

HELPING STUDENTS **ACHIEVE** **COLLEGE SUCCESS** WITH **INTENSIVE TEST PREP**

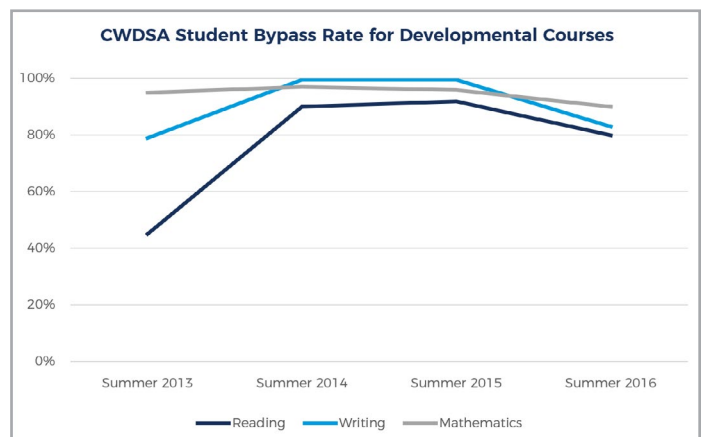


For years, the University of Arkansas at Little Rock struggled to retain and graduate minority students, particularly African-American and Hispanic students. Graduation rates hovered around 5% for males and 10% for females. The campus had become a revolving door for these students. **“I became very concerned about what I saw happening to our minority students. I could not sit in good conscience and allow that to continue to happen,”** said Dr. Donaldson.

Nine years ago, Dr. Charles W. Donaldson, the vice chancellor of educational and student services, decided to take action and established the African American Male Initiative. In subsequent years, the African American Female Initiative and the Hispanic/Latinx Initiative were also established to provide an intrusive mentoring program for the identified students.

Through this work, a closer look at the data of incoming students revealed a great disparity when comparing the remediation rates of minority students to those of majority students. This led to the establishment of the UA Little Rock Summer Bridge Academy (SBA) in 2013, which targeted entering freshmen who needed to bypass remediation before their first fall semester. Prior to 2013, the University had tried to provide a Summer Bridge Program but with little success. The team was determined—this time, failure was not an option.

In three weeks, the results were phenomenal and the years following showed similar success.



Cohort	N Count	Reading	Writing	Math
Summer 2013	43	45% (of those required)	79% (of those required)	95%
Summer 2014	36	90% (of those required)	100% (of those required)	97%
Summer 2015	28	92% (of those required)	100% (of those required)	96%
Summer 2016	20	80% (of those required)	83% (of those required)	90%

As a result of the 2013 Summer Bridge Academy success, which was funded by Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation, Bank of America, and the Freuauff Foundation, discussions emerged around how to expand this work to a year-round program that would serve the Pulaski County Special School District (PCSSD). Attorney John Walker, who was working with a 32-year old desegregation case involving PCSSD, felt the methods used to advance students in the summer bridge academy could help reach more students with adequate funding. In June 2014, the Dr. Charles W. Donaldson Scholars Academy was established with a 10 million dollar award to design and implement programs to assist students in PCSSD.

A leadership team was assembled to intervene and help the students succeed. A partnership was created that involved PCSSD, Philander Smith College (an HBCU), and UA Little Rock. Dr. Amber R. Smith serves as the program’s director and envisioned a program that thrived on innovative pedagogy rooted in pop culture.

“Engaging students in this generation requires educators to think differently. Through unconventional methods like hip-hop, original webisodes, and interactive learning spaces, the program helps students see the relevance of education in their daily lives,” said Dr. Smith.

The team expanded on previous work and established a Summer Bridge Program that would be intrusive, tailoring the curricula to the needs of PCSSD students.

The CWDSA Summer Bridge Academy is a three-week residential program aimed at preparing incoming freshmen for college-level work, eliminating the need for remedial math and English classes. Unlike UA Little Rock Summer Bridge Academy, CWDSA Summer Bridge Academy is open to all high school seniors who graduated from a PCSSD high school. Upon completion, students were awarded a \$10,000 scholarship to attend UA Little Rock or Philander Smith College.

CWDSA Summer Bridge Academy students:

- Participate in interactive, high-energy, academic engagement from 9 AM to 9 PM
- Meet with success coaches to review interest inventory results from ACT score reports to discuss college and career plans.
- Attend etiquette dinners with professionals to learn more about their career options

- Explore the arts and creativity through dance, spokenword, and visual art electives

The Summer Bridge Academy has been so successful that the CWDSA created two additional programs: Saturday Academy and ACT Prep Express.

Year-Round Programming

The first cohort of CWDSA students entered in July 2014, less than one month after the program began. This did not allow time for an early intervention program for seniors. CWDSA staff wanted to provide better preparation in the upcoming academic year, so Senior Success Saturdays were implemented and there was an increase in the entering ACT scores the next summer.

Senior Success Saturdays, helped high school seniors increase their standardized test scores, begin the financial aid process, and gain admission to college before Summer Bridge began. The table below shows where students began Summer Bridge in both years:

Subject	CWDSA 2014	CWDSA 2015	ACT Point Difference
Math	15.8	18.1	+2.3
English	15	17.5	+2.5
Reading	16.8	19.5	+2.7

ACT scores were not available for some of the students in the 2014 cohort because they had not taken the ACT by the time Summer Bridge began. Stronger individualized attention, curriculum revision, and early intervention positively impacted the results for summer 2015 in comparison to summer 2014.

Saturday Academy is hosted on the UA Little Rock campus, focusing on preparing students for success after high school. As with Summer Bridge, it caters to the different learning styles of students and engages students in ways that hold their attention and peak their interest.

ACT Prep Express brings a fun, interactive one-day event directly to high schools. CWDSA wanted to impact more students who maybe did not attend Saturday Academy or Summer Bridge Academy. The event includes music, balloons, colorful decorations, and inflatable obstacle courses. To incorporate learning, students answer questions about general test preparation to transition from one inflatable to another.

During the event, students can register for ACT Online Prep (AOP). Seventy percent of all students who completed the survey noted that they felt more confident in at least 3 of 4 content areas. Many students felt discouraged in the math and science section once they realized how much content the section covered, but they assured CWDSA staff that their decreased confidence would be fixed by using ACT Online Prep.

“Our goal is to help them become excited about ACT prep. But we want them to have access to ACT preparation beyond the one-day event. That’s why we started using AOP,” said Dr. Donaldson.

To ensure the success of their programs, CWDSA builds relationships with parents, including sessions the evening before to share information about the program, the importance of college, student expectations, and how parents can provide support. At the end of the programs, parents are invited to attend an awards ceremony to celebrate their child’s accomplishments.

Since inception, approximately 2,000 students have participated in one of the programs. May 2018 marked the first graduation of CWDSA students.

“From what we know, it’s clear that we’re exceeding what is happening with the average student at the university. And these were students who had been told that they were not college material. Their ACT scores were rock bottom,” said Dr. Donaldson.

Through these programs and the use of AOP, Donaldson Scholars have achieved a 93% remediation course bypass rate. Many students now also have the opportunity to enroll in concurrent classes while in high school, earning valuable college credits and experiences. Students who have stayed in the program the longest have seen the best results. For example, students who started in ninth grade have earned between a 26 and 33 ACT Composite score.



“I firmly believe that given the proper exposure and experiences, we all can succeed”

Dr. Charles W. Donaldson