

NETWORK NEWS



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FOCUS ON STUDENT TRANSITIONS

For more than 10 years, SHEEO has been examining state-level linkages between the K-12 sector, postsecondary education, and the workplace. This issue of *Network News* focuses on issues related to student transitions to college.

STATEWIDE COLLEGE ADMISSIONS, STUDENT PREPARATION, AND REMEDIATION POLICIES AND PROGRAMS BY ALENE BYCER RUSSELL

In October 1996, in collaboration with ACT, SHEEO embarked on the Study of State Strategies that Support the Successful Transition of Students from Secondary to Postsecondary Education. This study involved data collection from all 50 states as well as in-depth site visits in six states. This article, based on the first major report to emerge from the SHEEO study, provides a status report on state-level policies and programs.

Historically, colleges and universities have set their own admission requirements with relatively little involvement by states. This began to change in the early 1980s, however, largely as a result of several reports citing the under-preparation of high school students for college. Hoping to strengthen student preparation for college and to reduce the need for postsecondary remediation, state higher education agencies and state legislatures responded by adopting statewide admissions requirements. At the same time,

however, another set of concerns has arisen—namely that imposing higher college admissions standards might limit access to postsecondary education for many.

State higher education agencies have addressed these parallel concerns by taking a broad look at postsecondary systems and needs. By connecting admissions requirements to institutional role and mission, state agencies can maximize access while supporting greater selectivity at some institutions. Also, by coordinating work with state departments of education and local school districts, they can provide early outreach and academic supports to high school students.

This study was developed in part to provide current and comprehensive information on the status of statewide admissions policies, student preparation programs, and remediation policies in the 50 states. It is designed to serve as a foundation for future state and national projects that support student achievement.

College admissions. Higher education agencies in 28 states have adopted statewide admissions standards for first-time freshmen at public four-year institutions; agencies in six additional states are involved in admissions to varying degrees though there are no statewide requirements. (For example, one of these six state agencies sets admissions goals, but not specific requirements, at the state level.) In sum, in 34 states, institutions operate in a context in which external guidelines or requirements are in place

Table 1
Types of Statewide Admissions Requirements

	High School Coursework Units	Minimum ACT/SAT Test Scores	Minimum GPA	Minimum Class Rank	Eligibility Index, Sliding Scale, or Other Options Based on ACT/SAT, GPA, and/or Class Rank
Arizona	✓				✓
University of California/ California State University	✓		✓		✓
Colorado					✓
Florida	✓		✓		✓
Georgia	✓		✓		✓
Idaho	✓				✓
Illinois	✓				
Iowa	✓			✓	
Kansas	✓				✓
Kentucky	✓				
Maryland	✓		✓		
Massachusetts	✓		✓		✓
Minnesota State Colleges and Universities	✓	✓		✓	
Mississippi	✓				✓
Missouri	✓				✓
Montana					✓
University of Nebraska	✓				✓
Nevada	✓		✓		
City University of New York	✓				✓
North Carolina	✓				
North Dakota	✓				
Ohio (recommended)	✓				
Oklahoma	✓				✓
Oregon	✓		✓		
Rhode Island	✓				✓
South Carolina	✓				✓
South Dakota	✓				✓
Tennessee	✓				
Texas				✓	
Utah	✓				✓
Virginia (recommended)	✓				
Washington	✓				✓
West Virginia	✓	✓	✓		
Wisconsin	✓				

to determine how freshmen are selected for admission.

The most common statewide approach to admissions is establishing minimum high school coursework requirements; this strategy is used in 31 of the 34 states. Typically, these include four units of English, three units of math, and two to three units of science and social science; some include foreign language or elective requirements. The full survey report contains detailed information on each state's admissions requirements.

The other common approach is using "performance criteria" such as ACT or SAT test scores, high school grade point average, and high school class rank. Of the 26 states that use these criteria in some way, the majority (19 states) provide options for students in the form of admissions indices, sliding scales, or choices among criteria. For example, a student with a low GPA can compensate with a higher test score, and vice versa. The use of these criteria, summarized briefly in Table 1, can be quite complex and varied among states.

Even with statewide policies, admissions requirements at different colleges within a state may vary. Many states have policies that establish different selectivity levels (e.g., different cutoff points on a scale) for institutions, systems, or sectors. In other cases, institutions themselves retain the authority to set more restrictive requirements within the framework established by state guidelines.

