



Audio

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

Linking High School and College Assessments

Beverly Young, Ph.D. • March 2010

Topic: Helping Students Navigate the Path to College
Practice: Assess and Intervene

Highlights

- Students often believe they are ready for college-level work because they have successfully completed a college-prep curriculum in high school, but many find themselves placed into remedial courses in college.
- Dr. Beverly Young, Vice Chancellor for the California State University (CSU) System, describes how CSU teamed up with the K-12 system to integrate college-readiness assessment items into the eleventh-grade standardized test, giving students early signal information about college readiness.
- Students that are deemed college-ready can go directly into college-level courses at CSU, while others are given options for interventions to accelerate their readiness.
- CSU also provides professional development for teachers to help align high school and college expectations.

About the Interviewee

Dr. Beverly L. Young is assistant vice chancellor for teacher education and public school programs for the California State University (CSU) System. She works with

the campus presidents, vice presidents, and deans of education to facilitate changes in teacher preparation within the 23-campus system. Prior to her work at the Chancellor's Office of CSU, Dr. Young was a faculty member in teacher education at California State University, Fullerton.

Full Transcript

Hello, this is Beverly Young. I am the assistant vice chancellor for academic affairs at the California State University (CSU) System.

Assessing for college readiness is of critical importance. The CSU recognized it several years ago as we continued to have increasing numbers of our incoming freshmen not demonstrating proficiency on our placement test in English and in mathematics. One of the solutions that that we have developed over the past several years is to try to give our incoming freshmen a signal about their level of college readiness before they come to us as freshmen, in fact, as early as their junior year of high school.

We think that a lot of students then, and their families, and their teachers believe that they are on track to be successful in college. These are students who are taking all the right college-prep courses and they are getting good grades, Bs or better, and they think they are doing just fine. And then they come to the CSU or anywhere in higher education and they find themselves in a remedial track. And we think that it's really important if we can give them an early signal, sort of an early information intervention that they are not yet on track, that they still have a year of high school, their senior year, that they can do something about their level of proficiency so that they can enter directly into college-level work when they come to us as freshmen.

The EAP, the Early Assessment Program, addresses the problem of incoming freshmen. We have built a system of assessment. The last thing anyone wanted in California was an additional test for high school kids. And so we were able to build an assessment system that is based upon the existing standardized achievement test that all California high school juniors take in the spring of their eleventh grade. We added 15 items in English plus a writing sample and 15 items in mathematics, and built those onto the existing assessment structure. Based on that, our faculty are able to determine equivalency level for our placement exams so that students, before they begin their senior year of high school, get information that either they are ready for college-level work, in which case they are waived from having to take our placement exam, or they are not ready. And then we give them some options and direction and advisement about how they can use their senior year to get ready, so that when they enter the CSU, they go directly into college-level work.

The conditional-ready category says that a student at that point in the spring of their eleventh grade is demonstrating good math proficiency skills, but that if they want to maintain a waiver from the math placement exam, they need to do something in their senior year to maintain their math skills, that if they do nothing at all and take no math courses, math skills tend to go stale without any use. And so we give the

students a list of things that they can do during their senior year to keep their math skills up to par. And if they do that, then they keep their exemption and they don't have to take our entry-level math exam upon admission.

One of our most successful interventions has been the development of what we call the ERWC, the Expository Reading and Writing Course. This is a full-year twelfth-grade English course that was designed by our faculty and high school faculty, and it was specifically designed to address the skills of expository reading and writing, the kind of reading and writing that students need to be able to do proficiently to learn from academic text. This full twelfth-grade course has been really successful.

The other piece of all of this work in that twelfth-grade intervention is professional development for teachers. The CSU, at our own expense, has offered professional development to thousands of high school English and math teachers to better prepare them to deal with issues of college readiness with their students. What we found the big disconnect has been, it's not that our standards for college readiness are different than the adopted academic content standards for K-12, it's that high school teachers did not previously have a clear understanding of what levels of proficiency looked like for entering freshmen and which of the K-12 standards were really emphasized at the college level. So what we found were that some standards that existed in the K-12 curriculum might have been undertaught compared to the emphasis that college faculty put on certain skills and knowledge.

The teachers and their knowledge about college readiness are really critical to making changes. And so, if you want change to happen in your high schools and even before high school, you have to make sure that teachers really understand what your expectations are for college and how to get students to those levels of proficiency.