

Embracing Change: A More Equitable Statewide Approach to College Placement in Arkansas

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Measuring Students' Skills and Abilities

- Students arrive at college with **different levels** of academic preparation
- Colleges need a **simple** and **efficient** process to determine what students can do and to place them in the right courses
- Historically, colleges have relied on **standardized tests**
 - Accuplacer and Compass
 - SAT and ACT
 - “Home grown” tests

A lot can go wrong with standardized testing

- Students may have **test anxiety**
- Students may be “**rusty**,” especially if they have been out of high school for a while
- Students may not appreciate the **consequences** of a poor test score
- Tests may **reinforce** cultural and racial **bias**
- Material on tests may **not align** with what students need to know for their chosen majors and careers



But there is an alternative: MMA

- **Multiple:** more than one indicator is used to assess student readiness for college-level courses in math and English
- **Measures:**
 - most commonly High School GPA
 - traditional placement tests
 - background questions
 - course-taking history
 - other assessments
- **Assessment:** course placement is usually determined by cut-off scores or combinations thereof

Reforming Assessment into Developmental Education and Building the Research Base

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Project Description

- With support from Ascendium Education Group, CAPR aimed to facilitate the statewide expansion of the use of MMA in Arkansas and Texas through:
 - Helping stakeholders understand the **predictive utility** of available college-readiness measures;
 - Documenting conditions that facilitate or hinder successful **implementation** of MMA; and
 - Assessing **costs** of MMA
- We partnered with the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, Arkansas Division of Higher Education, Arkansas Community Colleges, and 13 open-access institutions

Predictive Analysis: Data

- **Data sources:**
 - 13 data colleges' transcript files and other available measures
 - Additional measures from ADE Data Warehouse (Arkansas) and Education Research Center (Texas)
- **Sample:**
 - All students at data colleges who enrolled in college-level math in last five years
 - All students at data colleges who enrolled in college-level English in last five years

Predictive Analysis: Takeaways

- The predictive utility of placement measures is **similar** in Arkansas and Texas to that found in **other** states and systems
 - High school GPA is the **best single observable predictor** of success in college-level English and math courses without additional supports
 - Using multiple measures in addition to high school GPA only **marginally** improves those predictions
 - These findings are **robust** across most subgroups

Implementation and Cost Findings

Implementation Research: Questions and Data

- How are colleges **adopting** MMA practices? What conditions **facilitate** or **hinder** the implementation of an MMA system?
- **Data Collection Activities:**
 - Attended planning meetings with states and colleges
 - Reviewed action plans and process maps
 - Conducted 22 interviews and/or focus groups at 12 of the 13 participating colleges across Arkansas and Texas

Implementation Research: Findings

- **Challenge:** Faculty and staff often raise questions about the reliability of high school GPA and other indicators as measures of college readiness
- **Solution:** Dissemination of context-specific information about the predictability and accuracy of MMA generated buy-in among faculty and staff

Implementation Research: Findings

- **Challenge:** Incorporating additional data points into placement practices often requires college to develop new procedures for collecting, storing, and accessing relevant data, and can introduce new and unanticipated challenges
- **Solution:** Proactively liaising with high schools and automating aspects of the placement system facilitated the collection and use of alternative measures

Implementation Research: More Findings

- **Challenge:** Implementation is time consuming and requires multiple staff
- **Solution:** Collaboration between departments and flexibility of faculty and staff helped colleges implement MMA

Cost Research Questions & Methods

- **In each state, what is the average cost, per college, of expanding and implementing MMA systems at the time of the implementation study?**
 - CAPR weighted reported hours by reported wages plus overhead and categorized these amounts by faculty and staff members' role in implementation.
- **What is the average cost by personnel category?**
 - These costs were then averaged in each state by personnel category to provide insight into the typical levels of effort by role in each state.

Cost Analysis: Results

- Personnel expenses were the **predominant cost** of MMA implementation, but the staff members involved—and the amount of time they contributed—varied by state.
- In Arkansas, the **registrar** had the **most important role** in the process, with the greatest time commitment to MMA implementation.
- In Texas, the bulk of the work was carried out by **administrators** and **advisors**.

Cost Analysis: More Results

- Data systems and state policy may create conditions that require different staff members to **change the processes** underlying course placement.
- In both states, costs were **relatively low**, especially when considering the large number of students going through the placement systems.
- Given the positive evidence base for MMA from previous studies, these costs are likely **justified** by improved student outcomes.

Activity

Turn and Talk

- Turn to those around you and discuss the following:
 - What **challenges** or **hurdles** might be faced in the adoption of MMA as an alternative placement system?
 - What **benefits** or **opportunities** do you associate with MMA?

Panel

Panelists



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Q&A

Thank you!

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