

College Student Achievement Project



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Data Collection and Analysis

CSAP data for students entering college in Fall 2011 has now been collected and validation is nearly complete. Because the project was not able to begin until September 2012, we are running rather later than we had hoped in publishing research results. We anticipate being able to complete preliminary analysis of Mathematics and Language (English & French) achievement data for students in both their first and second semester of college programs during the next month and have the first CSAP research report out in May 2013.

CSAP Provincial Forum

CSAP plans to hold its first Provincial Forum on October 25, 2013 to review its research results and to deliberate over a theme to be selected by the CSAP Steering Committee. This event, to take place in Toronto, will bring together stakeholders from both college and school communities to participate in interpreting the research and proposing directions for policy and practice relating to enhancing student success in college.

Assessment of Students' Mathematics Skills

As noted in the last CSAP News, a discussion paper on the assessment of incoming college students' mathematics skills has recently been published and is available for download from the CSAP web site – <http://csap.senecacollege.ca>). The paper describes the results of a survey of existing practices at Ontario colleges and then discusses a series of principles that the CSAP team believe should underpin the development of any common (province-wide) assessment of college-bound students' mathematics skills. These are:

- The purpose of any assessment should be to support students' learning as directly as possible;
- The content of the assessment should focus on mathematics fundamentals (as distinct from the content of Grades 11 and 12 mathematics courses);

*"Assessment is something we do with and for the student, not ... to the student"
(Grant Wiggins)*

- The assessment should be of high quality with regard to validity and reliability and meet the current standards of test development;
- The assessment and the procedures for its implementation should be as cost-effective as possible.

Based on these principles, a model is proposed in the paper that would provide for two parallel testing systems both based on the same assessment framework. One would be a formal system to be used within each college for the assessment of the mathematics skills of post-admission students (as is common at present). The other would be an informal system, based on an exactly parallel item set, to be used by students, whenever and wherever they wish, to determine for themselves if they have the mathematics skills expected by colleges of incoming students. Linked to this informal assessment would be a set of instructional modules designed to help students whose achievement levels showed that they needed such remedial support. Such an informal system would be designed both to communicate clearly the expectations of the college system to secondary school teachers and students and also to increase the achievement levels of students in college programs.

The paper is designed to promote discussion among all stakeholders and particularly those in the college community and we have particularly sought feedback from the colleges and from province-wide college organisations. But we would welcome comments from all who have read the paper. Readers from either college or school communities with thoughts about such an assessment should feel free to share them with us through an online survey we have developed – please use the link on the CSAP web site.

Language Gap Analysis

As an additional project this year, the language portion of CSAP includes a ‘gap analysis’ between the elementary and secondary school English/Français curriculum and colleges’ expectations of the language skills required for success, both overall and in first year language or communications courses. The purpose of this analysis is to further the ongoing conversation about the achievement of college students by comparing the learning outcomes of first-semester college language and communications courses with those of the Ontario language curriculum, Grades 1-12.

To date, the learning outcomes of the Ontario language curriculum (Grades 1-12) have been analysed and arranged on a template under three main categories: reading, writing and oral communications. (The fourth category of outcomes used in the Ontario Curriculum – media studies – does not have a parallel in college language courses and so has not been included in this project.) A review has also been completed of all first and second semester college language (or communications) courses. A similar template has been developed using the topics most commonly taught in these college courses as headings. This information has been given to an external reviewer, whose task is to map the topics taught between Grades 8 and 12, in order to convey the level and complexity of the material against those taught in college courses. The goal is to arrive at conclusions about the alignment of the two sets of learning outcomes.

Separately, as part of the regular CSAP data analysis of student achievement, comparisons will be made between students' achievement in secondary school language courses with their achievement in college language courses and also (where available) with colleges post-admission language skills assessments.

Next time....

The next issue of CSAP News will contain information about our first research report and the exciting new interactive CSAP database we are creating to make it much easier for personnel at both colleges and school boards to access their information and to conduct their own research. As always, if your name is not yet on our email list, please write to csap@senecacollege.ca. In addition, if your professional organisation would appreciate a regular CSAP Update for their executive or board meetings or for publication in its own journal or newsletter, please also let us know. CSAP team members are also available to speak about the project at provincial conferences.

To join the CSAP mailing list and receive regular email updates about the project, send us an email at csap@senecacollege.ca.

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