



August 7, 2017

President's Waypoint: CSU Eliminates Placement Exams and Remedial Classes!

Last Wednesday, in an unprecedented move, Chancellor Timothy White directed the 23-campus [California State University system to do away with remedial education](#). It may seem counter intuitive, but his goal is to increase student success.

It is no secret that tens of thousands of students begin their college journey by placing into lower than college-level in English and/or mathematics. In the California State University (CSU) system, 25,000 freshman students (39%) must take remedial classes before taking general education classes. These classes cost students considerable time, money, energy, and motivation, but do not count towards graduation requirements.

For more than half a century, the idea of college remedial courses was to get students up to speed so they would be more successful when they got into higher-level college coursework. The frustrating part for educators is that despite spending roughly \$7 billion nationally every year on remedial coursework, U.S. college success rates have not changed all that much.

Accordingly, state legislatures, like Florida and others, have moved to do away with funding college remedial coursework. This is forcing colleges and universities to rethink what has been the largest intervention in history to improve outcomes for underprepared college students. Here in California, the CSU system is getting out in front of this movement.

Compounding the poor success of remedial efforts is research indicating that many times the placement test given to college newcomers has been flawed. For example, one study found that roughly one in four math placements and one in three English placements were severely misplaced too low. Again, this costs students time, money, energy, and motivation. The CSU system plan is to do away with math and English placement tests.

Of the four costs to students, time may be the most critical factor in student success. The simple fact is that the longer it takes to get through college, the higher the likelihood of some extraordinary life event getting in the way of finishing. Certainly, more time also relates to increased money, energy, and motivation.

On balance, considering all of the above, the Chancellor's logic is that [remediation has become a major roadblock](#) to college success. Getting students straight into college-level work on day one, having them learn math and English as they as they need it and using it in college or contextually (e.g., I-BEST), will save students time and money, increasing completion success.

The mantra for the CSUs is now ["Finish in Four!"](#) Campuses in the California State University system are working to more than triple current four-year graduation rates over the next decade. This is certainly a noble goal and effort!

Time will tell whether the elimination of remedial courses was a good move. It will be interesting to see if the UC's will follow suit. I know the state's community colleges, including us here at SBCC, are all watching this very closely.

Please send me your thoughts (pro or con) on this important topic! I promise not to share, but I'd really like to know how you feel.

Together forward,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Anthony".