

# perspectives

## RP Group | November/December 2014

Welcome to the last issue for the 2014 calendar year! Have a wonderful holiday season and we look forward to our continued journey in the new year.

Sincerely,  
The RP Group

### In This Issue

- Announcements
- Statewide Spotlight | Using Noncognitive Measures to Inform College Assessment, Placement and Advising
- Research | Let Them In: Increasing Access, Completion and Equity in College English
- Planning | Is "Planning" in Your Job Title? Leadership Qualities for Colleges Planning Officers
- Assessment | Disaggregating Results on Student Learning

### Announcements

#### **Join the 2015 Leading from the Middle Academy**

The application deadline is Monday, December 1, 2014. More information and the link to submit an application can be found [here](#).

#### **Submit a Proposal to Present at the 2015 RP Conference**

Submit a proposal to present a session at the 2015 RP Conference, to be held April 8-9, 2015 at the Holiday Inn Capitol Plaza in Sacramento. The proposal deadline is Monday, January 5, 2015. More information and link to submit can be found [here](#).

#### **Attend the San Diego/Imperial Valley Regional Research Meeting**

The meeting will take place on Friday, December 5 from from 12:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. at Miramar College. For agenda details or to RSVP, please contact Jessica Luedtke at [jluedtke@sdccd.edu](mailto:jluedtke@sdccd.edu).

#### **Attend the CAMP Research Regional Meeting**

The meeting will take place on Friday, January 30 from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. at Mt. San Antonio College. For agenda details or to RSVP, please contact Barbara McNeice-Stallard at [bmcneice-stallard@mtsac.edu](mailto:bmcneice-stallard@mtsac.edu).

## Statewide Spotlight | Using Noncognitive Measures to Inform College Assessment, Placement and Advising



**Authors:** *Bri Hays*, Campus Based Researcher, San Diego Mesa College and *Rogéair Purnell*, Senior Researcher, The RP Group

Research examining psychological and social characteristics, such as self-efficacy and motivation, and learning strategies, such as time management and organization, suggests that these noncognitive factors may have important implications for student success in college. For decades, researchers have explored the link between noncognitive factors and student success (e.g., Pintrich et al., 1991; Tracey & Sedlacek, 1982) in an effort to better understand how factors other than cognitive skills and knowledge--those that can be measured by a standardized test--may impact student achievement. More recently, specific noncognitive factors, such as conscientiousness (Lleras, 2008), grit (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009), motivation (Noffle et al., 2008) and academic self-efficacy (Markle et al., 2013), have received increased attention as indicators of not only success in the first year of college but longer-term educational attainment and/or employment outcomes.

So how might noncognitive factors impact student outcomes on our campuses? For starters, certain noncognitive factors may help us better predict student readiness or performance in college, even when controlling for the traditional predictors of cognitive test scores and previous academic performance (for a review, see Robbins et al., 2004). Given the potential predictive power of noncognitive factors, as researchers, we may want to consider including noncognitive measures in our models of student success and persistence.

The assessment of students' noncognitive skills and abilities may also help colleges tailor services to those students who are most in need of specific types of support (Robbins & Li, 2013). Student services on our campuses often aim to improve noncognitive traits in specific areas such as motivation and academic self-efficacy; thus, assessing noncognitive skills may provide opportunities for formative and summative evaluation of student services and special programs.

Finally, the inclusion of noncognitive factors in the assessment process may inform placement decisions that help students who are right below the assessment test cut score to advance into higher-level courses in which they are just as likely to succeed as their peers. This practice may help to accelerate educational pathways for those students who are traditionally underrepresented on college campuses and may score lower on traditional cognitive tests, but be just as likely as other students to succeed academically.

While the potential benefits of measuring students' noncognitive skills are numerous, there are also some potential logistical challenges researchers should consider. For example, the sheer number of potential noncognitive factors and the associated measures available is staggering, and there may be a certain degree of overlap among some of these factors. In addition, the way in which the noncognitive assessment itself is framed to students may bring with it a certain degree of social desirability bias or reference bias (West et al., 2014). Additionally, some researchers might suggest that previous academic performance such as high school GPA, which is one of the strongest predictors of college success, by default

captures some noncognitive skills. This brings up the question of how much we might improve models of student success by including noncognitive factors. Thus, determining whether the assessment of a specific noncognitive factor is appropriate depends on the aims of the research being conducted and the intended use of the results. That said, the assessment of noncognitive factors as a means of measuring changes in student development, implementing multiple measures for placement and tailoring student support services appears promising.

