

**PARTNERING WITH SCHOOLS TO IMPROVE COLLEGE READINESS:
THE CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY EARLY ASSESSMENT PROGRAM**

Over 60 percent of the students arriving at the doors of California State University (CSU) are not prepared for college-level work, requiring developmental education in English, mathematics, or both.¹ This jarring statistic—one that is not unique to California—led the CSU to establish the Early Assessment Program (EAP), an effort designed to improve college readiness and align standards and curriculum between high schools and colleges.

CSU, which is made up of 23 campuses and serves 405,000 students, admits 40,000 first-time freshmen each year. By most standards, CSU admits students who appear qualified for college—CSU freshmen took the college preparatory curriculum in high school and graduated in the top third of California’s high school graduates with at least a B average.² The fact that more than half of CSU’s students are not ready for college-level work illuminates the disconnect between high schools and colleges experienced around the country.

PERCENT OF CSU FRESHMEN NEEDING DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION		
	1998 ³	2004 ⁴
English	47%	47%
Math	46%	37% ⁵

Under the leadership of Chancellor Charles Reed, CSU teamed up with the State Board of Education and the California Department of Education to assess high school students’ readiness for college-level English and mathematics, and for successful entry into the workforce directly out of high school, in the spring of their junior year.⁶ The premise of the program is that, with performance information in hand *prior to high school graduation*, students have their senior year ahead to work on areas where they need improvement. For college-bound students, making the necessary skill improvements while still in high school can eliminate the need to take developmental education courses before being able to get started in credit-bearing college-level courses, thus reducing their time-to-degree and decreasing the educational costs to both the student and the state.

¹ California State University. “Early Assessment Program.” Accessed April 6, 2006, <http://www.calstate.edu/eap/>.

² California State University. “Early Assessment Program.” Accessed April 6, 2006, <http://www.calstate.edu/eap/>; California State University. “Early Assessment Program: About the Early Assessment Program.” Accessed April 6, 2006, <http://www.calstate.edu/eap/about.shtml>.

³ Smith, Virginia B. “Bridging the Gap Between High School and College: An Interview with David Spence.” *Change*, May/June 2006, Page 42.

⁴ California State University. “More California 11th-Graders Volunteer to Get “Early Signal” of Their Readiness for College.” Early Assessment Program/Latest News. September 20, 2005. Accessed April 6, 2006, <http://www.calstate.edu/PA/news/2005/EAP05.shtml>.

⁵ Approximately 5 percentage points of this improvement are attributed to a change in the math placement test. Smith, Virginia B. “Bridging the Gap Between High School and College: An Interview with David Spence.” *Change*, May/June 2006, Page 43.

⁶ Smith, Virginia B. “Bridging the Gap Between High School and College: An Interview with David Spence.” *Change*, May/June 2006.

Also, students receiving the necessary scores in their junior year are not required to take placement tests at the time of enrollment in CSU.

“Perhaps the key point is that we can’t expect high school students to be prepared for college in a state if higher education doesn’t speak with a clear voice about what readiness is.”—David Spence, President of the Southern Regional Educational Board and former Executive Vice Chancellor and Chief Academic Officer of the California State University system⁷

The Early Assessment Program is not, however, only about testing. A significant component of the program is supporting students and teachers so that students can meet the readiness standards. Resources are focused on high school teacher professional development in reading, writing and mathematics, and self-help programs for seniors. The programs for seniors include diagnostic testing to help students understand where they need the most help, and then courses and programs to help students gain the skills they need. Courses and programs at the students’ disposal include a Math Success Web site, an English Success Web site, and a new 12th grade English course on expository reading and writing.⁸

EARLY ASSESSMENT PROGRAM KEY PRINCIPLES

- There is a shared view of college-readiness standards across higher education.
- There is a substantial core of K–12 standards and assessments that can be aligned with collegiate readiness standards.
- Postsecondary education should lead in connecting its readiness standards to K–12 standards.
- K–12 standards and postsecondary education readiness standards need to be aligned.
- There needs to be direct assessment of college-readiness standards.
- Additional tests and testing time should be minimized.
- The timing of tests should be early enough to help students improve their preparation for college.
- The work should be cost-effective.

Source: David Spence, “Early Assessment Academic Preparation Initiative,” presentation at “State Policy Dimensions for K–16 Reform,” Wingspread Conference Center, September 12, 2005.⁹

⁷ Smith, Virginia B. “Bridging the Gap Between High School and College: An Interview with David Spence.” *Change*, May/June 2006, Page 45.

⁸ California State University. “The Early Assessment Program: Helping High School Students Meet College Expectations in Mathematics and English. A Joint Program of California State University and California Public Schools.” Accessed April 6, 2006, http://www.calstate.edu/eap/documents/eap_program_description.pdf.

⁹ As quoted in Callan, Patrick M., Joni E. Finney, Michael W. Kirst, Michael D. Usdan, and Andrea Venezia. *Claiming Common Ground: State Policymaking for Improving College Readiness and Success*. San Jose, CA: National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, March 2006, p. 9. Accessed May 1, 2006, http://www.highereducation.org/reports/common_ground/common_ground.pdf.

In recognition of the fact that high school students were already being subjected to a battery of tests, CSU worked with the K–12 faculty and the California Department of Education to modify existing exams, called the California Standards Tests, which are mandatory exams used for accountability purposes. The California Standards Tests were expanded to include additional, voluntary questions and an essay that cover CSU’s readiness standards in math and English. While taking the California Standards Tests is mandatory for all students, completion of the additional questions and essay added by CSU is voluntary.

