

# **Douglas College**

## **Developmental Studies (DVST) Departmental Review**

**A Report of Summary Findings  
and  
Recommendations**

**Prepared for Dr. Kathy Denton, Vice President**

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**Prepared by Dr. Pius Ryan**

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### **Summary Findings and Recommendations**

The DVST Department is currently positioned to provide basic education to community members, as well as academic preparation for the university transfer stream. Given the future vision of the college, a review of the current departmental mandate, course offerings, and

services was requested. The DVST Department was constituted to support a number of identified community needs, including adult basic education, college diplomas, and academic preparation.

In general, four interdependent themes that require attention were identified from the review:

- 1) Alignment of the DVST Department with the current vision for Douglas College
- 2) Baseline entrance requirements to be a Douglas College student
- 3) Departmental procedures related to student placement and criterion referenced assessment
- 4) Interdisciplinary collaboration

Departmental recommendations are dependent upon theme one and whether the DVST Department remains a comprehensive program or shifts to a greater focus on academic preparation.

#### **1) Alignment of DVST Department with the current vision for Douglas College**

The Douglas College DVST Department has a long history of supporting adults with limited academic skills. Faculty self-reports as having to advocate locally and provincially for their discipline, department, and marginalized learners since the inception of the Developmental Studies Department. Faculty perceive their clientele as being highly diverse, and potentially the very clients that Douglas College will need to attract as it strives to increase market share of the college level student population. Nonetheless, the new direction for Douglas College does not appear to align with the teaching of basic skills, and/or high school equivalency. Although it is evident that the faculty within the DVST Department is highly dedicated and are passionate educators, the focus of the Department may be too broad (e.g., basic skill development to academic preparation for college courses) in relation to the future vision for Douglas College.

The range of options for future directions will need to be adjusted in accordance with clarifying the purpose/mandate of the DVST Department. In other words, the recommendations for Department development will be very different if the Department were to remain as a full-service provider of basic academics, high school equivalency, and college preparation courses, *versus* focusing departmental resources on college preparation.

In review of the core documents outlined, it is apparent that the vision for Douglas College is clearly focused on transitioning to an academic institution. This being the case, the

recommendations for the DVST Department must be seen through the lens of how to maximize student access and success in academic programs. The DVST Department is presently engaged in a number of reportedly successful activities in this regard, but an increased and deliberate shift in focus towards these ends will support the Douglas College Strategic Plan to a greater degree.

***Recommendation #1***

*Narrow the departmental mandate to focus resources on college preparation with the goal of increasing student access and success.*

The DVST Department could remain as a separate entity or be amalgamated into various academic departments with the responsibility and focus on the development and delivery of discipline specific college academic preparation. If senior leadership determine to maintain the DVST Department with clarity of focus on college academic preparation, then an increase in the delivery of discipline specific academic preparatory courses is recommended. These courses could be collaboratively designed and delivered within each of the academic disciplines at Douglas College.

Ideally, college academic preparation courses should be offered within each of the respective faculties and departments that require students to obtain a higher academic standard beyond college entrance criteria. In some cases, such offerings already exist - for example a college preparation course titled English Language Composition is a prerequisite to higher level English Literature courses. This preparation course is positioned within the English Department and instructed by English Department faculty.

***Recommendation #2***

*Collaboratively design discipline specific academic preparatory courses to be delivered within various faculties.*

**2) Baseline requirements to be a Douglas College student**

The threshold or benchmark requirements for Douglas College entrance are an important consideration with regards to the role and function of various departments. At present, there seems to be a lack of clarity as to baseline or minimum entrance criteria (e.g., variant language proficiency requirements are accepted by Douglas College). This lack of clarity leads to system misalignment.

***Recommendation #3***

*Establish universally applied standardized college entrance criteria to increase clarity and institutional integrity.*

**3) Departmental procedures related to student placement and criterion referenced assessment**

Student placement within the current DVST course structure is highly dependent on the agreed role and function of the DVST Department. In other words, the scope of the current DVST support, inclusive of basic academic skill development through to college preparation, requires personalized assessment procedures which are time intensive.

***Recommendation #4***

*Clarify and narrow department focus and enact standardized placement assessment.*

Criterion referenced assessment is noted by faculty as the primary mode of course assessment/evaluation. Although instructors are beginning to share assessment tools, a focus on formative and summative assessment practices would contribute to program coherence. These assessment tools can be built from scope and sequence curricular materials as well as accepted standards in English, Mathematics, and Written Language.

***Recommendation #5***

*Evaluation of student progress should be informed by formative and summative assessments.*

**4) Interdisciplinary collaboration**

Interdisciplinary collaboration is also contingent on the overarching role and function of the DVST Department. If Developmental Studies is focused on academic preparation for students who meet college entrance criteria, but who need support to enter a particular discipline, then an interdepartmental collaboration role would be highly focused in relation to specific Department foundations. Under this model or vision for the DVST Department, the work of instructors will likely include formal partnerships and foundational planning with respective academic areas and programs. This may include regular reviews of foundational learning outcomes required for success within a specific department, shared assessment tools, and an

identified curriculum. The result of this type of collaboration would likely result in co-planning, co-teaching, discipline specific tutorials, and academic fundamentals.