### **Resources:**

- Booth, K. Bracco, K. R., Chaplot, P., & Lagunoff, R. (2014). [Interim environmental scan report to The Common Assessment Initiative Steering Committee](#). Oakland, CA: WestEd in partnership with Cal-PASS Plus in association with Butte-Glenn Community College District and San Joaquin Delta College.
- Farrington, C. A., Roderick, M., Allensworth, E., Nagaoka, J., Keyes, T. S., Johnson, D. W., & Beechum, N. O. (2012). [Teaching adolescents to become learners: The role of noncognitive factors in shaping school performance-A critical literature review](#). Chicago, IL: Consortium on Chicago School Research.
- Person, A. E., Baumgartner, S. E., Hallgren, K. & Santos, B. (2014). *Measurement and segmentation of college students' noncognitive attributes: A targeted review*. Seattle, WA: Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in partnership with Mathematica Policy Research (Oakland, CA).

## Research | Let Them In: Increasing Access, Completion and Equity in College English



**Authors:** *Leslie Henson*, English Instructor, Butte College and *Katie Hern*, Director, California Acceleration Project

California's Student Success Scorecard shows a stark divide between "college prepared" and "unprepared" students. When incoming community college students are designated prepared for college-level work in English and math, they go on to complete degrees, certificates and transfer-related outcomes at a rate of 70% within six years. For students designated unprepared and required to enroll in remedial courses, that figure is just 40%. Unfortunately, most California community college students are in the "unprepared" group. Statewide, more than 70% of incoming students are required to enroll in one or more remedial courses.

But recent research suggests that students may not be as unprepared as we have believed. Two studies by the Community College Research Center have found that standardized placement tests--the primary mechanism community colleges use to assess student readiness for college-level courses--are poor predictors of students' performance in college. Analysis of data from a statewide community college system revealed that placement tests in reading/writing explain less than 2% of the variation in students' first college-level English grades. A study of a large, urban community college system estimated that 40-60% of students placed into remediation could pass college English with a C or higher if allowed to enroll directly, and that 29% of them could earn a B or

higher. Long Beach City College found that when they quadrupled the number of students classified "college ready" through changes to their placement process (from 13% to 59%), there was no effect on pass rates inside the college-level course.

Butte College began its own examination of placement in March of 2011 when the English department replaced a previous placement test with the COMPASS exam. Under the new test and cut scores, faculty were surprised to see that many more students were being classified as "college ready." Instead of 23% of incoming students having access to the gateway college-level English composition course, 48% of students did. They considered lowering the cut scores back to the prior ratio of college-ready/remedial, but conscious of the high rates of attrition in remedial course sequences, they decided to let the new scores stand and see how students performed.

This article describes what happened. Overall, substantially more students completed college English across all ethnic groups, and achievement gaps between groups narrowed. Black and Hispanic students--who had fared the worst under the prior policy--saw the greatest gains, with both groups' completion of college English more than doubling. Examining grade distributions after the new policy, we found that among students who previously would have been placed into remediation, 40% earned As and Bs in the college-level course. While there was a modest decline in average course success rates in college English, the significance of this decline is uncertain given the huge variability in success rates across sections and instructors. The article closes with a discussion of implications for Butte College and community college placement and remediation policies.

#### **Resource:**

- Read the full article, [Let Them In: Increasing Access, Completion, and Equity in College English](#)

## Planning | Is "Planning" in Your Job Title? Leadership Qualities for College Planning Officers



**Authors:** *Julie Slark and Linda Umbdenstock, Founding Board Members, The RP Group*

Having visited community colleges across California and beyond in recent years working in planning, development and evaluation roles, we have seen a range of involvement by institutional research and planning (IRP) staff in planning activities. Some members sit off to the side when college planning efforts are underway while others are leading conversations and making progress on institutional effectiveness efforts. Read the latest [Report on Trends in Higher Education Planning 2014](#) by the Society for College and University Planning's Academy Council.

What does it mean when we talk about "planning"? As a starting place for that discussion, we propose that "planning" includes:

- Integrated functions within the *planning-evaluation-improvement cycle* for all levels, from college-level (mission, educational and strategic plans) to department-level to unit-level;

- Related *connections* to accreditation action plans and subject plans (e.g., equity, educational master planning); and,
- Subsequent *resources plans* for facilities, technology and human resources.

