



Massachusetts Board of Higher Education

Early Assessment - Accuplacer

Background

There are numerous reasons why some students persist in their educational goals while others leave prematurely. Students bring to campus their own educational experiences, personal goals, study habits, motivations and interests that may help or hinder academic progress.

Academic preparation is a significant factor which influences whether or not students succeed in college. Underprepared college students must take developmental courses prior to beginning progress toward a certificate or degree. Research has demonstrated that students enrolled in developmental courses tend to have lower graduation rates. Nationally, 70% of students who took at least one developmental reading course in college did not obtain a degree or certificate within eight years of enrollment.

Early assessment allows students to evaluate their college readiness while still in high school, allowing them to do more in high school to prepare for college-level coursework.

Policy and Process

The Accuplacer is a college placement exam¹ that provides information about student skill levels and abilities. Currently, all first-year students at Massachusetts public colleges are required to take the Accuplacer assessment prior to enrollment. Many students are unable to meet reading and math requirements and must take developmental courses.

% First Time, Full Time Students
taking at least one developmental
course:

University of MA	8.0%
State College	21.6%
Community College	61.3%

Offering the assessment earlier—during the 11th grade—would provide students with improved knowledge of what it takes to succeed in college and enable them to make better decisions concerning how to prepare for college in their final years of high school.

There are several implications resulting from the high need for development course-taking (remediation).

From a student's perspective:

- Higher cost to attend college. A student must pay for developmental courses, but the courses do not count towards a degree. Developmental courses add to the overall cost of a student's college education.
- Longer time in college. Developmental courses do not count toward a degree, extending the amount of time it takes to successfully complete a certificate or degree.
- Dissatisfaction. Many high school graduates believe they are ready to embark fully on their college career and are dismayed to learn they must take developmental courses. Students who take these courses are much more likely to drop out of college than their peers.²

From an institution's perspective:

- High cost. Developmental courses are expensive to offer due to low student-faculty ratios.
- Low productivity. Longer time toward completion and significant dropout rates mitigate institutions' degree production.

From the Commonwealth's perspective:

- K-16 seamless system of education. State resources supporting both K-12 and higher education systems are significant. Early assessment would make the educational pipeline more effective and cost efficient.

BHE Recommendation

The BHE recommends a pilot program to offer the Accuplacer to 15,000 high school juniors. The participating students will be selected by high school administrators and will represent diverse academic, ethnic, and economic backgrounds. The Internet-based test will be administered by 15 public colleges and University campuses. These institutions will provide advising, curriculum development assistance, and mentoring to high school teachers and guidance counselors. The pilot will enable participants to identify effective intervention programs and best practices that can be shared with others.

¹ The Accuplacer was developed by the College Board and committees of college faculty.

² Conley, D (2007). *Toward A More Comprehensive Conception of College Readiness.* Education Policy Improvement Center, retrieved on line on April 11, 2007 at epiconline.org