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The RP Group and AB 705 — an Evolution Through Place(ment) and Time

Dr. Darla Cooper, Executive Director, The RP Group

For more than six years, the RP Group has been on a journey to support California Community Colleges in better understanding how to assess for and place students in college-level coursework — smoothing their entry into our institutions and bolstering their likelihood for success.

Early Exploration of Multiple Measures Assessment and Placement

Propelled by the passage of the 2012 Student Success Act and the increasing interest in multiple measures assessment and placement, we first conducted the Student Transcript-Enhanced Placement Study (STEPS). This research aimed to help colleges grow their capacity to use high school transcripts to determine recent high school graduates' readiness for college-level coursework, given a growing body of evidence that indicated information like GPA and grades in high
school math and English courses may be a viable option for improving placement.

Working with the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office (CCCCO) and Cal-PASS Plus (an effort of the Educational Results Partnership), the RP Group concluded a pilot study that built on these findings and tested a specific transcript analysis methodology already utilized at Long Beach City College.

This initial research showed that when looking at the transcripts of recent graduates from local high schools, institutions can derive meaningful information that can facilitate more accurate placement of this population and predict their likelihood for success in college courses. It provided an initial window into the nuances of how to use this data for more effective placement and called for deeper examination of its impact on student success.

STEPS served as an important precursor and foundation for the Multiple Measures Assessment Project (MMAP), which replicated and extended STEPS as part of the California Community Colleges Common Assessment Initiative (CAI), which was designed to develop and implement a common assessment system for the state — streamlining and strengthening student assessment and placement in English, ESL, and math coursework. Launched in 2014, MMAP sought to help colleges identify and place students more effectively into the English, math, reading, or ESL course level in which they were highly likely to succeed.

Early on, MMAP found (in alignment with earlier STEPS findings) that high school performance is a more accurate predictor of college course success than placement tests.

As more data emerged, the project continuously provided and refined resources as new evidence of impact emerged to help colleges effectively implement multiple measures and shared this growing base of evidence broadly across the state. As of spring 2018, over 90 community colleges statewide were using high school performance data as a multiple measure to place students and maximize their performance in college courses.

Enter AB 705
Signed into California law in October 2017, AB 705 requires community colleges to maximize the probability that a student will enter and complete transfer-level coursework in math and English within a one-year timeframe by utilizing assessment measures that include high school performance.

It requires colleges to use high school performance data as the primary means of validating placement decisions, and allows colleges to assign students to basic skills courses only if they are highly unlikely to succeed when directly placed into transfer level classes.

The law took effect January 1, 2018, but includes phased-in implementation, with deadlines for related math and English instruction requirements occurring in fall 2019, and ESL in fall 2020.

The RP Group and AB 705
With the shift towards AB 705 compliance, the MMAP research team (comprised of members from the RP Group and Educational Results Partnership) turned its attention to applying our extensive research in the context of this new law in 2018.

While our work previously focused on identifying the course level in which
students were highly likely to succeed in order to maximize their likelihood of completing a transfer-level math or English course in one year, or ESL course in three years, our goal today still focuses on maximize students’ success through effective placement practices.

In partnership with the CCCCO, the MMAP team aims to provide support, research, and resulting recommendations to colleges across the system as they work to implement AB 705. MMAP team members also sit on the AB 705 Implementation Committee in order to both draw on learning from — and provide information to — the field.

Currently, the MMAP team is focused on ESL sequence completion to provide research to the AB 705 ESL Subcommittee, examining:

- Credit ESL to English pathways
- Noncredit to credit pathways
- Adult education to noncredit and credit pathways

The MMAP team has also conducted a review of the literature around effective placement practices for English Language Learners (ELLs), including guided self-placement, writing samples/essays, and multiple measures questionnaires to further inform the ESL guidance.

