

memorandum

Date: January 15, 2012

To: California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office

From: WestEd and the RP Group

Question 1: Mandatory Orientation, Assessment, and Counseling

Is there research on the value or benefit of mandating orientation, assessment, and counseling to improve student success and completion in community college? If so, what has the research found? If not, are there example(s) of colleges that are testing out those practices?

Background

As noted below, a number of studies indicate that community college students who complete orientation, and who receive assessment for making placement decisions, counseling, and other matriculation support are more likely to have positive college outcomes than students who do not receive such support. In 1986, the Seymour-Campbell Matriculation Act established a prescribed set of matriculation support services to be offered by California community colleges for students enrolled in credit-bearing courses, including orientation, assessment, and counseling. While students have not been required to use these support services, various reports commissioned by the community college system over the past five years, including *Basic Skills as a Foundation for Student Success in California Community Colleges* and the reports of both the Task Force on Student Success and the Commission on the Future, have identified matriculation support as so critical to student success that it *should* be a student requirement. Yet, due to budget constraints, California community colleges are becoming increasingly less able to even *offer* such support.

In 2009–10, the California community colleges' budget for matriculation services for students enrolled in credit-bearing courses was cut by 52 percent, representing a loss of approximately \$50 million statewide. In 2010–11, categorical funding for matriculation services for these students was equal, in non-adjusted dollars, to funding for those same services in 1991–92 — despite increased enrollment in credit-bearing courses in the intervening years. This funding stagnation for matriculation services has come on top of other funding reductions tied to the state's continuing budget crisis. Further complicating the picture is that, in the midst of growing budget constraints, colleges also have to comply with the 50-percent law, which requires them to devote at least half of their budget to the direct costs of instruction (e.g., faculty salaries).

As a result of all this, fewer students have access to matriculation support. Partly because of a reduction in services, and partly because some students have chosen not to use those services that *are* available, in fall 2008, when more than 88 percent of first-time community college students were taking credit-bearing courses and, thus, *should* have received matriculation services, only 49 percent went through orientation,

63 percent underwent placement assessment, and 39 percent worked with a counselor. Among those who did avail themselves of services, a significant percentage failed to complete these processes by, for example, taking a basic skills course after being assessed as below college level in a content area, or completing an education plan after an initial counseling session.

Scenarios for Implementation

Under current budgets, California community colleges do not have the resources to fulfill their matriculation-services mandate. Thus, if such services are to be available for all incoming students taking credit-bearing courses, colleges need to come up with less costly alternative approaches for providing the services. Examples of such alternative approaches include

- self-paced orientation classes available either online or in a lab;
- orientation provided via podcasts or YouTube videos;
- orientation that is embedded in courses, such as a student success course;
- using students' high school grades or scores on standardized high school exams in lieu of a community college placement test;
- guided self-placement for students, using a question bank
- group counseling sessions;
- counseling via email;
- counseling delivered by paraprofessionals, peers, or faculty instead of instead of counselors; and
- electronically prompted development of student education plans.

Related Considerations

- Due to increases in workload associated with expanding matriculation support, changes in contractual language, including definition of roles and work hours, will have to be negotiated for student services staff and/or faculty.
- If alternative forms of orientation, assessment, and counseling are used to address workload, staff and/or faculty will need to be retrained to implement new methods of delivery of information and resources.
- Students may need additional support to successfully use new delivery methods, particularly technology-based methods.
- Stand-alone resources require careful scaffolding, as well as options for students to connect with other supports to address their needs, experiences, and skills. Safeguards are needed to ensure that students are not penalized if they do not understand directions or advice.
- Colleges will need to cover the costs of developing any new resources, including the costs of instructional design, content expertise, computer programming, printing, and design.
- When institutions develop materials and services, the needs of various populations should be considered. For example, colleges may need to tailor orientation to specific populations or education goals.

- Colleges will need to determine how assessment results should be used. For example, mechanisms could be developed so that assessment results inform curriculum, and traditional placement recommendations may need to be reconciled with new approaches to developmental education, such as acceleration or modularization.
- If the community college system moves forward with mandatory common assessment, it will need to decide which types of skills to evaluate, such as whether to pinpoint specific math and English skills that need remediation and/or to address cognitive, behavioral, experiential, or affective qualities or skills.