Other statewide policies have been developed to help balance the need for higher standards with the need to maintain broad access to postsecondary education. These include policies that:

- Establish relatively open access to community colleges.

- Allow a certain percentage of students to be admitted "conditionally"—without meeting stated requirements; this varies from 3 to 25 percent across states.
- Accept applied or tech prep courses.
- Accept learning experiences that occur outside the regular classroom, such as community service, apprenticeships, and internships.
- Admit "adult" students without their meeting regular admissions criteria.

Competency-based admissions approaches have emerged in the 1990s, largely motivated by K-12 school reform efforts and increasing numbers of home-schooled students. In Washington and Oregon, major school reform legislation has motivated these efforts, and assessment of competencies will replace traditional measures for college admissions. Nine other states are actively involved in some kind of competency-based admissions activities, such as task forces and pilot projects. In most cases, these approaches will not replace traditional means to admissions but will provide alternatives for students with non-traditional high school experiences.

In the near future, we can expect to see continued state involvement in setting admissions requirements, though not all states will be involved. Several states are setting more stringent admissions requirements, and many are increasing admissions options for students. Finally, there may be significant impacts on statewide admissions policies as affirmative action programs are being limited or dismantled across the country.

Student preparation programs. Concerns about underpreparation of students for college are being addressed in other ways as well. Many states are developing collaborative strategies between the K-12 and postsecondary sectors to improve student preparation

for college. These strategies are designed to increase awareness of interested parties, to raise the level of student motivation, to help secondary personnel better inform and guide students, and to smooth the transition process to college. Unlike admission policies, however, this area is less policy-driven at the state level, and state agencies often provide support and incentives for programs that are developed at the local level.

Common approaches include:

- Early outreach programs designed to inform and motivate younger students and to provide support for them as they plan and prepare for college; most are aimed at under-represented groups and designed to increase access to college.
- Providing information for middle and high school students and parents; these letters, brochures, and web sites address college admissions requirements, how to prepare for college, applying for financial aid, and so on.
- Bridge programs designed to smooth the transition from high school to college by providing high school students with weekend or summer experiences on college campuses.
- Allowing high school students to take college courses for credit, through dual, joint, or concurrent enrollment; Advanced Placement; and International Baccalaureate programs.
- Feedback to high schools on how their graduates perform in college.
- Bringing high school and college faculty together to work on curriculum and standards.

Remediation policies. There has been growing involvement by SHEEO agencies and even state legislatures in

addressing remediation issues at the state level. Much of this interest, particularly on the part of legislators, stems from concerns about cost; in this sense, many view remedial coursework as paying twice for learning that should have occurred at the secondary level. The other side of the coin, however, is that remediation is also seen as offering a second chance for many students, particularly economically disadvantaged and first-generation college students who may not have had opportunities to participate in high-quality pre-collegiate coursework. Totally cutting off remediation would be viewed as reducing access for these underrepresented groups.

In an effort to make knowledgeable decisions about remediation policies, some states have begun to conduct major studies of remedial activities in their public institutions to determine the extent of the problem and what is currently being done about it. (See Selected Bibliography on page 7.) Some states have also developed statewide remediation policies, typically to regulate or limit where and how postsecondary remediation may be offered. These include:

- Not allowing remedial credits to count toward graduation.
- Limiting which sectors or institutions can offer remediation; this is typically being moved to the two-year sector, or at least being moved away from the most selective institutions.
- Restricting the amount or source of funding; funding may be prohibited at certain institutions or beyond a certain number of classes per student, or remediation may be offered on a "self support" basis.
- Defining when and how students participate in remedial coursework; this is typically tied to scores on mandated placement tests or to early years in college.

The *Point of View* article on page 6 questions the wisdom of some of these policies and suggests instead that states face this challenge with more creative solutions.

Other findings. Over 30 states collect some data to evaluate the effectiveness of statewide admissions policies, student preparation programs, and/or remediation policies. However, many of these are routine data collection efforts that do not involve in-depth research or evaluation. About 15 states use incentive funding or competitive grant approaches to improve student preparation. Finally, state personnel generally believe that state policies and programs are having a positive impact on student preparation for college.