MMAP rule sets have been used to inform the CCCCO’s AB 705 Default Placement Rules, and team members have also assisted with the AB 705 Implementation Survey, issued last fall. The results of this survey and other forms of data collection show that colleges have implemented changes to their curriculum and placement practices to "pilot" AB 705 compliance in fall 2018. An ESL-focused summary of the survey is now available and includes information on:

- Current ESL Landscape and Placement Practices
- Plans for Aligning ESL to AB 705 Requirements
- Needs Identified to Support the Field with Aligning ESL to AB 705 Requirements

What's Next
In regards to adult education and noncredit ESL, the MMAP team will be interviewing colleges via telephone with large populations of noncredit ESL or adult education students to get a better sense of effective practices that could be shared with the rest of the field.

Further, the team will be looking at fall 2018 data from early adopters of English and math practices to see how aligned the AB 705 Default Placement Rules have been with student outcomes at these colleges.

For questions regarding technical assistance related to AB 705 implementation (e.g., evaluation services, collecting student voices, and other research assistance), please email Director of Research and Evaluation Alyssa Nguyen at anguyen@rpgroup.org.

AB 705 Resources
- All About AB 705 Newsletters
- CCCCO Assessment FAQs
- CCCCO’s Assessment Web Page
- CCCCO’s AB 705 Implementation Web Page
- IEPI Connecting the Dots Workshops
College Readiness: A Two-Way Street

Alice Perez, Vice Chancellor of Educational Services, California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office

Matthew C. might not think he’s a typical community college student. Yet, he has a lot in common with our more than 750,000 students who are similarly “non-traditional” (age 25 and up) and who enroll in our colleges with varying levels of knowledge and experience and with competing priorities like career and family.

For years, we have focused on readying students for college. However, with significant Vision for Success goals to achieve, we are shifting the paradigm to focus on readying our colleges to meet the unique needs of this large and diverse non-traditional student population. Readiness is a two-way street, and colleges and students both benefit when we better serve students like Matthew.

Many non-traditional students come to us with college-level skills gained through military, workplace, and civic experiences. They hold industry credentials, are graduates of public service academies and, like Matthew, were trained for highly specialized military occupations. Credit for prior learning (CPL) is a strategy to help students get credit for what they already know.

Research indicates that students who earn credit for their college-level skills and knowledge:

- Are roughly twice as likely to complete a degree than those who do not
- Accumulate more credits through coursework at the institution than their counterparts
- Save an average of 6-10 months in time to degree compared to their non-CPL counterparts

A 2016 RP Group report suggests that California Community Colleges need new policies to help students with prior learning earn credit for degree-applicable courses (general education and program requirements), and to build faculty capacity to lead this work on their campuses.

The Chancellor’s Office is considering new policy that will help catalyze more consistent, equitable, and transparent practices than are currently supported by our Credit by Exam policy (Title 5 Section 55050). Based on what we have seen in colleges across the country, we believe that when done with a focus on quality and integrity, CPL can be a win for students and colleges alike.

CPL can help students save time and money towards degree. In California, there are more than 1.7 million military veterans and 4 million workers with some college and no degree who are likely to turn to California Community Colleges to upskill for new jobs, complete training for a promotion, or prepare for university transfer. CPL can help non-traditional students get a jump-start with credit, but more importantly, students feel a sense of belonging when we value their prior learning. Further, more than half of Californians with some college but no degree are people of color; accelerating their educational progress is an equity imperative.
CPL can help colleges meet Student Centered Funding Formula metrics. The Vision for Success asks colleges to increase the share of students who transfer or complete certificates or degrees and to close achievement gaps. CPL helps by accelerating students’ time to complete. In addition, students who earn CPL tend to earn more credits at the institution than their non-CPL counterparts, which translates to increased enrollment for colleges — the exact opposite of what some might expect. Helping students complete a quality program faster increases our colleges’ value proposition.

CPL has the support of two important bodies in California: the legislature and the Academic Senate. New laws (SB1071, AB1786-chaptered 2018) urge the California Community Colleges to award credit for prior learning, especially for veteran and military students and those who hold industry-recognized credentials. The Academic Senate supports the concept of assessing students’ prior learning for credit (adopted resolution 7.02 S16). Promising practices exist in colleges with nursing programs and those that serve veteran and military students. Yet, there is more to be done to create equitable processes for all students at every campus, ensure transferability of credit, scale assessments for broad student impact, and keep faculty driving this work at their campuses.