Research on Mandatory Orientation, Assessment, and Counseling

Much of the research on mandatory orientation and assessment, as well as on placement, has been done in the context of developmental education. An extensive literature review conducted by the RP Group found that one characteristic of highly effective developmental education programs is that they make orientation, assessment, and placement mandatory for students.¹ Another summary of research on remedial education finds that, compared to students who do not participate in new-student orientation, those who do participate are more likely to persist in community college.² Yet another review of the literature notes that, compared to students who do not take them, students who participate in orientation or who take student success courses are likely to earn more credits, maintain higher GPAs, persist, and graduate from both community college and a four-year institution.³

Research on counseling has been conducted in the context of programs targeting specific vulnerable student populations and in relation to education planning. The Community College Research Center has found promising, though somewhat limited, evidence that education planning, goal setting, and clarifying the utility of college are related to improved persistence and transfer among community college students.⁴ Another study has found that enhanced advising, characterized by guidance that is more personalized for individual students, has positive results. However, this type of personalized advising is costly to implement due to the level of staffing required.⁵ A number of studies have found that requiring students to

¹ For a review of the literature in this area, see the RP Group, Center for Student Success (2007), *Basic Skills as a Foundation for Student Success in the California Community Colleges*. Retrieved from <http://www.rpgroup.org/content/poppycopy>. See specifically section B.1 on making orientation, assessment, and placement mandatory for new students.

² Boylan, H. R., & Saxon, D. P. (2002). *What Works in Remediation: Lessons from 30 Years of Research*. Prepared for the League for Innovation in Community Colleges. Retrieved from http://www.ced.appstate.edu/centers/ncde/reserve_reading/what_works.htm

³ Moore, C., & Shulock, N. (2009). *Student Progress Toward Degree Completion: Lessons from the Research Literature*. Sacramento, CA: Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Policy.

⁴ Karp, M. (2011). *How Non-Academic Supports Work: Four Mechanisms for Improving Student Outcomes*. New York: Community College Research Center. Retrieved from <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/Publication.asp?UID=886>

⁵ Visher, M. G., Butcher, K. F., & Cerna, O. S. (with Cullinan, D., & Schneider, E.). (2010). *Guiding Developmental Math Students to Campus Services: An Impact Evaluation of the Beacon Program at South Texas College*. New York: MDRC.

begin planning as early as their first semester for degrees or credentials, as well as for transfer and/or career preparation, can increase chances of persistence.⁶

Many community colleges use student success courses to help address some of the basic needs of underprepared students. These courses, which often integrate orientation and individual counseling, address such topics as study skills and developing education plans while also orienting students to college life. A research study on the impact of student success courses offered in Florida's community colleges found that students who completed these courses were more likely than those who did not take such a course to complete a credential, transfer, and/or remain enrolled.⁷

While the research has generally found orientation and student success courses to have a positive impact on student outcomes, not all of this research has focused on mandatory requirements. To the extent that the findings come from studies of participation in non-mandatory matriculation support, they may be somewhat skewed, because those students who seek out orientation on their own may be more motivated and, thus, more likely to succeed anyway compared to their peers who don't seek out this support.⁸

Several authors cite the importance of mandatory assessment and placement. For example, Roueche and Roueche (1999) found that students in states that require assessment and placement show improved retention and success when mandatory policies are enforced.⁹ In addition, multiple studies show that completing developmental education courses during the first year or even first term of enrollment improves outcomes, particularly for those who are least prepared when they start community college.¹⁰

One concern in making assessments mandatory is that they may have poor predictive validity.¹¹ For example, a student's assessment results may suggest that he or she needs remediation, but the student might actually succeed in college-level classes without taking a basic skills course or while co-enrolled in a basic skills course.¹² Research at California community colleges also shows that using such methods as

⁶ See Cooper, M. (2010). *Student Support Services at Community Colleges: A Strategy for Increasing Student Persistence and Attainment*. Washington, D.C.: Institute for Higher Education Policy; Lumina Foundation (2005). *Paths to Persistence: An Analysis of Research on Program Effectiveness at Community Colleges*. Indianapolis, IN: Author; Moore, C., & Shulock, N. (2011). *Sense of Direction: The Importance of Helping Community College Students Select and Enter a Program of Study*. Sacramento, CA: Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Policy.