To spread the word about the benefits and resources of the EAP, CSU also developed a series of marketing materials. Brochures, flyers, posters, and cards have been distributed to students and high schools to raise awareness and encourage students to take the EAP college readiness exams.¹⁰ In addition, the CSU annually sends out letters to college counselors, K–12 principals, superintendents and other administrators, eleventh grade English and math teachers, and eleventh grade students to provide information about the exams and encourage participation.¹¹

“The goal of the EAP program is to have California high school graduates enter the CSU fully prepared to begin college-level study.”¹²

So far, tests have been administered in the spring of 2004, 2005, and 2006.¹³ While the EAP is too new to have produced concrete results, early indicators suggest some bumps-in-the-road for implementation, but also some promising developments. One study, based on interviews conducted in late 2005, found that students were not receiving timely feedback on their test scores, and thus were not able to revise their course schedules for senior year. The study also concluded that the schools did not have adequate systems in place to respond to the data coming out of the Early Assessment Program.¹⁴ A further concern is that California’s community college system has not yet participated in the EAP, which greatly limits the reach and impact of the program for the state (about two-third’s of California’s college students are in the community college system, which boasts 109 colleges and serves 2.5 million students).¹⁵

However, the same study that found that students were not receiving timely feedback in the early years of the EAP also concluded that the opportunity for faculty from K–12 and

¹⁰ California State University. “Early Assessment Program: EAP Marketing Materials.” Accessed April 6, 2006, http://www.calstate.edu/eap/marketing_materials.shtml.

¹¹ California State University. “Early Assessment Program: EAP Letters.” Accessed April 6, 2006, <http://www.calstate.edu/eap/letters.shtml>.

¹² California State University. “Early Assessment Program.” Accessed April 6, 2006, <http://www.calstate.edu/eap/>.

¹³ California State University. “More California 11th-Graders Volunteer to Get “Early Signal” of Their Readiness for College.” Early Assessment Program/Latest News. September 20, 2005. Accessed April 6, 2006, <http://www.calstate.edu/PA/news/2005/EAP05.shtml>.

¹⁴ Veazey, Dave. “K16 and the Art of Soccer Coaching.” Diss. U of Pennsylvania, 2006.

¹⁵ Callan, Patrick M., Joni E. Finney, Michael W. Kirst, Michael D. Usdan, and Andrea Venezia. *Claiming Common Ground: State Policymaking for Improving College Readiness and Success*. San Jose, CA: National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, March 2006, p. 10. Accessed May 1, 2006, http://www.highereducation.org/reports/common_ground/common_ground.pdf.

CSU to engage in important discussions and collaborate on new curricula was a positive outcome that would likely lead to improved student preparation. In addition, more students are choosing to take the voluntary tests, and there has been a slight increase in test scores. In spring 2005, 184,695 juniors took the English test, representing 46 percent of all high school juniors and an increase of 21 percent over the number of students who took the test in spring 2004.¹⁶ In spring 2005, 69 percent of the high school juniors eligible to take the math section of the California Standards Tests (based on the courses they have already taken) also took the voluntary EAP test.¹⁷ That represents a 3 percent increase over 2004. Between 2004 and 2005, the number of students who demonstrated college-level proficiency, and thus were exempted from taking the placement tests at CSU, rose 2 percent for English (from 22 percent to 24percent) and 1 percent for mathematics (from 55 percent to 56 percent).¹⁸

A pilot evaluation of the curriculum used in the 12th Grade Expository Reading and Writing Course revealed that teachers found the materials rigorous and engaging for their students, and students who had taken the course scored higher on the English Placement Test (taken upon entry into CSU) than students who had not taken the course.¹⁹

Finally, the EAP is reaching teachers as well. In 2004–05, 700 teachers received professional development in English and then taught at least two English course modules in their classrooms.²⁰ Professional teacher development activities are under development for mathematics teachers as well.²¹ CSU, which is a main provider of teacher education in California, is ensuring that its teacher preparation programs incorporate the college readiness standards.

FURTHER INFORMATION

eapmail@calstate.edu
www.calstate.edu/eap
www.csumathsuccess.org
www.csuenglishsuccess.org

¹⁶ California State University. “Early Assessment Program: EAP Test Results.” Accessed April 6, 2006, <http://www.calstate.edu/eap/testing.shtml>; Smith, Virginia B. “Bridging the Gap Between High School and College: An Interview with David Spence.” *Change*, May/June 2006, Page 46.

¹⁷ California State University. “More California 11th-Graders Volunteer to Get “Early Signal” of Their Readiness for College.” Early Assessment Program/Latest News. September 20, 2005. Accessed April 6, 2006, <http://www.calstate.edu/PA/news/2005/EAP05.shtml>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ California State University. *Pilot Study Evaluation of the Early Assessment Program’s Professional Development in English, 2004-05*. Teacher Education and Public School Programs. Academic Affairs, Office of the Chancellor, October 2005, p. vi. Accessed April 6, 2006, http://www.calstate.edu/TeacherEd/EAP_ReportFinalA.pdf.

²⁰ California State University. “More California 11th-Graders Volunteer to Get “Early Signal” of Their Readiness for College.” Early Assessment Program/Latest News. September 20, 2005. Accessed April 6, 2006, <http://www.calstate.edu/PA/news/2005/EAP05.shtml>.

²¹ California State University. “The Early Assessment Program: Helping High School Students Meet College Expectations in Mathematics and English. A Joint Program of California State University and California Public Schools.” Accessed April 6, 2006, http://www.calstate.edu/eap/documents/eap_program_description.pdf.