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Public colleges noticed the increasing drop-out rates among students and provided an existing approach to address it: they require students to take remedial courses before receiving state-funded college education. Remedial courses are courses mandatory for academically unprepared students to bolster their literacy and math skills, particularly in math, reading, and English. While remedial classes are aimed to provide a foundation of college-level work for incompetent students, it is possible that these courses might backfire on students themselves. Amselem (2017) reported that more than one-third of university undergraduates are required to take remedial courses, and Mangan (2019) points out the flaw of remedial classes by adding that the completion rate for the remedy math course and remedy reading course is merely 17 and 29 percent respectively. Furthermore, students are discovered to be 74 percent more likely to drop out of college if they took remedial classes in their freshmen year, and those who completed their studies graduated 11 months later than non-remedial students (Mattison, 2017). Clayton (2018) provides an explanation for the inefficiency of remedial classes: majority of colleges rely on standardized exams to determine the placement of students in remedy classes based on a cutoff point, but few information for these exams are available. Therefore, students might risk getting misplaced due to the high error rates of these inaccurate and unreliable placement exams, causing college-ready students being assigned to remedy classes, and truly underprepared students enrolling in challenging college classes (Clayton, 2018). However, remedial classes do not confer college credit, and students have to pay for them (Mattison, 2017). As a result, students who are in these classes may drop out due to financial reasons, while underprepared students who are in proper college classes will drop out due to incompetency. This shows that the solution of boosting college-readiness among students through remedial classes is questionable as these classes could potentially increase drop-out rate instead of lowering them.

To reduce students’ drop-out rate in public colleges, one improved approach is to implement a system where students have to consistently perform well to continue receiving state-funded higher education (Kurfiss, 2019). Instead of attributing students’ drop-out rate to their inability to cope with tertiary education, it would be more feasible to motivate students to push themselves beyond their boundaries in their studies. Research shows that students perform academically better when they are motivated financially (Franck, 2017), and this financial incentive could be applied on tertiary education. When students have to maintain a certain grade point average (GPA) to continue receive state-funded higher education and incur all expenses when they fail to meet such requirement, students would be constantly aware and prompt themselves to excel in their studies constantly. Therefore, this approach acts as a reminder on student themselves while lowering drop-out rate and shifts the burden of tuition fees away from student simultaneously.

This essay has detailed the increasing drop-out rate of college students caused by state-funded higher education, and one current approach to address this issue is the placement of students in remedial classes in college. Despite remedy classes’ aim to improve students’ performance, it is found that these classes are not very effective due to the lack of clarity in the placement process. One better approach that is described in the essay is to set a threshold in the GPA system of which students may continue to receive free tertiary education, so students would be constantly aware of their responsibilities and strive to achieve their very best in college. (586 words)

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