⁷ See Zeidenberg, M., Jenkins, D., & Calcagno, J. C. (2007). Do Student Success Courses Actually Help Students Succeed? *CCRC Brief No. 36*. Retrieved from <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/Publication.asp?UID=667>

⁸ See, for example, The Academic Senate for California Community Colleges (2004). *Issues in Basic Skills Assessment and Placement in the California Community Colleges*. Retrieved from <http://asccc.org/node/174993>

⁹ RP Group (2007).

¹⁰ See, for example, RP Group (2007) op. cit.; Roueche & Roueche (1999) op. cit.; and Boylan, H. R. (2002). *What Works: Research-Based Best Practices in Developmental Education*. Boone, N.C.: Appalachian State University, Continuous Quality Improvement Network with the National Center for Developmental Education.

¹¹ Hughes, K. L., & Scott-Clayton, J. (2010, August). Assessing Developmental Assessment in Community Colleges: A Review of the Literature. *CCRC Working Paper No. 19*. New York: Community College Research Center, Institute on Education and the Economy, Teachers College, Columbia University. Retrieved from <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/Publication.asp?uid=804>; and RP Group (2007).

¹² Jenkins, D., et al. (Nov. 2009). *Promoting Gatekeeper Course Success Among Community College Students Needing Remediation: Findings and Recommendations from a Virginia Study* (Summary Report). New York: Community College Research Center, Institute on Education and the Economy, Teachers College, Columbia University. Retrieved from <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/Publication.asp?UID=714>; and RP Group (2007).

review of high school grades for placement purposes and/or student self-placement may be more effective than using traditional test score data.¹³

The effectiveness of mandatory assessment and placement is best understood in the context of the developmental curriculum with which it is associated. Only 10 percent of community college students who assess three levels below college level in math and only 24 percent who place three levels below in reading complete the developmental sequence.¹⁴ Compared to the use of traditional placement test data, the use of alternative instructional techniques that reduce the amount of time students spend in remediation before entering college-level courses, such as acceleration or modularization of developmental classes, has been shown to result in stronger success and persistence rates.¹⁵

Examples of Colleges Experimenting with Mandatory Orientation, Assessment, and Counseling

Several California community colleges are trying student **self-placement** rather than mandatory assessment, on the grounds that the placement tests are not accurate. These alternative approaches to placement include allowing students to select courses in both developmental-level and transfer-level English at Moorpark College and in developmental and transfer-level English at Diablo Valley College.¹⁶

Northeast Iowa Community College has a number of **college-entry requirements**. All students must take a placement test to determine whether they are ready for college-level material. Academic advising, also mandatory, helps students to understand which courses they should take to meet their goals; it also incorporates personal support. The college currently offers both in-person and online orientation, in which two-thirds of students participate. Orientation will become mandatory in the spring.¹⁷

West Kentucky Community and Technical College prohibits students who are assessed as needing developmental education from enrolling in college-level coursework until they can demonstrate readiness. The college takes a **multifaceted approach** to helping students *become* college-ready. Assessment is paired with a comprehensive basic skills program and bundled with orientation and counseling through a

¹³ Phillips, B. (Sept. 18, 2011). How to Break the Cycle of Remedial College Classes. *Good Education*. www.good.is/post/how-to-break-the-cycle-of-remedial-college-classes/; T. Hetts (Personal communication, December 20, 2011); and K. Hern (Personal communication, November 8, 2011).

¹⁴ Bailey, T., et al. (2009). *Enrollment and Completion of Developmental Education Sequences in Community Colleges*. New York: Community College Research Center, Institute on Education and the Economy, Teachers College, Columbia University. Retrieved from <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/Publication.asp?UID=659>; Hern, K., with Snell, M. (June/July 2010). Exponential Attrition and the Promise of Acceleration in Developmental English and Math. *Perspectives*. Berkeley, CA: RP Group. Retrieved from <http://www.rpgroup.org/resources/june-july-2010-perspectives>; Biswas, R. (2007). *Accelerating Remedial Math Education: How Institutional Innovation and State Policy Interact*. Achieving the Dream Policy Brief, Jobs for the Future.