As we work to curate resources and change policy, we invite you to consider how CPL could help your students save time and money and your college support the Vision for Success. There are millions of potential non-traditional students out there who could benefit from a certificate or degree. Are you ready to help them achieve their goals?

Multiple Paths Forward: Diversifying Mathematics as a Strategy for College Success

Pamela Burdman, Senior Project Director at the Opportunity Institute, Founder, Just Equations; Kathy Booth, Project Director for Educational Data and Policy at WestEd

Community colleges in California have been leaders nationally in developing approaches to ensure student success in mathematics. They were among the first to embrace the idea of diversifying students’ math pathways to ensure they align with students’ educational and career goals. These efforts include work by the California Acceleration Project and Carnegie Math Pathways to develop a pre-statistics pathway to ensure that more students — especially those pursuing non-STEM majors that do not call for advanced algebra — can meet their general education math requirements and qualify for university transfer.

Now, under Assembly Bill (AB) 705, California’s Community Colleges are expected to maximize the chances that students complete their college-level math and English requirements within a one-year period. However, until recently we have not had a clear statewide picture of students’ enrollment patterns in mathematics: To what extent are California Community College students enrolling in alternative math pathways? Are traditional algebra-intensive remedial requirements holding students back?

Our recent study with Peter Bahr of the University of Michigan and other colleagues shed light on these questions.
Looking at enrollment data spanning the period from 2009 through 2016, here’s what we found:

- About one-quarter of students took a transferable non-algebra-based course as their highest-level completed math course, with statistics emerging as by far the most common of the alternatives. This finding may be explained in part by the fact that, unlike some state systems, California’s public university systems have long accepted statistics as a transferable general education course.

- Yet, almost one-half of students only got as far as remedial math, which (at least in the years covered by the study) consisted largely of courses designed to prepare students for an algebra-based math sequence. In fact, more than two-thirds of students who dropped out of college and more than one-half of career and technical education students never got beyond a remedial math course.

Alternative math pathways have been validated by research showing that they can vastly increase completion of general education math (or college-level math), with the potential to reduce equity gaps. In addition, they have been endorsed by the mathematics community in A Common Vision for Undergraduate Mathematical Sciences Programs in 2025, which states: 

_There is a call to provide mathematically substantive options for students who are not headed to calculus. These entry courses should focus on problem solving, modeling, statistics, and applications…. There is a mismatch between a curriculum designed to prepare students for calculus and the reality that only a small proportion of these students subsequently enroll in calculus._

Indeed, at least two dozen state higher education systems around the country are implementing diversified math pathways by developing non-algebra-based options such as statistics and quantitative reasoning. Such policies allow colleges to align prerequisite or corequisite requirements with students’ majors — with a goal of ensuring that students get farther in math and acquire the skills necessary for career and life.

Here in California, such approaches are helping faculty re-think how math serves community college students.

“What is our purpose at a community college?” asks Donna Necke of Mt. San Antonio College. “Isn’t it about empowering students? Multiple paths and contextualized math courses give students the mathematical reasoning to tackle and analyze problems in work and in the real world. They’re not just focused on getting the right answer. They’re asking important questions about why an answer is correct.”

Diversifying students’ math pathways, aligning them with students’ program of study, and eliminating arbitrary requirements are ways that colleges can ensure that students build the quantitative skills that they will need for their futures. Further research can help shed light on how and whether math course enrollment patterns shift under California’s new law.

Download the report [here](#) for more information on the case for diversification, findings regarding enrollment patterns, and examples of learning outcomes from non-algebra math courses from around the country.
Collaboration

Dr. Janet Fulks, ASCCC Guided Pathways Faculty Lead on Capacity Building

Guided Pathways (GP) will affect institutions, their students, and the types of data colleges need to review. Implementing Guided Pathways means looking at new and exciting information beyond typical student success data and calls for greater collaboration between faculty and researchers. Collaboration between faculty and researchers will help contextualize and uncover the many variables influencing the data such as:

- Unclear pathways
- High unit awards
- Scheduling barriers
- Program marketing
- Program review issues

Guided Pathways focuses on accessing and using data to help students achieve their goal sooner and at a lower cost — a contrast to the California Community College Chancellor’s Office (CCCCO) Scorecard, which intentionally tracks six-year cohorts (the most current data for 2018 tracks students beginning in 2012). GP calls for colleges to track "First-Time in College" students, identifying those currently starting and ideally connected to a pathway with an educational goal. Some colleges implementing GP review data weekly or monthly for agile changes designed to improve support to students within a semester.