The SHEEO study concludes that states need to greatly expand their research efforts to evaluate and improve activities that support student achievement. States must examine their effectiveness in such areas as access, remediation, and graduation, and it would serve them well to engage in more substantial research designed to provide answers about what works, what is cost-efficient, and what meets broader statewide goals.

The full report, published in January 1998, contains detailed appendices listing state-by-state activity in each of these areas. Copies are available for \$15 by contacting the SHEEO office at 303-299-3687. For further information on the report, contact Alene Russell at 303-299-3671, and for information on the larger SHEEO project on student transitions, contact Esther Rodriguez at 303-299-3657.

STUDENT TRANSITIONS ISSUES FOR FURTHER STUDY

The SHEEO study concludes that states need to greatly expand their research efforts to evaluate and improve activities that support student achievement. Questions for further study include:

- Are more stringent admission requirements making a difference in student performance in college? Under what circumstances and why? If not, why not?
- What will be the impact of dismantling affirmative action programs on statewide admissions policies?
- Are student preparation programs working? When and why? If not, why not? What strategies most effectively communicate to students how to prepare for college success?
- What would make high school feedback data more useful for both high school and college personnel?
- What messages do state and institutional remediation policies send to students about what it means to be prepared for college? Do they undermine admissions standards?
- What funding strategies for remediation would be most effective in increasing completion rates?

ACT STUDIES THE TRANSITION FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO COLLEGE

The information in this article is based on the brochure "How ACT Helps Educators in the Transition from High School to College" prepared by ACT for the SHEEO/ACT Invitational Symposium, February 1998.

A key component of any successful policy is quality information relevant to the policy goals. Since its founding in 1959, ACT has amassed a wealth of information on student academic achievement. With this information, ACT has been working with colleges and universities to monitor the success of their admissions and course placement policies and with high schools to monitor the success of their college-preparatory programs. Toward this end, every year ACT sends to more than 14,000 high school principals letters that summarize trends in their students' college-preparatory work, their ACT scores, and their satisfaction with various aspects of their schools.

In more recent years, ACT has also been working with state coordinating and governing boards to do research that informs important statewide policy issues. In this regard, ACT has designed and produced high school feedback reports for Arkansas, Kentucky, Missouri, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Utah (beginning in 1998), and Wisconsin. These reports provide information about the progress of graduates of individual high schools. They are customized to reflect particular needs and priorities, and they are designed to promote effective

communication between secondary and postsecondary educators.

The feedback reports produced for the Arkansas Department of Higher Education, for example, monitor the need for remedial instruction of high school graduates when they enroll in college. The table below shows the state's significant progress in encouraging students to take college-preparatory core courses and in subsequently reducing the need for remedial instruction in college. The creation in 1991 of the Arkansas Challenge Scholarship program, which is based in part on grades in high school college-preparatory courses, is believed to be one of the principal reasons for this turnaround.

The Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education also have effectively used ACT data to inform policy. Working closely with ACT researchers, Oklahoma State Regents staff studied the relationship between ACT scores and the probability of success in particular first-year college courses. They were then able to select cutoff scores for remedial instruction at which students in all the institutions had a reasonable chance of success in their courses. Oklahoma implemented its placement policy in 1993 and has continued to work with ACT in monitoring the effects.

The Oklahoma State Regents staff also have used ACT data to monitor retention in college. By linking Oklahoma's persistence data with ACT's history files, they have found that as students' ACT scores increase, so does their persistence rate, and also that, since 1990, persistence/ completion rates have steadily increased at every ACT score level.

Other research is conducted through ACT's "off-the-shelf" research services. The Course Placement Service provides information that institutions can use to document the validity of ACT scores or other information for course placement, and to determine optimum cutoffs. For example, among the 38 institutions that studied placement in calculus, the typical optimal ACT Mathematics cutoff score was 27; the accuracy rate (that is, the percentage of students who were correctly placed) was 80 percent. ACT's Underprepared Student Follow-up Report assists institutions in studying the effectiveness of their remedial courses. This service looks at how students taking particular remedial courses eventually perform in standard college-level courses.

