



theRPgroup

the Research & Planning Group
for California Community Colleges

perspectives

December

2015

Salut, !

Conference: "a formal meeting of people with a shared interest, typically taking place over several days." That's the definition given for "conference" in the Concise Oxford Dictionary (2002). Yet, the Strengthening Student Success Conference (SSSC) is an experience with much more meaning to the incredible community of faculty, staff, administrators, researchers, funders, policy makers, intermediaries, and advocates who attend this annual event.

At an event like the 2015 SSSC held in October, attendees can learn about new policies and practices that can help us do our jobs, or revisit ideas, networks, and resources we may have forgotten over time. Presenters can share our hard work and good thinking, hopefully receiving both recognition and feedback from a group that can understand our efforts. Yes, a conference deadline can even motivate us to finish an analysis or a project that might otherwise languish in the dungeons of procrastination or drown in the deluge of daily crises. Conference organizers can achieve a feeling of professionalization, a fueling of group effort, and a reinforcement of interregional networks/bonds. Sometimes the exposure can enhance our career opportunities, and good times had with our friends and colleagues can help us deepen our appreciation for our peers and jobs. Altogether, an experience like the SSSC can (re)energize you if you are lucky enough to participate in one.

Feedback from 2015 SSSC participants indicate that we collectively achieved these outcomes. We are thrilled to report that this year's event brought together nearly 800 attendees, including 14 teams of 15 or more participants from a single institution, representing the broad cross-section of stakeholders passionate about and invested in advancing student achievement and institutional effectiveness across California's community colleges. Thank you again to our long-time partners and conference co-hosts, Career Ladders Project, LearningWorks, and 3CSN, and to the nearly 250 individuals who delivered 83 sessions and workshops. We are grateful!

While going to a conference (sandals on the ground?) is the ideal scenario, it's impossible for some of us to break away from the grasp of the campus to join the SSS conference in person. But not all is lost for those unfortunate souls. The RP Group has loaded many presentations from this year's conference on our [website](#) for public access (free of charge). We will also hold "encore sessions" of popular presentations. Encore sessions will be integrated into this year's 3CSN activities; some

sessions will be part of their spring regional activities, including a two-day event in late April. Other sessions will be part of an equity summit planned for summer 2016. A few sessions about online instruction and data analysis will be repackaged as webinars and made widely available. Look for details and dates on the [RP Group](#) and the [3CSN](#) websites.

We will feature selected conference presentations in this and other upcoming editions of *Perspectives*. In this month's issue, read about (1) a session delivered by the Multiple Measures Assessment Project that highlights new research on a statewide effort to use high school data to improve the accuracy in the assessment and placement of students, (2) a demonstration of how Umoja Community program practitioners build community in their classrooms, (3) a session on how basic skills pathways relate to student equity, and (4) a session on new developments in the accreditation standards.

Finally, we are pleased to announce that we will now publish our *Perspectives* e-newsletter six times per year, on the 15th day of alternating months. This change to the *Perspectives* publication timeline will give our new editorial team and contributing authors adequate time to produce quality and expanded content for each issue. The next edition will be published on February 15, 2016. Additionally, we will send our newest publication--the *RP Super Brief*--at the beginning of each month to provide a quick glimpse into upcoming news, events, and opportunities. We welcome your feedback on these changes!

Sincerely,
Willard Hom

In This Issue

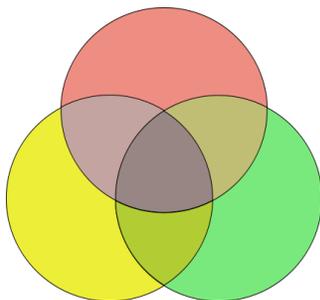
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Session Spotlight | Gains from Multiple Measures Assessment



