

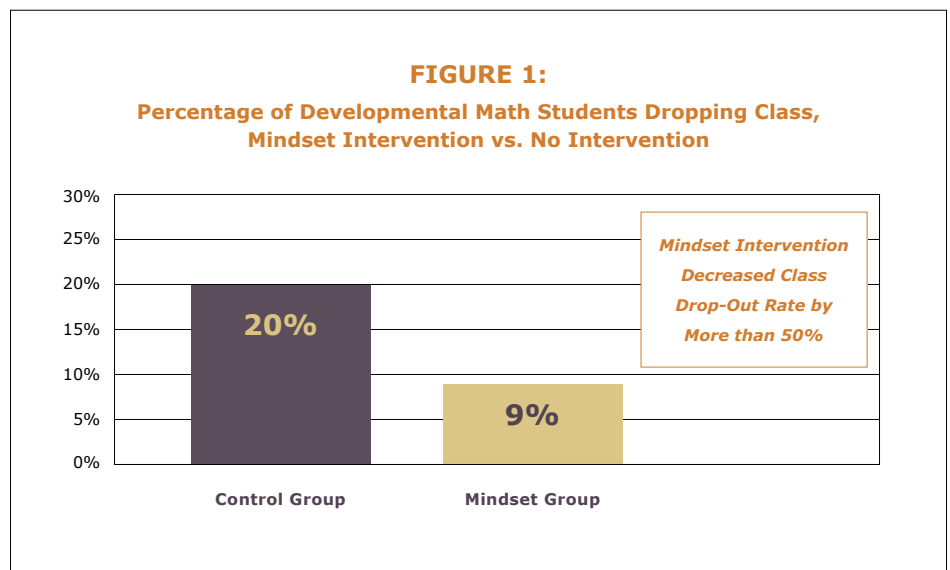


Mindset Interventions: Less Than One Hour Online May Change a Community College Student’s Trajectory

Across the country, there is considerable room for improvement in community college graduation rates – only 20 percent of full-time students receive a degree within 3 years.¹ Washington students fare somewhat better; nearly 29 percent receive a credential within 3 years*.²

The good news is that brief, low-cost interventions show promise for improving student outcomes. Behavioral research has shown that influencing students’ academic “mindsets” – *their beliefs about their ability to learn* – can improve academic performance. Instead of viewing intelligence as an innate quality that cannot be changed, interventions are designed to promote a growth mindset – meaning, intelligence is malleable and can improve through practice and hard work. Specifically, short reading and reflective writing exercises can affect how students respond to challenging work and academic setbacks.

At the community college level, mindset interventions have targeted students in remedial or “developmental” courses. Researchers have found that more than half of community college students need to take at least one developmental course.³ Fewer than 1 in 10 students who take developmental courses graduate in three years.⁴ Even within eight and a half years, only about one-quarter of these students receive a degree or certificate.⁵



SOURCE: Tough, P. Who Gets to Graduate? *New York Times Magazine*, May 15, 2014.

*An additional 19% of students transfer.

Emerging research suggests that mindset interventions can help boost these figures. More than 70 percent of developmental math students at 21 colleges across the country doubted their math ability, subscribing to fixed beliefs, such as someone either is – or is not – a “math person”.⁶

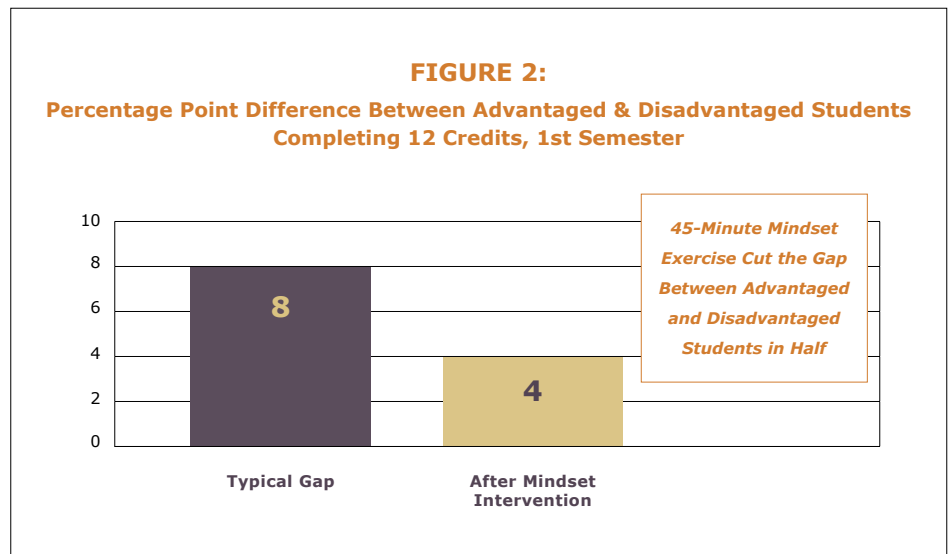
In one study, community college students taking developmental math were randomly assigned to read an article explaining that people can “grow their brains”

and improve their math achievement through practice, even if they’ve struggled with math in the past. The students then summarized the scientific findings in their own words and wrote to a fellow student who was struggling and doubting his ability to do well in school. As shown in **Figure 1**, at the end of the semester, nine percent of the students who did this exercise dropped out of the developmental math class, compared to 20 percent of students in the control group.⁷

Administrators at the University of Texas at Austin were so encouraged by a mindset experiment on their campus that they made the mindset tool part of the online orientation for all members of the class of 2018.⁸ At the end of the first semester of the randomized experiment, 86 percent of students in the intervention groups deemed “disadvantaged” – including students of color and first generation college students – completed 12 or more credits. Typically, just 81 to 82 percent of disadvantaged freshman complete 12 credits, compared to 90 percent of their more advantaged peers (see **Figure 2**).

Because effective mindset interventions can be delivered online – for example, as part of orientation or registration activities – they can be implemented on a broad scale. Since there is no need for highly trained or dedicated facilitators, there are few barriers to sustaining interventions.

Given the national push to increased access to community college, colleges will need tools that can be easily and broadly implemented to ensure that as enrollment rises, student success does as well.



SOURCE: Tough, P. Who Gets to Graduate? *New York Times Magazine*, May 15, 2014.

Learn more on the latest behavioral research and the practical implications for student outcomes at Seattle Jobs Initiative's 2015 Annual Conference: *Illuminating Pathways to Self-Sufficiency*.

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8. *Ibid.*

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