ACT data are increasingly being used by postsecondary institutions and coordinating and governing boards to assess the effectiveness of their admissions and course placement policies. In collaboration with SHEEO, ACT has begun to explore new ways to use this rich store of data to address national issues. For example, further analysis of ACT data in conjunction with data collected from the 50-state SHEEO survey in 1997 has begun. By plotting trends over time in ACT scores, high school coursework, and high school grades, possible associations between changes in admissions policy and changes in student achievement are being explored.

For more information, contact Don Carstensen, Vice President, ACT Educational Services Division, 319-337-1056 or carstensen@act.org.

	Arkansas Fall Entering Freshman Class						
	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
% taking core coursework	41%	44%	51%	59%	65%	70%	72%
% needing remedial instruction	60%	57%	57%	54%	54%	50%	49%

POINT OF VIEW

We invite Point of View articles on topics of interest to the postsecondary community. This article, by James R. Mingle, executive director of SHEEO, is reprinted from the March/April 1998 issue of AGB Trusteeship.

REMEDIAL COURSE CORRECTION

Remedial course work in college is here to stay. So let's turn our attention to making sure these programs are more effective.

The attitude of public policymakers toward remedial education can be summed up in the simple mandate, "Make it go away." Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's demand for the end of remedial courses at the City University of New York is only the latest of many calls to reduce or eliminate these courses, especially in four-year colleges and universities.

But remediation in higher education is not going away unless we significantly reduce access. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reports that about 30 percent of first-year students were enrolled in remedial courses in 1995—a number virtually unchanged since 1989 (*Remedial Education at Higher Education Institutions in Fall 1995*, NCES, 1996). Yet evidence in this report and in other studies shows remedial work is on the rise, especially in mathematics. Remediation is a nearly universal activity of higher education, with 80 percent of all institutions that enroll freshmen offering remedial courses.

A number of state and national studies have pinpointed the nature of the problem. The Southern Regional Education Board concluded that students' failure to take a core of college preparatory courses in high school was one of the most powerful predictors of

the need for future college remedial work.

In Georgia, for example, four of five high school graduates who did not take core courses had to take remedial college work. In contrast, Maryland reports that less than 10 percent of graduates of college preparatory courses who entered public four-year universities in that state needed remedial work.

In addition to recent high school graduates, returning adults also are seeking remedial work—especially in urban areas. Tennessee found that half of the remedial students in four-year institutions and two-thirds in community colleges were adults returning to school after an absence of a year or more. Ohio discovered it was spending the majority of funds for remedial support on this adult population. These data suggest that no matter how great our hope for school improvement as a solution to the remedial problem, higher education is likely to continue to play a key role for the foreseeable future.

A recent survey by my organization found a common approach among state boards: establish minimum standards for core academic courses in high school, encourage collaborative efforts and standard setting with the K-12 sector, and move remediation—where possible—to two-year colleges. But when such a policy was proposed in the California State University System, it drew fire from community college leaders, who worried their colleges would be overwhelmed when they became the state's exclusive franchise for remediation. In some cases, state boards are reducing remedial support or adding course fees in reaction to legislative pressure "not to pay twice" for high school curricula. Occasionally, legislators suggest assessing schools for the price of

college remediation. Initiatives and standards that encourage high school students to take tougher courses are laudable but insufficient. And the idea that we should reduce public support for remediation in college or bill the cost to the schools is wrong-headed and unworkable. In fact, we should be turning our attention to making remedial programs in colleges and universities more effective.

With more than one-third of all college freshmen—up to 75 percent or more in some urban community colleges—in need of remediation, we need state policies that support remediation in two-year colleges and nonselective four-year institutions. We need more and better trained faculty in these programs and more subject-matter specialists who are trained to work with remedial students, especially adults.

Significant advancements have been made in the development of learning software in both English and mathematics. But too few faculty are using these new resources, in some cases because of the absence of institutional and state support. States also should consider creative financing and organizational solutions, including vouchers that students can take to private providers of remedial help. In short, instead of hoping this issue goes away, we need to face this challenge squarely and with renewed commitment.

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SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY ON STUDENT TRANSITIONS FROM SECONDARY TO POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

As a service to our readers, Network News periodically publishes bibliographic references on relevant topics. This bibliography lists research reports that examine admissions factors, student preparation programs, and remedial education. As states increasingly face demands to examine the effectiveness of their policies, these reports may serve as models for other states to replicate.