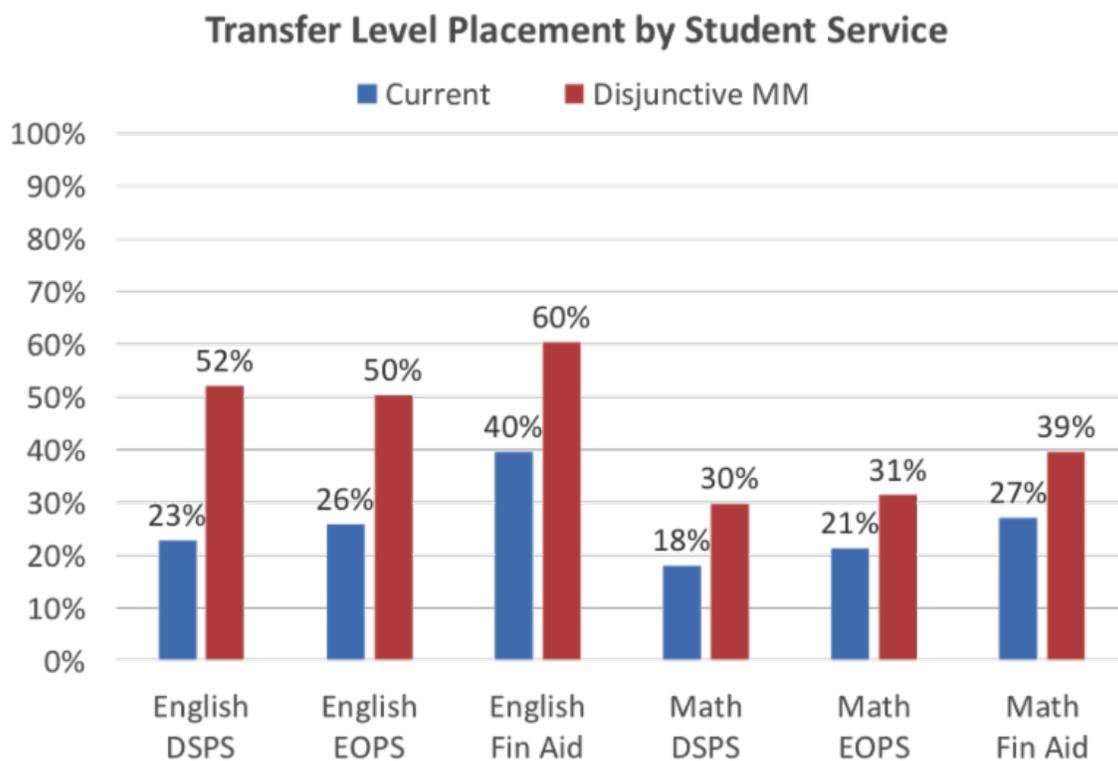
Authors: *Peter Bahr*, Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education, University of Michigan; *Loris Fagioli and Craig Hayward*, Irvine Valley College; *John Hetts, Daniel Lamoree, and Ken Sorey*, Educational Results Partnership; *Mallory Newell*, De Anza College; and *Terrence Willett*, Cabrillo College; in collaboration with *Janet Fulks*, Bakersfield College

The Multiple Measures Assessment Project (MMAP), a sub-project of the Common Assessment Initiative, is generating interest across the California Community Colleges. The application of multiple measures using high school performance data holds the [potential to transform](#) how we assess student capacity, as demonstrated by a [pilot group of 28 colleges](#) at different stages of evaluation and implementation of this approach. California is not alone in this endeavor; there is a growing body of evidence that (1) shows [weak relationships](#) between commonly used assessment

tests and college course outcomes and (2) indicates [standardized tests underestimate](#) students of color, women, low SES students, and first generation college students in particular.

On the other hand, a growing body of evidence shows that **use of multiple measures provides a more complete picture of student ability and a way to increase the accuracy of placement tests—largely by [reducing underplacement errors](#)**. The MMAP research team is eager to further explore initial findings that showed increased assessment accuracy can improve rates of placement into transfer-level courses and completion of math and English sequences for all students, but in particular for underrepresented students who have long been disproportionately placed into the lowest course levels under the current paradigm.

Through an analysis of statewide data from Cal-PASS Plus, the MMAP research team found that even using a relatively conservative but disjunctive multiple measures approach to place students based on the evidence of their capacity (i.e., what predicts performance in college courses) holds the potential to increase placement into transfer-level courses by 23 percentage points in English and 10 percentage points in mathematics. Moreover, **disaggregation of the impacts by student groups suggests the potential to improve access and outcomes across virtually every demographic group that the California community colleges track for our student equity plans.**



While the MMAP research team expects that the new Common Assessment Test will provide more accurate and detailed assessment of students, multiple measures will remain a vital (and required) aspect of improving the accuracy of student placements.

