

Jonas Hugosson



Personal Story

Like some of his peers at LaGuardia Community College (LGCC), Jonas Hugosson worked for 10 years after graduating from high school. Originally from Sweden, he had jobs such as a postal worker and TSA agent in Norway until he recognized, “I needed to do something because my jobs didn’t challenge me anymore.” Reminiscing about that time in his life, he said, “I always knew I wanted to study, I really didn’t know what to do. I applied to school back home and got accepted to do IT [Information Technology].” Like others who start college later in life, Jonas hints that the period between developing an interest in a career and pursuing that career can be challenging: “I had always enjoyed being around computers, but I never had the opportunity to pursue IT as a degree, because you know, sometimes life get in the way.” Eventually, he visited the United States, emigrated to New York City to be with his girlfriend, and decided to apply to LGCC to study IT.

After entering LGCC, Jonas took an assessment exam and was placed into an accelerated algebra and trigonometry course. Reflecting on his decision to take the course, he said, “I should have probably done one or two steps back, just because I was having such a hard time...I lacked the basics.” With these words, Jonas contests what proponents of developmental education reform advocate—cutting short the amount of time that students spend in traditional remediation. However, Jonas began to deal with the struggles he faced in the course by using a resource that was offered—supplemental instruction. “We had a tutor who sat with us in the class. He knew what we were doing and when I went [to the tutoring center,] I noticed the difference.” Here, Jonas sheds light on the need to combine multiple modalities when implementing developmental education reform. In other words, adding structures—such as acceleration—without key supports—such as new placement practices and supplemental instruction—does not position students to be successful. Rather, pairing these structures with appropriate resources help students like Jonas draw on their own skills and persistence to achieve success.

Policy-Related Overview

Enrolling students into long sequences of developmental education coursework can delay their academic progress and negatively impact the likelihood that they will enter college-level courses. To address this issue, some colleges and universities have adopted accelerated course models, which support student learning in two ways. First, some models of acceleration combine—or compress—two or more developmental courses, thereby reducing the number of exit points in the traditional developmental education sequence. Second, some acceleration models eliminate superfluous course material considered unnecessary for student progress. With fewer opportunities to exit the course sequence and attention to course material that is pertinent for success in subsequent courses, students complete developmental coursework over a shorter period of time and enroll into college-level courses sooner than they would within traditional developmental models. Seeking to improve student outcomes in math and English courses, the faculty at LaGuardia Community College implemented acceleration models so that adults who are returning to college—like Jonas—can progress through lower-level courses, complete college-level coursework, and ultimately graduate from college.

As we talked about the pedagogical practices that help him understand course material, Jonas revealed some ways faculty facilitate or hinder learning in the classroom. He offered a specific example of hands-on learning when addressing one instructor's practices: "In the experiment of flipping coins, we actually flipped coins, so for me it was 'official learning'. Using props like cards, dice, whatever, it helps...I learn better when I see it like that instead of just reading." Focused on effective groupwork engagement practices he noted, "They assigned us to groups, they walked around, and if someone needed help, they helped." He contrasted these effective practices with the ways another professor's practices hindered his learning: "He was at the board doing his work and we sat back and went along for the ride instead of being a part of it...a lot of writing on the board. We didn't have time to ask questions. [It was] almost as if he had a script and he's like, 'I'm gonna go through this' with no feedback from the class."

After two years at LaGuardia, Jonas completed the associate's degree and is ready for what's next in his career and academic journeys. He said, "I'm working temp jobs and odd jobs while waiting for a background check to go through, then I'm gonna work IT for a hospital in town." In his new role as a Support Analyst, Jonas will put his degree to work at the help desk, assisting staff with computer-related problems. Recently, Jonas was also accepted at a four-year college in the city. Sharing his plans for his next degree, he said, "I just got accepted to John Jay, so I'm probably gonna take a night class now and then because I need to work."