Relationship of Admissions Factors to College Readiness and Success

Illinois Board of Higher Education, **Student Preparation for College: Executive Summary**, 1996.

Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, **The Kentucky High School Feedback Report**, annual.

Maryland Higher Education Commission, **Relationship between High School and College Performance by Maryland Students: Student Outcome and Achievement Report**, 1997.

Massachusetts Board of Higher Education, **Pilot College-to-School Report for Massachusetts Public High School Graduates**, 1997.

Missouri Coordinating Board for Higher Education, **Missouri Student Achievement Study**, conducted since 1986, and **Enhanced Missouri Student Achievement Study**, begun in 1996.

North Dakota University System, **Review of Policy 404.2: Admission Requirements for Baccalaureate and Graduate Campuses**, 1996.

Oklahoma State System of Higher Education, **Admission Policy Impact Study, 1996**, and **Oklahoma Higher Education Standards: Admission/Retention/Assessment**, 1998.

Southern Regional Education Board, **Better Preparation, Less Remediation: Challenging Courses Make a Difference**, 1997.

University of Wisconsin System, **Preliminary Data: Competency-based Admission Pilot Project**, March 1997, and **University of Wisconsin System Competency-based Admission**, January 1998. These one-page summaries highlight find-

ings from ongoing evaluation of the Competency-based Admission Pilot Project.

Effectiveness of Student Preparation Programs

Florida Postsecondary Education Planning Commission, **State-wide Evaluation of Florida's College Reach-out Program: Annual Report: 1993-94 Cohort, 1996**, and **A Review of Acceleration Mechanisms in Florida Public Education**, 1997.

Maryland Higher Education Commission, **Evaluation of the College Preparation Intervention Program**, 1994.

University of Hawaii at Manoa, **College Opportunities Program: Annual Report**, annual. Annual performance reports are also prepared for **Special Student Services** and **Hawaii Upward Bound**.

Remediation

Illinois Board of Higher Education, **The Scope and Effectiveness of Remedial/Developmental Education in Illinois Public Universities and Community Colleges**, 1997.

Kentucky Council on Higher Education, **Annual Accountability Report Series of Kentucky Higher Education**, annual. This report contains a section on "Remedial Follow-up."

Ohio Legislative Office of Education Oversight, **Remedial and Developmental Programs in Ohio's Public Colleges and Universities**, 1995.

Maryland Higher Education Commission, **A Study of Remedial Education at Maryland Public Campuses**, 1996, and **Study of the Effectiveness of "Privatizing" Remedial Services**, 1997.

Ohio Department of Education, **A Total Approach: Improving College Preparation in Ohio**, 1997.

Oklahoma State System of Higher Education, **Annual Student Assessment Report**, 1997. This report contains a "Student Remediation Survey."

Rhode Island Office of Higher Education, **A Status Report on Remedial Programs in the Rhode Island System of Public Higher Education**, 1997.

Texas Academic Skills Program, **Annual Report on the Texas Academic Skills Program (TASP) and the Effectiveness of Remediation**, annual.

University of Wisconsin System, **Report on Remedial Education in the UW System: Demographics, Remedial Completion, and Retention and Graduation**, 1997.

IPEDS DATA AVAILABLE ON WEB

IPEDS data from 1988-89 onward are currently available through the NCES web site. In addition, NCES now provides preliminary, edited IPEDS data for some current year surveys. NCES cautions that the preliminary data should not be used to produce national estimates until after all institutions have responded to the survey or data have been imputed.

To access the complete list of IPEDS data, sign on to the NCES web site

<<http://nces.ed.gov/>>. Select "Data" and then select "Integrated Postsecondary Data System (IPEDS)" under "Data Products by Survey." From there, select "Download IPEDS databases from 1988 to present" and a list of databases will be presented from which you can make your selection.

The "IPEDS Interactive Search Tool" is another on-line product available, developed to make IPEDS data more accessible and easier to use. This search tool for selecting postsecondary education institutions is based on criteria where values are chosen by the user. Users select institutions by

searching on characteristics for a selected survey. This tool gives users the ability to browse data on screen and to download selected records. Note that for this search tool, only data from 1995 and 1996 IPEDS are available.

Comments or questions about the data or search capabilities are encouraged and should be sent via e-mail to samuel_barbett@ed.gov.

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