Overview of Findings from AB 705 Statewide Interviews

Project Overview

The Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges (RP Group) Multiple Measures Assessment Project (MMAP) research team, in partnership with the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, interviewed colleges throughout the state that were identified as scheduling either an average of 80% or more, or 65% or fewer English and math courses at transfer level in fall 2019.

The purpose of these interviews was to better understand the factors that influence varying levels of and approaches to implementation of AB 705. Findings from the interviews are intended to inform the Chancellor's Office and colleges across the state of the challenges and needs that have resulted from the implementation of AB 705, as well as identify promising results and practices to support colleges in their efforts to continuously improve student outcomes and lessen equity gaps.

The RP Group's Multiple Measures Assessment Project (MMAP) research team conducted interviews via Zoom with 83 individuals from 14 colleges who played a key role in AB 705 implementation. The stakeholders interviewed included faculty from English, math, counseling, and ESL; administrators from instruction and student services; representatives from institutional research, assessment/ placement, and student equity.

This overview begins with a summary of the key findings organized by the following research areas: decisions around placement rules, positive outcomes, challenges with implementation, students' capacity to succeed, student support, and equity gaps. Quotes from the statewide interviews are included after each section to provide additional detail and context to the findings. The final section includes recommendations on how colleges can advance their AB 705 implementation efforts, and a conclusion that describes the significance of the

insights gained within the context of assessment and placement in California Community Colleges. For a detailed examination of the findings, please see the comprehensive report.

How Colleges Are Determining Placement Rules

How colleges determined the placement rules they are currently using:

- Task force or committee created to lead AB 705 implementation
- Discipline faculty had deciding vote
- Administration supported the faculty

Factors that influenced colleges' decisions on placement rules:

- Statewide data
  - Default placement rates
  - Multiple Measures Assessment Project (MMAP) findings
- Local throughput data
- Prior initiatives focused on shortening sequences and increasing support

> *Our department eliminated two-levels-below transfer with CAP before AB 705. The curriculum for two-levels below was used to create the corequisite support course for one-level below. The English department used the same method to remove one-level-below for AB 705.*
>
> *Going with the default placement rules was an easy decision. The department felt confident going through the process again. We repackaged the existing noncredit support course for English 1A using the curriculum from one-level-below. All tutors and faculty were re-trained to teach transfer-level English composition.*
>
> *—English Department Chair*

Decisions Around Use of Default Rules

- Found the data presented with the default placement rules sufficiently convincing
- Acceleration and ESL integration led to structural changes that supported AB 705 implementation
- Default placement rules would be easier to implement or a safer bet

> *The plan is to collect one to two years' worth of data using the default rules. The college wants to compare the new placement rates and throughput rates to the rates from the old placement process to see if the statewide trends can be replicated at the college level.*
>
> *—Placement Coordinator*

> *Math faculty agreed that it would be difficult to increase students' likelihood of completing transfer-level math within one year if students were required to start with algebra.*
>
> *—Math Department Chair*

> *Altering the default rules meant tracking outcomes and reporting more data. The math departments from the four colleges in the district were not confident that the district and the colleges would do what they needed to do to track that data.*
>
> *—Dean of Liberal Arts*

Decisions Around Use of Local Rules

- Desire to keep pre-transfer courses for underprepared students
- Unique student population with many non-traditional students

> *We are not offering enough pre-transfer English prep classes to serve the community. Neighboring colleges with a similar demographic are offering a greater proportion of pre-transfer courses. We're not trying to hold students down; we just want students who need a prep course to have access to it.*
>
> *—English Department Chair*

> *Our unique student population and the number of non-traditional students we serve influenced our decision to keep one-level below and use our own [local] placement rules.*
>
> *—Counselor*

> *Our college felt it was important to utilize the two-year probation period to pilot our local rules.*
>
> *—Math Department Chair*

Most Positive Outcomes of AB 705 Thus Far

Increases in Student-Centeredness

- Simplified placement process
- Guided and self-placement - ownership of starting level
- Access to transfer-level saves time and money

Development of New Curriculum

- Shorter sequences
- Embedded support
- Corequisite support courses

Increased Collaboration

- Within disciplines
- Across disciplines

Development of New Strategies

- Pedagogy
- Support models

Improved Academic Outcomes

- Access
- Success
- Throughput

> *Prior to AB 705, most students of color at the college did not have access to transfer-level. Now these students have access to transfer-level, even if that comes with other challenges due to the required support. This increase in students completing transfer-level in one year at the college will influence the statewide numbers. Our college is one of the biggest contributors of Hispanic student success in the state.*
>
> *—Research Analyst*

> *Our college saw an increase of 750+ students complete transfer-level math this fall [fall 2019] compared to the prior academic year. Over half of the students who completed transfer-level were Hispanic, compared to only 30% the prior year.*
>
> *—Counselor*

> *More students can transfer, instead of being career community college students. This helps us get back to being two-year colleges instead of six-year colleges.*
>
> *—Counselor*