As part of the MMAP pilot, colleges will share student outcomes data with the MMAP research team, who will then explore differences not only in placement levels using multiple measures, but also success rates in the courses in which students are placed. **Early results show that students placed via multiple measures (i.e., placed using the evidence of their consistent academic performance over four years of high school) successfully complete the course in which they are placed at rates equal to or greater than the success rates of students placed by a test.**

EXAMPLE: Bakersfield College

Bakersfield College (BC), one early adopter of the expanded use of multiple measures, implemented multiple measures in spring 2014 and placed students with a combination of (1) the existing assessment test, (2) an overall high school GPA ≥ 3.0 , AND (3) senior year fall semester English or math class with a grade $\geq B$. Because transcripts were available for review, some students were encouraged to register for accelerated and compressed courses. BC also instituted and scaled up support services including tutoring, success lab, use of the writing center, and supplemental instruction. Mentors were assigned new freshmen, and classroom interventionists were trained in habits of mind, early alert, and education planning. One key implementation factor was that high school students were registered for their college classes at the high school using abbreviated education plans that included English and math in their first semester because previous data has shown that enrollment in English and math in first college semester increased student success and completion.

That first cohort of 326 students that enrolled in fall 2014 succeeded at the same or better rates than other students at the college in the same classes except in math. The success rate in math was slightly lower than comparable overall success rates of the existing BC students. However, fewer students were bumped up in math and, in fact, students bumped up by multiple measures performed better than those who were not bumped by multiple measures. So, bumping did not account for the overall lower success rates in math. **The first cohort of students saved over 820 semesters of developmental education that the evidence suggested and student performance demonstrated that they did not need.**

In spring 2015, BC increased the application of multiple measures placement to a cohort of over 1,500 students, with over 2,111 semesters saved through bumping and accelerated and compressed coursework. These students now have a greater opportunity to succeed and complete their educational plans than the students without multiple measures. **BC has discovered that there are thousands of reasons to consider multiple measures, and each reason has a name and skills well beyond what the placement test alone reveals.**

The experiences of BC, other early adopters, and the MMAP pilot colleges suggest that, on average, **more accurate assessment of student capacity through evidence-based multiple measures can reduce the required number of semesters of developmental education by one to two semesters, while maintaining or even improving success rates.** For the nearly two million community college students in California, improving the accuracy of their assessment by simply using the evidence of their prior achievement represents a significant, transformative opportunity for their education and for all of us who provide it.

Resources:

- [Multiple Measures Assessment Project](#)
- [Using Decision Trees to Predict Course Success in the Multiple Measures Assessment Pilot](#)
- CCRC's studies on [Assessment, Placement, and Progression of Developmental Students](#)
- [Defining Promise: Optional Standardized Testing Policies in American College and University Admissions](#)
- [Improving the Accuracy of Remedial Placement](#)



Authors: Donna Colondres, Chaffey College, Erainia Freeman, Long Beach City College, and Erin Charlens San Diego City College

In 2008, a group of practitioners from multiple community colleges started the UMOJA Community with no permission granted and no funding. UMOJA, a Kiswahili word meaning "unity," is a critical statewide resource designed to enhance the cultural and educational experiences of African-American and other under-resourced students. Presently, more than 35 California community colleges are delivering UMOJA Community programs and services to over 4,000 students annually. UMOJA students complete core coursework together over a one-year period; courses may include a combination of counseling, English, history, and math based on the campus climate and context. UMOJA students continue to receive intrusive support services through graduation, transfer, and/or goal completion. Intrusive services extend beyond the walls of classrooms, programs, and counseling offices and into the lives of students.

The UMOJA Community had the pleasure of presenting some of its practices at the 2015 Strengthening Student Success Conference in a workshop entitled Building Community in the Classroom and Beyond. The workshop was created with the principle that many students feel disengaged from their classrooms and campus communities. We were deliberate about building community in order to create a sense of belonging in Umoja programs. The workshop focused on tools and activities that may be used by educators to build community inside *and* outside the classroom.

We began our workshop with a community-building activity called the Trust Walk. This set the tone for participants who spent their time together intensively bonding and creating their own community-building strategies. As we debriefed the activity, participants drew parallels of the mutual trust that is necessary for both students and practitioners to build community. Participants then worked in teams to craft their respective definitions of community.