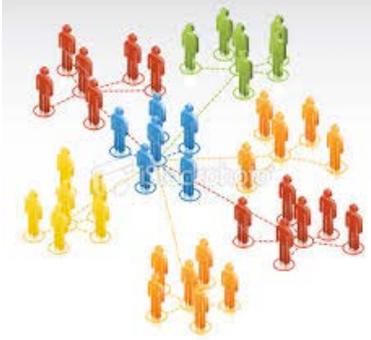
Although colleges differ in their structures for distributing responsibilities, to be a "planning officer" then, theoretically, includes oversight and leadership for the development, monitoring and integration of the above functions, as well as the ability to collaborate, motivate and to manage networks of focused and related efforts. That's a tall order, especially in a multi-college district! Besides the generic, by-the-textbook organizational leadership skills that are already used, our experiences have uncovered four additional strategies that can strengthen effective planning:

1. *Step up to the plate and don't hesitate to take the first few steps.* Oftentimes, because the nature of our organizations is so collaborative, and because planning can be complicated, some hesitate to take first steps to design and take responsibility for planning. Many ideas float around the discussion tables, but few concrete assignments for accountability and responsibility arise. Just dive in and go for it!
2. *Use available resources, don't reinvent the wheel.* While structures need to be customized and development is a big part of successful planning, many colleges have already shared their planning models, structures and strategies online. Of those shared, there are a few can be adapted for your unique institutional efforts.
3. *Model thinking that challenges the borders of the status quo.* Propose alternative methods to develop plans versus the typical tinkering around the edges and "Noah's Ark", turf-laden politicization of ideas. For example, new [design thinking](#), using advances in brain research and the science of complexity, suggests that we accurately identify sources of problems with significant information and data before attempting to solve them with action steps. Promote [futures thinking](#), maintaining meaningfulness of our work, keeping the eye on the long perspective, the changing world for students and the 21st century context for higher education.
4. *Move away from the traditional researcher mindset.* Granted, research needs to become a more predominant contributor to making decisions and setting agendas. However, IRP offices have been dominated with a research mindset and personality, limiting institutional and broader-level thinking. Planning is usually tacked on to job descriptions without full understanding of its complexity, and individuals are often hired with an expectation of sophisticated research activity, but not planning skills. College leadership, faculty and staff need to be educated (by you) that the responsibilities for full-fledged planning efforts require staffing, talented leaders and comprehensive levels of advancement. Engagement precisely deals with the heart/culture issues as well as the rational, research-based ones.

### **Resources:**

- Review the [Report on Trends in Higher Education Planning 2014](#) by the Society for College and University Planning (SCUP)
- Subscribe to [The SCUP Scan](#), a weekly e-newsletter by the SCUP sharing the latest higher education news stories
- Peruse the basics of [Design Thinking](#)
- Peruse the basics of [Futures Thinking](#)

## Assessment | Disaggregating Results on Student Learning



**Author:** *Robert Pacheco*, Dean of Institutional Effectiveness, MiraCosta College

Colleges are familiar with disaggregating student success results at the institutional level into targeted areas of focus such as gender, ethnicity or first generation status. These data provide great information for dialogue when creating equity plans, evaluating program effectiveness and applying for federal and state grants. Moreover, the data provide ways for colleges to assess progress towards meeting our collective mission as community colleges to serve as a key entry point

for students into post-secondary education.

Unlike student achievement measures, student learning outcomes have always been examined in the aggregate level, whether at the course, program or institutional/general education levels.

As shared in the [accreditation listserv](#), the new accreditation standards direct colleges to broaden their views and break down learning results in the same way we do success rates. Specifically, Standard I.B. 6 in the new academic quality and institutional effectiveness standards requires colleges to: disaggregate and analyze learning outcomes and achievement for subpopulations of students. When the institution identifies performance gaps, it implements strategies, which may include allocation or reallocation of human, fiscal and other resources, to mitigate those gaps and evaluates the efficacy of those strategies.

At first blush, it seems simple enough. We can review differences in students subgroups, disaggregated by age or gender, and identify efforts to innovate and experiment with new pedagogies and methods to improve outcomes for all students. However, this is a significant cultural change for colleges and simply not what we have been doing when we look at learning.

Napa Valley College is piloting the new standards and self-evaluation leaders confirmed in a webinar last week for the field that indeed the Commission now expects colleges to break down learning data by subpopulation. Posts on the [learning outcomes and learning assessment listservs](#) on the new expectation since the Commission adopted the new standards have been robust to say the least, with assessment leaders taking varied positions on the move from logical adoption to flat-out repudiation. This will take a little while and wide berth to turn the assessment ship. We will continue to share progress and college examples.

### **Resources:**

- Subscribe to the [accreditation listserv](#)
- Subscribe to the [learning outcomes and assessment listservs](#)