

Los Medanos College Developmental Education Program

Assessment and Placement

Research/Effective Practice

There is clearly a consensus in the field of developmental education that mandatory assessment and placement are key components of successful programs (Boylan, 2002; McCabe, 2000; Roueche & Roueche, 1999.) While a majority of community colleges require assessment for incoming students unless they meet specific criteria for exemption, mandatory placement is more likely to occur in four-year colleges and universities than in community colleges (Roueche & Roueche, 1999, p. 24). Boylan (2002) in *What Works* explores a number of reasons why mandatory placement has not been instituted in more community colleges. He concludes that the most valid argument against mandatory placement is that developmental courses are not effective. Agreeing with Norton Grubb that too many developmental courses are “dull, poorly taught, and emphasize low level drill and practice” (Boylan, 2002, p. 36), Boylan recommends that institutions evaluate their developmental courses before instituting mandatory placement to ensure that the quality of instruction is high, and that the methods and techniques used are found to be effective. In *Basic Skills as a Foundation for Student Success*, mandatory orientation, assessment, and placement is effective practice B.1 (p. 23).

LMC Current Practice (2007)

Matriculation policies and procedures are clearly stated in the LMC catalog and comply with Title 5 regulations. Students may be exempted from matriculation processes of assessment, orientation and advising if they a) already have an Associate Degree or higher or b) enroll in fewer than 6 units and state that they are not pursuing a long-term educational objective. Students are also informed of their right to waive matriculation services and this is listed as an option on the matriculation exemption request form. However, students are not required at this time to fill out the exemption/waiver form.

LMC uses Accuplacer, a computerized placement test published by the College Board and accepted by our state Chancellor’s Office. It uses an adaptive testing mode that presents different questions to different students depending on their responses to test items. This allows for quicker and more accurate testing. Background questions embedded in the test provide multiple measures that are used in determining placement advisement. The LOEP (Levels of English Proficiency) is used for placement of non-native speakers of English in English and/or ESL courses. LOEP is part of the Accuplacer package, and students can be “branched” into the LOEP test depending on their responses to background questions and test item responses.

Consequential Validity studies for the purpose of validating cut scores are conducted by the LMC Office of Institutional Research in accordance with the *Standards, Policies and Procedures for the Evaluation of Assessment Instruments Used in California Community*

Colleges. The Consequential Validity study identifies students within the cut score range and compares the instructors' view of the student's level of preparedness for the course with the student's view of his or her preparedness. The study looks for a three-way match among faculty perception of the appropriateness of a student's placement, the student's perception of his or her placement, and the Accuplacer score. In order to determine that the cut scores are appropriately set, the match must occur for at least 75% of the students.

English courses two-levels or more below 1A, ESL courses, and math courses below Elementary Algebra do not have prerequisites, though assessment scores and responses to questions embedded within Accuplacer are used for advisement. Prerequisites for English 90 (one-level below 1A) and higher-level English courses are based on assessment score, which includes points from the multiple measures questions, or previous LMC course work in English. The prerequisite for Elementary Algebra is similarly based on an assessment score adjusted for multiple measures or previous LMC math course work. The prerequisite for Intermediate Algebra allows students to enroll who have achieved a "C" in high school Algebra II within the last two years even if their assessment score indicates a lower placement. Because the establishment of mandatory placement in math has been so controversial at LMC, prerequisites for transfer-level math courses are not keyed to the placement test. Students can enroll in any transfer-level math course if they have earned a "C" or better in Intermediate Algebra or an equivalent course at anytime in their lives.

References

Boylan, H. (2002). *What Works: Research-Based Best Practices in Developmental Education*. Boone, N.C: Continuous Quality Improvement Network with the National Center for Developmental Education.

Grubb, N., & Associates (1999). *Honored but invisible: An inside look at community college teaching*. New York: Routledge.

Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges (RPgroup)/Center for Student Success (CSS). (2007). *Basic Skills as a Foundation for Student Success in California Community Colleges*.

Roueche, J., & Roueche, S. (1999). *High stakes, high performance: Making remedial education work*. Washington, DC: American Association of Community Colleges.