

Nadia Turner

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Personal Story

Nadia Turner is the definition of persistence. As a first generation college student who is set to graduate from Middle Georgia State University (MGSU) in May 2020, she will be the first person in her family to graduate from college. This fact is not lost on Nadia. In fact, it has been a motivating factor in her resolve to finish college.

When Nadia entered MGSU, she was placed into developmental English and math courses, which are non-credit bearing. She successfully completed those courses and enrolled into college-level English and math courses in her second semester. It was at this point that Nadia's resolve was tested.

The English course was a stand-alone college-level class. The math class was a corequisite course – a college-level class coupled with a learning support class that ran concurrently in the same semester. The developmental English class that she took in her first semester did not seem to help. She struggled with the English course and ultimately failed the class.

Math, however, was a completely different story. The math course was a corequisite course with two different professors. The college-level class met on Mondays and Wednesdays, and the learning support class met on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Even though she was failing in English, Nadia was doing well in math. She started off with "Cs" on her math tests, but slowly moved her grade up with each subsequent test. Nadia attributes her success to the support class and to the professor who taught the college-level math class. The professor was open, accessible, and "was enthusiastic about math." Qualities that rubbed off on Nadia. Nadia liked her so much that she took the same professor for Elementary Statistics in a later semester.

Unfortunately, Nadia was not doing well in her other classes and was eventually placed on academic probation and then suspension. Remembering the significance of being a first-generation college student, she buckled down and signed up for summer classes after her suspension was lifted. To catch up, Nadia enrolled in five classes every semester thereafter and six classes in the fall of 2019. For the current (and last) semester, she is happy to be taking only four classes and is ecstatic that she's on track to graduate in May. Come graduation, Nadia will have completed her degree in five years.

Policy-Related Overview

MGSU is part of a larger effort within the University System of Georgia (USG) to reform developmental education known as “The Momentum Year.” USG rolled out the initiative in the summer of 2017 and it aims to help students succeed in their first year of college. While the initiative encompasses other aspects of the first-year experience, one important part is the completion of college-level (or gateway) English and math courses within the first academic year.

As in Nadia’s case, many students, especially students of color, adult returning students, and low-income students are placed into developmental education (or remedial) courses. These classes do not count toward a degree and they must be completed before the student can access gateway math and English courses. Many students languish in these courses because the number of courses a student must complete can be onerous and the in-class supports scarce. Consequently, a student may end up dropping out of college before ever accumulating any college credit. For Nadia, half of her coursework in her first semester was non-credit bearing. Because of her hard work and determination, she made it through those classes, but then ran into a roadblock with the gateway English course in her second semester.

Corequisite remediation, the type of course Nadia took for her college-level math class, which she completed successfully, places a student directly into a gateway course, but with concurrent student supports such as a support class. Corequisite remediation has been shown to increase not only access to college-level courses, but also completion of those courses. (Ran & Lin, 2019). Some colleges that have implemented the corequisite remediation model have seen a doubling of their throughput rate - the proportion of students completing a transfer-level gateway math course in their first term. (Mejia, Rodriguez, & Johnson, 2019). Corequisite remediation is one of the reforms USG is implementing in its Momentum Year initiative.

For Nadia, the support class made the college-level material less difficult. She remembered being “stressed out” before a number of the math tests, but the support course and the other resources available at the university (e.g., tutors at The Math Academic Resource Center and The Student Success Center) alleviated her stress. As she got better grades on the math tests, she felt more confident, which made her strive even harder.

As Nadia reflected on her time at MGSU, she had this advice for incoming students who may struggle with college-level coursework: (1) use the resources at the school if you are struggling, (2) surround yourself with other students who are serious about college, (3) focus and don’t procrastinate, and (4) most importantly, don’t give up.

Reference:

Ran, F.X., & Lin, Y. (2019). The Effects of Corequisite Remediation: Evidence from a statewide reform in Tennessee (CCRC Working Paper No. 115). New York, NY: Columbia University, Teachers College, Community College Research Center.

Mejia, M., Rodriguez, O., & Johnson, H. (2019). What Happens When Colleges Broaden Access to Transfer-Level Courses? Evidence from California’s Community Colleges. San Francisco, CA: Public Policy Institute of California.

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