**Recommendation #6**

*Collaboratively design discipline specific academic preparatory courses to be delivered within various faculties.*

**Summary Comments**

The author has used best efforts in preparing this report. The accuracy and completeness of the information provided, and the opinions stated herein are not guaranteed to produce any particular results.

The author would like to thank all those who participated in the review process. The recommendations contained within this report, have to a large extent emerge from the contribution of those faculty and staff who graciously participated.

**About the Author of this Review**

Pius G. Ryan, Ed. D., is a director of edusystems inc., an educational consulting company specializing in quality system development. Dr. Ryan has been employed in education for 18 years in a variety of specialist roles. His educational background includes a doctorate in policy and leadership, a master's in school psychology, a bachelors in secondary education, and a bachelor's in English Literature and dialectology. Pius has conducted research into the utility of networks as a vehicle to support teacher development. He is also trained as an ESL instructor.

Dr. Ryan is President Elect of the British Columbia Council of Administrators for Special Education, a member of the Council for Exceptional Children, the British Columbia School Psychology Association and the British Columbia School Superintendents Association. He is an acting member of the British Columbia Provincial Audit Advisory Committee, ESL Provincial Consortium, and has served on a number of Ministry of Education Review teams.

## **DVST Program Review Follow up Plan**

Kathy Denton, VP Academic  
November 3, 2011

Administrative policy A18.01.01, Program and Service Review, requires that a follow-up plan is developed by the Vice President as the final step in the program review process.

DVST submitted a comprehensive program review in April 2011. An external reviewer subsequently read the review, conducted a site visit, and submitted a report. The review process highlighted some clear strengths, most notably the instructional skills of faculty and their commitment to students. In addition, recommendations were provided by DVST and by the external reviewer. Those recommendations, as well as other information gathered in the review process, inform this follow up plan, however, not all recommendations were accepted. Some (e.g., those that were political in nature) were beyond the scope of the review, others may be explored in the future.

The following recommendations merit further consideration or action. Normally the actions identified in a follow up plan such as this would be accomplished within a year. However, given the College's decision to shift DVST English into the Faculties of Language, Literature and Performing Arts and DVST Math into the Faculty of Science and Technology, additional time may be provided following consultation with the areas' new Deans in January 2012.

### Recommendations associated with program identity

The discipline name, Developmental Studies, should be changed to reflect the mandate of the discipline, which is to provide academic upgrading for students who require additional preparation before entering college-level courses. The renaming should be done separately for DVST English and DVST Math in consultation with other departments in their new Faculties.

### Recommendations associated with course delivery

DVST English and DVST Math should work with colleagues who teach in programs with high attrition rates to develop courses that provide language or math skills required to be successful in those programs. Nursing is one area that would benefit from this type of course development. Other areas will be identified by VPAC. Upon request, the College will consider providing one-time-only sections of instruction to support collaborative initiatives with other Departments.

DVST English should develop 3-credit preparatory English courses to meet the needs of students who have specific areas of weakness.

DVST English should collaborate with EASL regarding how to meet the needs of students characterized as Generation 1.5.

DVST English and DVST Math should increase hybrid delivery options for students. At least one 300-level and one 400-level hybrid DVST course in Math and English should be offered each semester.

#### Recommendations associated with assessment and admission

Students should not be assessed multiple times to be placed in a Math or English course; a single standardized test in Math or English should be used. The College has adopted placement tests to identify whether students demonstrate college-level skills in Math and English. Some of these tests, including test the College uses to assess English proficiency (i.e., Accuplacer) do not identify where to place students whose skills fall below college-level. Understandably, DVST has been re-assessing students with their own tests. Multiple testing is inefficient, increases program costs, and creates frustration and confusion in students.

Over the next year, the College should analyze placement scores on College assessment tests and DVST grades to identify appropriate placement cutpoints for students who fall below college-level skills on College assessment tests. These cutpoints, as well as other information can then be used to inform students about the level of DVST English or DVST Math that they should take. DVST faculty may wish to examine students' exams (e.g., writing samples) to ensure that they seem appropriately placed based on the newly identified cutpoints, but students should not have to write a second exam before registering for courses and this practice should stop within a year.

The College should also consider simplifying admission requirements, or how the requirements are communicated to potential students. This should be done in consultation with DVST English and Math, as well as other related departments in their new Faculties.

#### Recommendations associated with evaluation

Students' progress in DVST courses should be informed by formative and summative assessments. Students should be aware of how they will be assessed and be able to track their performance in their courses.