¹⁵ Phillips, B. (Sept. 18, 2011). How to Break the Cycle of Remedial College Classes. *Good Education*. Retrieved from www.good.is/post/how-to-break-the-cycle-of-remedial-college-classes/

¹⁶ C. Hayward (personal communication, November 8, 2011).

¹⁷ Booth, K., & Karandjeff, K. (2011). *Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence Site Visit Internal Report*. Berkeley: RP Group.

coordinated advising center. The college staffs up this center during peak enrollment times to ensure that students have access to the services they need. The college has revamped its entire developmental math program using a math emporium (i.e., modular) model and has implemented an institution-wide initiative to improve students' reading proficiency.¹⁸

College of the Sequoias has implemented a **mandatory orientation** program. Students can fulfill the orientation requirement in one of three ways: the "First Giant Step Orientation," a group orientation held in the summer; an online orientation; or a face-to-face individualized orientation.¹⁹

Yakima Valley College in Washington has implemented a **mandatory student orientation and registration** process. Upon leaving this orientation, students have at least their first quarter of classes scheduled and they subsequently receive prompts to meet with advisors prior to registration for the next quarter. Since the implementation of mandatory orientation, Yakima Valley College has seen an increase in first-quarter retention from 75 percent to 82 percent.²⁰

Ivy Tech Community College in Indiana began a **mandatory orientation** program in fall 2010 as part of its involvement in the Achieving the Dream Initiative. Early research results showed an increase in first-semester retention for students who took part in the orientation, which included student success courses and advising.²¹

At **South Texas College**, all students who participate in its new student orientation also participate in a **case-management advising program**. As a part of this program, student success specialists make four mandatory contacts with students each semester. Students receiving this intervention have had a higher fall-to-fall retention rate and higher GPAs than students who did not receive it.²²

Laredo Community College in Texas is experimenting with **mandatory orientation** for students enrolled in fall 2011 coursework. The purpose of the orientation, to be held each summer for fall enrollees, is to build college knowledge. The orientation familiarizes students with expectations for college life, makes them aware of financial aid and other services, provides advising, and gives students the opportunity to register for classes.²³

LaGuardia Community College in New York **mandates academic advising** for all students with fewer than 30 earned credits. Students cannot proceed with registration unless they have their advisory forms

¹⁸ Booth, K., & Karandjeff, K. (2011).

¹⁹ See College of the Sequoias at <http://www.cos.edu/Admissions/Orientation/Pages/default.aspx>

²⁰ Achieving the Dream. (2010). *Promising Practices: First-Year Experience 2010 Leader Colleges*. Retrieved from <http://www.achievingthedream.org/CAMPUSSTRATEGIES/PROMISINGPRACTICES/default.tp>

²¹ Ivy Tech Community College (2011, April). Ivy Tech Community College Sees Retention Numbers Increase with Achieving the Dream Initiatives. *Ivy Tech News*. Retrieved from <http://ivytechnews.com/2011/04/22/ivy-tech-community-college-sees-retention-numbers-increase-with-achieving-the-dream-initiatives/>; Vandal, B. (2011, October). The Unchecked Power of the College Placement Test. *Good Education*. Retrieved from <http://www.good.is/post/the-unchecked-power-of-the-college-placement-test/>

²² Achieving the Dream. (2011). *Promising Practices: 2011 Leader Colleges. Retention Support Services*. Retrieved from <http://www.achievingthedream.org/CAMPUSSTRATEGIES/PROMISINGPRACTICES/default.tp>

²³ Laredo Sun. (2011, April 9). *Mandatory Orientation for Freshman Class Now Required*. Retrieved from <http://www.laredosun.us/notas.asp?id=15307>

signed off by an advisor. Advisors provide students with support for education and career planning by reviewing degree requirements, discussing progress, and helping with course selection.²⁴

At **Cuyahoga Community College** in Ohio, students are required to take part in a new student orientation program that includes a **required counseling** session. Early results showed a significant increase in semester-to-semester retention for those students who completed the mandatory counseling session relative to those who did not.²⁵

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²⁴ For more information, see <http://www.lagcc.cuny.edu/academics/advisement/>

²⁵ Achieving the Dream. (2011). *Promising Practices: 2011 Leader Colleges. First-Year Experience*. Retrieved from <http://www.achievingthedream.org/CAMPUSSTRATEGIES/PROMISINGPRACTICES/default.tp>