

What Community College Developmental Mathematics Students Understand about Mathematics

James W. Stigler, University of California, Los Angeles

Karen B. Givvin, University of California, Los Angeles

Belinda J. Thompson, University of California, Los Angeles

Abstract

The nation is facing a crisis in its community colleges: more and more students are attending community colleges, but most of them are not prepared for college-level work. The problem may be most dire in mathematics. By most accounts, the majority of students entering community colleges are placed (based on placement test performance) into "developmental" (or remedial) mathematics courses (e.g., Adelman, 1985; Bailey et al., 2005). The organization of developmental mathematics differs from school to school, but most colleges have a sequence of developmental mathematics courses that starts with basic arithmetic, then goes on to pre-algebra, elementary algebra, and finally intermediate algebra, all of which must be passed before a student can enroll in a transfer-level college mathematics course.