# College Student Achievement Project

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## Final Report for CSAP 2013

The College Student Achievement Project (CSAP) has published its final report covering the first year mathematics and language achievement of Ontario college students. The Report is available in both English and French on the CSAP web site (http://csap.senecacollege.ca). Highlights of the research are as follows:

- The research covers over 96,000 students at all 24 Ontario colleges who entered college in Fall 2011. Of these, 60% were recent Ontario graduates with the remainder being from out-of-province or 23 and over.

### *Mathematics*

- 68.5% of first semester students obtained "good grades" (A, B, C, or P grades) in mathematics, while the remaining 31.5% – over 12,000 students – obtained D, F or W grades and are considered to be "at risk" (of not completing their chosen programs). These figures are very similar to those of the past four years.
- Females out-perform males and older students out-perform younger students in mathematics.
- Nearly 10,000 students are taking a foundational or preparatory mathematics course (rather than a diploma-level course), a 55.7% increase over last year.
- There is a strong relationship between the marks obtained in secondary school mathematics and achievement in college mathematics: over 77% of those obtaining over 80% in MAP4C (the Grade 12 mathematics course most often taken by college students) went on to obtain good grades in college, compared with 42% of those obtaining 50%-59% in MAP4C.
- Over 3,600 first year college students have not taken a Grade 12 mathematics course; only 55% of these obtain good grades in college mathematics.

### *Language*

- 22 of the colleges are English-language colleges and 2 are French-language.
- 73% of first semester students received good grades in English or French with females outperforming males and older students outperforming younger students.

- In a majority of colleges, first semester English communications involves expository writing and nearly 39,000 students take this type of course. In the remaining colleges, the first semester course involves vocational writing and about 15,500 students follow this type of course. There is only a small difference in achievement between these two, with 74.5% of students obtaining good grades in first semester expository writing courses and 72.3% in vocational writing courses.
- Many students at French language colleges also take English language courses with 92.1% obtaining good grades.
- 60% of students taking college English courses had taken ENG4C in secondary school – of this group 66% obtained good grades in college English. Of those with ENG4U from secondary school, 78% obtained good grades in college English. Similar results were found in the French language colleges – 67.4% of those with FRA4C and 79.2% of those with FRA4U went on to obtain good grades in college French courses.

The CSAP research program this year also tracked student achievement in both mathematics and language into second semester. Analysis of these results is significantly more complex owing to the varieties of courses taken by the students in their second semester. In general, however, over 90% of students obtaining good grades in first semester mathematics and language continued into second semester.

Following the completion of the research program, the CSAP sponsored a provincial forum in October 2013 which was attended by over 120 teachers, administrators and government officials representing both secondary and college education. Their purpose was to help interpret the research data and to propose ways forward with a view to increasing student achievement. The report contains a summary of the discussions at the Forum.

Finally, the report concludes with a summary of what has been learned by the CSAP team from both the research and the forum deliberations. In mathematics, two main themes emerge: the need to "change the conversation" about achievement from the simple obtaining of credits to a greater focus on the greater achievement of learning; and the need for an overall increase in numeracy on the part of Ontarians. In language, it was noted that since this was the first year of data collection, care must be taken in drawing conclusions. However, concern was voiced over the difference in success in college language courses between students who had taken ENG4C/FRA4C and ENG4U/FRA4U in secondary school. In addition, the college system was encouraged to begin a discussion around grading practices, moving to common learning outcomes in first year language courses, and reviewing assessment practices and approaches to remediation.

## CSAP Online Database

All the data collected in this research and analysed in the CSAP final report is contained in a new online database, which is now open to authorised users. Authorisation may be obtain from a college vice-president, academic (in the case of college users) or from a superintendent (for school board users). Further information is provided on the CSAP

website (http://csap.senecacollege.ca – click on research database). Users can access aggregate provincial data as well as that relating to their own college or school board and can craft research questions according to their particular areas of interest. Full instructions are provided on line.

## CSAP Provincial Forum 2014

The CSAP is once again sponsoring a provincial forum to review the report from 2013 and the 2014 data (based on students entering college in Fall 2012) which is currently being analysed and to deliberate over ways to improve achievement in mathematics and language. While the one-day October 24th forum is invitational because space is strictly limited, we sometimes have a few spaces available at the last minute and readers who wish to attend should contact the CSAP secretariat at csap@senecacollege.ca. Preference will be given to participants representing provincial organisations. A later issue of CSAP News will report on the deliberations of this forum.

## CSAP Mathematics Assessment Development Project

This project was described in a previous issue of CSAP News and has now moved to its beta-testing phase. Two types of test (a basic 45-minute numeracy test and a 90 minute diagnostic test) are available online in both English and French for use in three modes: for use by colleges for the assessment of post-admission students; for use by college faculty or secondary school teachers in conducting prior learning assessment for their classes; and for use by individual students considering applying to college to self-assess their mathematics skills. With this latter group in mind, the CSAP is also completing the development of a series of online remedial modules, matched to the topics in the assessment and these will be ready for trial use later this Fall. Any reader interested in participating in this beta-testing at their school or college should contact CSAP (csap@senecacollege.ca). Following evaluation of the beta-test, the assessment system will be generally available in 2015.

## CSAP Mathematics Learning Outcomes Development Project

The CSAP team has also been working with the colleges during the 2013-14 year to develop sets of common learning outcomes for first-year college business, pre-business, and pre-technology mathematics courses. These sets of learning outcomes are framed by the secondary school mathematical processes in order to (a) support the colleges' continuing efforts to create high-quality student experiences, (b) foster smoother transitions from secondary school to college, and (c) support greater understanding of college mathematics curriculum. The final report of this project, *Bridging the Mathematics Gap through Learning Outcomes*, will soon be available on the CSAP web site (http://csap.senecacollege.ca). The report contains the conceptual principles and methodology underpinning the project and the actual learning outcomes for each of the three program areas noted above. It is intended that this work will provide the basis for college based development of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment, and support collaborations with secondary school partners and others.

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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