

PHCC gets grant

Of \$743,000 for remedial instruction

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Patrick Henry Community College is one of 15 community colleges in the nation that will receive nearly \$750,000 to expand its remedial instruction programs.

The funding, scheduled to be announced today by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and MDC Inc., is designed to increase the number of low-income and minority students who finish college, according to a news release.

Patrick Henry and Danville community colleges in Virginia, along with 13 colleges in other states, each will receive grants of \$743,000 over three years, the release said.

PHCC will use the funds to expand developmental instruction, said Carolyn Byrd, PHCC's dean of instructional support services. Between 60 and 85 percent of students in degree-seeking programs at PHCC require remedial work, depending on what programs they are in, Byrd said. The rate varies because different programs have different requirements. Also, some students, such as those who enroll through the Trade Act, might have been out of school for years when they come to PHCC, so they may need remedial courses to prepare them for college-level work, Byrd said.

The funding will help PHCC build on work it began through the Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count program, which is designed to enhance remedial education and boost college completion rates. Achieving the Dream is operated by MDC, a Chapel Hill, N.C.-based organization that promotes education, work force training and community development.

Developmental (or remedial) classes, which prepare students for college-level courses, are essential to success for many students, but studies show that the longer students must stay in remedial classes, the less likely they are to graduate, Byrd said.

National studies have shown that nearly two-thirds of students who take remedial courses never finish college, according to the news release.

Part of PHCC's efforts will focus on identifying students who are likely to succeed in "fast-tracking" programs so they can get through their developmental courses more quickly, Byrd said. Last fall, the college offered fast-track developmental math courses that allowed students to complete two developmental courses in one semester, which essentially cuts in half the time they must spend in the courses.

This fall, fast-track programs will be offered in developmental English and writing, Byrd said. Instructors also will encourage students to expand their use of the school's math lab. Using the lab, which is staffed by a developmental math instructor and numerous tutors, has been shown to improve students' success, Byrd said.

Plans call for expanding the lab's hours. Instructors also plan to cut down on time in developmental courses by identifying students who would be likely to succeed in a college-level math classes if they took a math lab course at the same time, Byrd said.

Teachers also will be encouraged to make lessons more application-based so students can apply what they're learning to real-world examples. Cooperative learning, which involves "very structured group activities" that have been shown to help students succeed, also will be encouraged, Byrd said.

Advising also will be enhanced, and instructors will try to tailor assistance to the needs of individual students, Byrd said.

"There's no silver bullet for the success of these students," she said. "You have to individualize the approach."

Byrd expects between 500 and 600 students to be enrolled in developmental courses in the fall semester.

The grant for Patrick Henry is part of a \$16.5 million effort that will affect an estimated 45,000 students nationwide, the release said. In addition to the money for PHCC and Danville Community College, the state will receive \$300,000 over three years to study obstacles to degree

completion, factors that correlate with student success and more to help “inform statewide goals for community colleges,” the release said.
The other states to receive grants are Connecticut, Florida and Texas.

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