To describe the concept of community, one team quickly created the ICARE acronym, which represented Integrity, Communication, Accountability, Respect, and Empathy. The teams worked seamlessly and passionately as though they had worked together for years. Interestingly, another team used the term "yoked" to describe the the joining together that often takes place within a community. The term "yoked" was repeated and re-crafted in definition by multiple groups as the participants began to share the language that they developed, something quite common in the development of community.

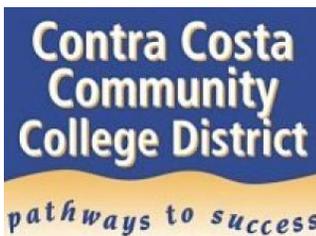
Finally, we had participants form a collective definition of community. Live learning (another UMOJA practice) ensued as we reviewed the many definitions and strategies surrounding community building, and ultimately "queened" our definition for the day. Queening is a common practice in the UMOJA Community where students, in this case participants, engage in a democratic process to select a common theme or definition amongst several concepts or definitions that are shared.

We enjoyed the engagement of the participants. On this particular afternoon, every person was a teacher, and every person was a learner. Community was built. Not a voice went unheard.

Resource:

- [SSSC PowerPoint - Building Community Inside of the Classroom and Beyond](#) (to find the file,

Session Spotlight | Improving Basic Skills Pathways as a Route to Equity



Author: *Gregory Stoup*, Contra Costa Community College District (CCD)

Research on student pathways and academic performance has the potential to improve college equity strategies. In my SSSC conference session titled Basic Skills Pathways as a Route to Equity, I shared preliminary research findings from data on basic skills pathways in a large community college district. My colleagues at the Contra Costa CCD and I tracked the course taking behavior and academic performance of degree-seeking students to determine if the gap observed in the degree attainment rates by student ethnicity could be explained by the different pathway and academic experiences observed for these cohorts. The preliminary findings from the study suggest that roughly **70% of the gap in degree completion can be explained by three broad factors or systematic effects: (1) placement level in the developmental math and English sequences, (2) course enrollment patterns with regard to their chosen program, and (3) overall academic performance.** There was measurable variation across ethnicity categories in each of these areas with students of color (in this study defined as Hispanic and African-American students) having disproportionate placement three and four levels below transfer in either math or English, greater accumulation of off-pathway units within their program of study, lower cumulative GPA, and attempted but unearned units at milestone points along the program pathway.

Application of two statistical approaches (a linear random effects regression and a components of variance model) revealed that **50% to 60% of the explained variation in graduation rates could be attributed to the placement factor alone**, independent of the other two factors. In other words, within the model, being placed at the lowest levels within the developmental education sequence explained over half of the gap in degree attainment even before the students obtained a single grade or enrolled in a single course. The independence between placement level and academic performance can be further explained by the observation that **the majority of students that passed their level four or level three developmental course, never enrolled in the next course in the sequence.**

Embedded in these findings is the **well-known influence that developmental education course-taking has on increasing the time to degree.** Likewise the accumulation of off-pathway units and attempted but unearned units serve to lengthen, often by more than a year, the completion timeline for students. Students of color were found to have accumulated an average of seven off-pathway units by the time they had earned 30 transferable units compared to three units for Asian and White students (further supported by evidence that students of color changed their major more frequently). Students of color also accumulated more unearned units by the time they reached the 30 unit milestone. The models estimated that the number of units off-pathway accounted for 15% to 25% of the explained variation in degree completion. The models also ascribed 15% to 25% of the explained variation to the differences in student GPA and the number of unearned units accrued by the 30 unit mark.

While these findings are preliminary and derived from data on a single district, taken with the

scholarship on effective practices, **they do suggest a framework for approaching equity planning, one that targets placement practices, pathway support, and instructional practices and supports as focal points for interventions.**

Full paper forthcoming

Resources:

- [Lumina Foundation's Equity Imperative](#)
- [Completion by Design Principles](#)
- [Redesigning America's Community Colleges, A Clearer Path to Student Success](#)

Session Spotlight | Mind the Gap: Linking Compliance and Improvement under the 2014 Accreditation Standards



Author:

Robert J. Pacheco, Ed.D., Assessment Chair, RP Group

Editor's Note: At the Strengthening Student Success Conference in October 2015, colleges from the Los Angeles Community College District (LACCD) along with Bob Pacheco, the RP Group Assessment

Chair, conducted a four-hour workshop on the new accreditation standards. The session was called "Lead-off Batter," and it recognized the unique role of the LACCD schools as the first set of institutions to apply the 2014 standards. This article points out, that while simpler, the new standards still pose challenges for colleges to connect the expectations for improvement from the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges with the increased federal expectations for compliance.