Greatest AB 705 Implementation Challenges

Ensuring Sufficient Buy-in

- Faculty, administration, students, feeder schools, community

Operational Issues

- Student registration system
- Support models
- Enrollment challenges

Providing Student Support

- Ensuring students who need support have access to it and utilize it

Availability of Data

- Timely access to data to support data driven decisions

Communication

- Dissemination of accurate and consistent messaging
- Sharing best practices

> *Most faculty think we will go back to the old way when this initiative fizzles out in the next few years. There are questions about whether this effort is going to make an impact. Some of these instructors want to go back to the traditional sequence, and others do not understand [that] math has been the gatekeeper for so long that something needs to change.*
>
> *—Math Department Chair*

> *We are worried we don't have enough safety nets for students who need more time and support.*
>
> *—Dean of Liberal Arts*

> *Both math and English faculty report that students who need support are not actively seeking the support they need.*
>
> *—Assessment Coordinator*

> *Sometimes it feels a little isolated that we are all trying to solve [creating an effective support model] separately. Statewide, we have a lot of great colleagues doing amazing things. And we don't always know about them.*
>
> *—Assessment Coordinator*

Overall Belief in Students' Capacity to Succeed at Transfer Level

A New Conversation

- The message students now receive is that they are college-ready
- The belief is that students can succeed in transfer-level courses in their first year if they have the necessary support

Concurrent Support and Wraparound Services

- Students are reassured they will receive the support they need from the college

Equity Gaps Persist

- Concern that eliminating remedial courses prevents the college from being able to accommodate different skill levels

Non-Academic Barriers

- Colleges are examining various influences and barriers that contribute to an unsuccessful student outcome

> *The college is now treating all students as having the capacity to complete transfer-level courses.*
>
> *—Assessment Coordinator*

> *Success rates maintained in both math and English, especially for English. Faculty see that there was no harm done, even if students require extra support.*
>
> *—Dean of Liberal Arts*

> *Giving students more autonomy can often be empowering for students. The ESL department has seen that with guided self-placement efforts for ESL. Students feel empowered by having more choice and control over the classes they take.*
>
> *—ESL Department Chair*

> *Math and English faculty conducted a curriculum gap analysis comparing high school classes to transfer-level. Faculty were confident students could start in transfer-level and be successful.*
>
> *—Research Analyst*

> *AB 705 provided an opportunity for the college to create new placement policies, procedures, pathways, and support services with an equity lens. Members of the Student Equity Committee also served on the AB 705 Committee.*
>
> *— Student Equity Director*

How to Best Support Students in Transfer-Level Courses

Corequisite Support Courses

- For both remedial and transfer-level courses
- Supportive and collaborative environment
- "Built-in tutoring session"

Scheduling and Course Design

- Linked registration
- Scheduled immediately before or after the main lecture section
- Extension of the lecture and classroom activities

Comprehensive Support Services

- Summer bridge programs

- Early alert systems
- Math and Writing Centers
- Embedded coaches and tutors

> *We need to create a positive environment for students. We need them to believe they can do it. Not being good at something is not permanent, it's just temporary. They will get better. We need to promote a growth mindset. For the students and the faculty. We need to put an emphasis on this and change the culture.*
>
> *—Director of Institutional Effectiveness, Research, and Planning*

> *We know what's in our support courses, what's being offered and what type of support they're getting, so when we meet with students, we are able to communicate that to them. They know exactly what is going to be taught and what type of support is going to be given to them to be successful.*
>
> *– Counselor*

Addressing Equity Gaps

Increased Access

- Improved access to transfer-level math and English among students who otherwise would have been placed in a developmental course

Improved Student Outcomes

- Increased completion and success rates among disproportionately impacted groups

Equity Gaps Persist

- Equity gaps persist despite preliminary improvements seen at many institutions

Support and Resources

- Colleges are working to identify equity gaps and increase support and intervention for underperforming students

Recommendations

Based on the findings from these interviews, the RP Group offers the following recommendations to colleges that are working to improve their AB 705 implementation in ways that result in greater student success and reduced equity gaps:

1. Ensure that equity is a key consideration in every decision.
2. Address faculty and staff concerns.
3. Make professional development available to all faculty, including part-time faculty.
4. Streamline processes to make them as simple, accessible, and student-centered as possible.
5. Collect and analyze feedback related to AB 705 to understand how it can be improved.
6. Facilitate communication and collaboration among faculty, both within and across disciplines.
7. Devote resources to making meaningful data available campus-wide in a timely manner.
8. Support a shift in culture that highlights students' college-readiness.
9. Commit at all levels to equitable placement and closing equity gaps.

Conclusion

The findings from this study provide insight into the impact of AB 705 on colleges at different levels of implementation across the state, beyond what can be observed in the quantitative outcomes. These statewide interviews bring to light important ideas and considerations on how to advance implementation moving forward and provide an opportunity for colleges to express some of the ways in which the state can support their implementation efforts.