Let Them In: Increasing Access, Completion, and Equity in College English
• http://video.butte.edu/media/ENG-118/Simpsons_OnlyMoveTwice.html
Research Context

- In CA, 70% of students designated as prepared reach completion outcomes within six years, versus 40% for students designated as unprepared and required to enroll in remedial courses.

- Statewide, more than 80% of incoming students are designated as “unprepared” in math or English or both. (CA Student Success Scorecard)
Which students are most likely to be placed into developmental coursework?

**Nationally:**
Black and Hispanic students twice as likely as white students to take three or more remedial courses (43% vs. 22%)

**In California community colleges:**
- Black students are three times more likely to begin 3 or more levels below transfer English
- Hispanic and Asian students twice as likely

More than half of Black and Hispanic students in basic skills begin 3 or more levels below transfer math
What are the consequences?

Figure 1. Statewide progression of students from three levels below transfer to transfer-level English from fall 2010 through spring 2013.
Do we see this pattern of attrition at Butte?

- 50% of students who began one level below college in writing in Fall 2010 completed college English within two years.

- For students who began two levels below college in English, that number dropped to 27%.

- Among students starting three to four levels below college, just 18% completed college English within four years (timeframe extended because of time required to progress through sequence). (Basic Skills Progress Tracker)
Are that many students really unprepared for college-level work?

• Statistical modeling from a large urban community college system predicts 40-60% of students placed into remediation could make a C or better in college English if allowed to enroll directly. (Scott-Clayton, CCRC, 2012)

• Long Beach City College quadrupled the number of students classified as “college ready” (from 13% to 59%), with no effect on pass rates inside the college-level course
Butte College begins its own natural experiment with placement…

In 2011, Butte switched from one placement test to another. While establishing cut scores, they were surprised to find that more than twice as many students were now eligible to enroll directly in college English.

Old test/cut scores:
23% of incoming students “college ready” in English

New test/cut scores:
48% of incoming students “college ready” in English
Did access to college English become more equitable?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First-Time Freshmen (FTF) Cohort enrolled for credit</th>
<th>Fall 2010 percent assessed at college level</th>
<th>Fall 2012 percent assessed at college level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>30.81%</td>
<td>51.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>36.49%</td>
<td>58.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>15.11%</td>
<td>37.28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>19.17%</td>
<td>41.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>18.75%</td>
<td>34.88%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Completion of College English in One Year
College-Wide – first-time freshman cohort

- Tripled for African American students (8% \(\rightarrow\) 23%)
- Doubled for Hispanic students (13% \(\rightarrow\) 27%)
- Doubled for Asian students (17% \(\rightarrow\) 35%)
- 1.6 times higher for White students (23% \(\rightarrow\) 37%)

Old policy:
Whites’ completion nearly 3 times higher than African Americans’

New policy:
There’s still a gap, but whites’ completion now just 1.5 times higher than African Americans’
What other variables were in play?

Reduction in numbers of students placed into developmental levels:
Most significantly, from 33% of incoming students placed two levels below in Fall 2010, to 17% placed two levels below in Fall 2012.

Options for students placed two levels below:
Accelerated English also came into the picture

2012-2013 academic years:
21 sections of accelerated English, 478 students
243 sections of college composition, 7,007 students.
What about course success rates?

Median success rates across sections of College English:
Old policy: 67-72%
New policy: 63%

High degree of variability across sections:
2012-13 success rates ranged from 18% to 94%
Should we be concerned about drop in median success rate?
Were students less prepared?

21 instructors taught both before and after the policy change:

- 8 had higher mean success rates after the change
- 3 had no change in their mean success rates
- 10 had lower mean success rates.

Across all 21 instructors, the mean success rate dropped just 2.8 percentage points under the new policy, and the median less than 1 percentage point.
Were students less prepared? Success Rates in College English by Placement Test, Fall 2011-Spring 2014

College English success rates

- Old test: 66.53%
- New test: 63.44%

Legend:
- Old test
- New test
How did lower-scoring students do under the new policy -- the ones previously placed into remediation?

We estimated this group by considering the ratio of incoming students formerly placed into college English

**Under previous placement ratios:**

*Students scoring between 73-88 on new test would likely have been placed into developmental coursework*

*Students scoring between 89 and 99 on new test would likely have been placed into college English*
What grades would we expect for the lower-scoring group if they were truly less prepared for college English?

• What proportion of As?
• What proportion of Bs?
• What proportion of Cs?
• What proportion of Ds, Fs, and Ws?
## Grade Distribution in College English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Placement Score Range</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D/F/W</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students likely placed into college English under prior ratios</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scores: 89-99 on new test</td>
<td>N=2481</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students likely placed into remediation under prior ratios</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scores: 73-88 on new test</td>
<td>N=1927</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
How did the change affect the institution?

Enrollments and sections Fall ‘10-Fall ‘12

• Number of first-year students enrolling in college English doubled; numbers of first-year students enrolling in all other English levels fell by almost a third
• 22 sections of college English added to fall schedule
• 15 sections of developmental English cut

Staffing

• Five new part-time faculty hired in Fall 2012
• 2 new full-time faculty hired to cover sections and a third on the way
• Some part-time faculty who were not credentialed to teach college English were let go (faculty with reading or ESL credentials)
Cultural Shifts

23 of 46 English department faculty have been trained in methods for teaching accelerated English:
• integrated reading and writing
• growth-oriented approach to students
• grading so that students have low-stakes opportunities to practice skills early in the semester

Faculty report using this pedagogy at all levels
Implications

What percentage should be placed into college English?
48% of students? (Butte)
59% of students? (Long Beach)
51%-69% of students? (CCRC estimated % incoming students who could earn C or higher at Large Urban CC)
Shedding Light on Under-Placement

“When a student is placed into college-level course and fails there (an over-placement error), the fact that there has been a placement mistake is painfully obvious to all.” But “when a student does well in a remedial course, it is unlikely to be perceived as a problem.”

Judith Scott-Clayton, 2012

“Do High Stakes Placement Exams Predict Success?”

Placement and Continuing Inequity

- Disproportionately placing students into developmental courses “contributes to further disparities…in retention and completion rates, graduate school participation rates, and access to opportunities for deep and engaged learning throughout their postsecondary careers.” (USC Center for Urban Education)

- Placement and remediation policies are not race-neutral.

- Veneer of scientific accuracy, but placement test scores bear almost no relation to ability of students of color to succeed in college coursework.
The Urgent Need to Act

- Given mounting evidence that placement into remediation leads to worse outcomes, we need to acknowledge and address the consequences of our well-intended structures and policies.

- We must “be willing to disrupt the current systems of higher education and take responsibility for those aspects of inequality that are under our control.” (America’s Unmet Promise)
How Should We Start?

- What are the implications of this research and other research for changing policy and practice regarding placement?

- Areas to consider could include:
  1) how we validate cut scores
  2) how to ensure greater equity in placement
  3) how researchers might work with English and math faculty to catalyze rethinking our current policies and processes
  4) how else we might improve things