When the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) rolled out the [2014 Standards](#), one of the advantages touted by the accrediting commission was the simplicity (lack of redundancy) in the new standards. Indeed, the 2014 standards and eligibility requirements are leaner and easier to read than previous iterations. The goal in this effort has been to provide a clearer avenue to demonstrate both statutory compliance and organic institutional improvement in one document. Achieving these twin objectives is certainly not an easy endeavor.

The Commission is to be commended for its yeoman's efforts to make this process more fluid than prior versions. Without question, the new standards are more straightforward than before, but colleges need to watch your step. There's more to it than meets the eye.

To see how this all works, let's take a look at a hot topic, the expectation for "institution-set standards"--designated levels of performance as a benchmark for meeting the college mission. (*Do not confuse the terms "accreditation standards" and "institution set standards" because these are different concepts.*)

There are three connected documents colleges must review when crafting a complete response: (1) the standards themselves, (2) the eligibility requirements, and (3) the checklist for compliance with federal regulations and policies. You can see these resources at the end of this article. The Standards

Under the accreditation standards, colleges must establish:

*...institution-set standards for student achievement, appropriate to its mission, assesses how well it is achieving them in pursuit of continuous improvement, and publish this information.
(ER 11) Standard I.B.2 (ACCJC, 2014)*

This directive seems simple enough. Set levels (floors) that the college identifies as a "standard" of performance, evaluate progress against the standard, and share what the college learns with the community. But hold on. Notice the reference "ER 11" at the end of the citation. In creating simplicity, the Commission now permits colleges to embed some responses to Eligibility Requirements within the response to the accreditation standards.

The Eligibility Requirements

[Eligibility Requirement 11](#) further addresses institution set standards:

11. Student Learning and Student Achievement

*The institution defines standards for student achievement, and it compares its performance to those standards. The institution publishes **for each program** the program's expected student learning and any program-specific achievement outcomes. Through regular and systematic assessment, it demonstrates that **students who complete programs, no matter where or how they are offered, achieve the identified outcomes and that the standards for student achievement are met.** (Standard I.B.2, 1.B.3, and II.A.1) (Emphasis added)*

Notice, there is no mention in accreditation standard I.B.3 about setting institutional standards down to the program level, and there is no focus on program completers. The requisite coverage of ER 11 is at a higher resolution and granularity than the standards coverage. Colleges could easily miss this difference when finding evidence and analyzing and evaluating performance under the standard.

The Checklist

Now, let's add the final piece of the puzzle, the [Checklist for Evaluating Compliance with Federal Regulations and Related Commission Policies](#). To help site teams determine whether colleges are meeting federal expectations, the Commission has created a useful checklist for teams to check off and report compliance. In doing so, however, the Commission added another wrinkle to reporting progress on institution-set standards.

Let's look at item two under the checklist for institution-set standards.

The institution has defined elements of student achievement performance across the institution, and has identified the expected measure of performance within each defined element. Course completion is included as one of these elements of student achievement. Other elements of student achievement performance for measurement have been determined as appropriate to the institution's mission. [Regulation citations: 602.16(a)(1)(i); 602.17(f); 602.19 (a-e)]

The checklist adds the expectation that colleges will identify successful course completion as one of the standards for evaluation. This expectation escapes mention in the Eligibility Requirement 11, and in Standard I.B.3.

What is the lesson here? **The marriage of academic quality and increased federalization of accreditation makes for some careful cross-walking for colleges to meet the Commission's call for a system of improvement and the federal government's call for compliance.**

Resources:

- [Accreditation Standards, Cross-Walked, with Glossary Terms](#)
- [Eligibility Requirements for Accreditation](#)
- [Checklist for Evaluating Compliance with Federal Regulations and Related Commission Policies](#)

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