

NAVIGATING COMMUNITY COLLEGE ASSESSMENT & PLACEMENT

California's 114 community colleges have different policies and processes for determining course placement for new students. Noncredit remedial courses, which may also be called developmental or basic skills courses, may delay graduation or transfer plans so it's important to help ensure students aren't taking more courses than they need.

WHAT TO KNOW

1

Research has found that using the traditional assessment test (e.g. Accuplacer) frequently places students in remedial courses below their actual abilities.

- However, when "multiple measures" are utilized for assessment, students are more likely to place higher.
- Multiple measures = using multiple variables (i.e. high school grades, test scores & courses) to assess readiness.

2

Most students who are placed into remediation never make it to college-level courses because underestimating their abilities is discouraging and adds unnecessary time and expense to get to college-level work.

- Placement tests especially hurt foster youth as they are more likely than the general student population to be placed unnecessarily into low-level remediation courses.
- Students who rely on financial aid may waste their eligible years of aid on courses that don't count toward their degree, certificate or transfer.

3

Major changes shown to improve student success are underway at community colleges! Assembly Bill 705 (Irwin) requires community colleges to:

- use one or more of the following measures to determine placement: high school coursework, grades or grade point average; and
- ensure that students enter and complete transfer level math and English courses within a one-year timeframe.

These changes will be fully implemented statewide by fall 2019, however in the meantime, some colleges have begun changing their practices and some have not.

California State Universities are adopting similar policies beginning fall 2018.

For colleges still using the test...

4

Campuses provide varying levels of information & support to students about preparing for assessment:

- Free online study guides/sample tests
- Test prep workshops (often part of summer bridge program)
- One-on-one tutoring

5

Some colleges allow students who are unsatisfied with their test scores to retake the assessment test before registering for their courses, however:

- The time a student must wait before retaking the exam varies drastically from college to college (i.e. one day, eight weeks, six months, one year).
- Some colleges only offer re-testing on a case-by-case basis.
- Most colleges limit the number of retakes and may prohibit a student from re-testing once they have started their English or math course series.

WHAT TO ASK & HOW TO HELP STUDENTS

1

Find out about the assessment process at your local college(s):

- ⇒ Colleges often do not list which measures they use for assessment on their website, so it's important to call or visit the assessment center to inquire about students' options.
- ⇒ *Because of the system-wide changes underway, check back regularly for changes & inquire about the school's timeline for implementing AB 705.*

If the school uses the traditional assessment test:

- ⇒ Find out from the assessment center what type of test prep the school provides.
- ⇒ If they don't offer anything specific, consider these online resources, and encourage them to study:
 - <http://www.test-guide.com/free-accuplacer-practice-tests>;
 - <http://www.studyguidezone.com/accuplacertest.htm>;
 - <https://www.khanacademy.org/math>
- ⇒ If the student is unsatisfied with their test score, encourage them to inquire about re-taking the exam.

2

If the campus utilizes multiple measures, they may require high school transcripts:

- ⇒ Assist the student in acquiring their high school transcripts.
- ⇒ Start early to make sure transcripts accurately reflect work completed, and if necessary, assist student in correcting their transcripts: contact high school counselor, foster youth district liaison (foster youth) or McKinney Vento district liaison (homeless youth) to assist with credit recovery; contact college assessment center to verify appropriate credit is being given for coursework.
- ⇒ Communicate to current high school students that their high school performance impacts where they start in college.

3

If a student places into remediation, make sure they inquire about best options where available:

- ⇒ Begin directly in transferrable, college-level courses (regular transfer-level English/math or transfer-level courses with "co-requisite" support - e.g. 2 or 3 extra units to help them succeed in the course).
- ⇒ Begin in "accelerated" courses one level below a transferrable English/math course (integrated reading/writing, pre-statistics course for students who aren't STEM majors). Accelerated courses combine two or more required classes, thereby shortening the required course sequence.
- ⇒ Take "stretch" courses that integrate remedial content and college-level content over the course of 2 semesters.
- ⇒ *Because of the system-wide changes underway, check back regularly for changes & inquire about the school's timeline for implementing AB 705.*
- ⇒ *Remember, every remedial course a student takes reduces their likelihood of earning a degree or transferring!*