Guided Pathways also calls for colleges to collect and analyze data on students’ transfer or degree applicable units to facilitate comparison across degrees; separately including basic skills units can provide even greater depth of understanding. Comparing units completed and units attempted can also help align support strategies within pathways.

As colleges pursue multiple measures assessment and placement and acceleration — which research shows contributes to student success as well as a reduction in their college costs and time — data such as time of enrollment and outcomes will need to be examined. Data are additionally critical for curricular-pathway alignment and transfer requirements. Colleges should consider how they will track, quantify, and use these data to tell their students’ story.

Current student success metrics are based on data that do not always reflect or capture completely and accurately the nuances that often times will require faculty awareness and involvement at the local level to identify and incorporate that information into the analysis. For example, the Scorecard metric on transfer-level English achievement in one year and two years only includes the completion of transfer courses identified by the English TOP (Taxonomy of Programs) code 1501. However, other courses providing the same credit found in ESL (TOP 4930) and Reading (TOP 1520) as well as other disciplines, are not being included in the metric.\(^1\)

This issue is even more substantial when looking at math and quantitative reasoning requirements, where several courses outside the math curriculum satisfy the transfer-level math requirement (e.g., statistics offered in psychology, sociology, business).\(^2\)
These limitations of TOP coding also result in under-reporting completions, for instance at Bakersfield College, more than 700 students completed this requirement in the Psychology Top Code last year in the course called Behavioral Statistics (C-ID SOCI 125). Statewide, more than 155 courses meet this math/quantitative reasoning area that are not in the MATH TOP code.

Scorecard, Launchboard, and other research reports using TOP codes for program completion are not based on specific awards. Understanding and finding ways to correct for this misalignment is very important as colleges work to clarify pathways. One possible appropriate fix requires new coding for courses that satisfy the requirements for transfer-level composition and math/quantitative reasoning.

“Cabrillo College looked at the average number of units taken by each student who graduated in Spring 2016, separating them by majors,” says Marcy Alancaraig, English faculty and Guided Pathways Coordinator at Cabrillo College. “The average number of units was 100, the lowest was 80, and the highest 139. We then analyzed the course-taking patterns of several selected students. This was eye-opening for faculty to understand that our pathways were often unclear and courses were not always scheduled so students could take them in an efficient manner.”

Currently, statewide work has begun addressing the lack of clarity and utility of our current coding at the state level, but faculty will need to collaborate on details locally as the new coding is implemented in 2019.

To begin exploring the student success challenges and opportunities at your college that can be addressed through a Guided Pathways approach, colleges should ask questions such as the following:

- How many units does the average student take to get an associate’s degree?
- Why do some programs require more than 60 or 70 units?
- How does the average units completed in the transfer (AA-T and AS-T) degrees compare to these numbers?
- Are the average units to degree or transfer the result of intentional course-taking, scheduling, or student issues outside of class?
- How does general education coursework impact a degree path?
- How can general education coursework enhance a degree path?
- How do you count prerequisite units for programs such as nursing or radiology?

These new analyses will provide a treasure trove of questions and answers to gain new insight about the institution and the student experience.

“Paying close attention to data literacy as a strategic element for facilitating and empowering faculty to engage is beneficial for making meaningful progress and increased faculty participation,” says Randy Beach, English faculty and Guided Pathways Coordinator at Southwestern College.

For more information, resources, and questions, please email Dr. Janet Fulks at jfulks@bakersfieldcollege.edu.

1 Courses satisfying freshman composition and transfer in ASSIST.
2 Math/quantitative reasoning area B4, include non-math TOP coded courses in sociology, psychology, computer science, biology, and business TOP codes.