

Rules of the Game and the Center for Student Success (RP)

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Rules of the Game was released this January by authors Dr. Nancy Shulock and Colleen Moore of the Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Policy of CSU-Sacramento (IHELP). The report provoked a strong reaction from the System Office of the California community colleges and from defenders of the CCC around the state. This research project was informed by a group of researchers recruited from the by the Center for Student

Success (CSS) of the RP Group. How could a report with advisers that are friendly to the multiple missions of the community colleges come across as so, well, unbalanced?

Dr. Shulock contracted with CSS for four research analysts to provide technical review and to facilitate the acquisition of data. I coordinated this group of researchers for the Center for Student Success. We made many suggestions and asked many questions as we came to grips with the IHELP research design. We felt that we were taken seriously and, by and large, we were

satisfied with the technical and professional responses from Colleen and Nancy. We advocated strongly for a completion metric that would have been quite similar to the one created by AB 1417 (ARCC), the new accountability and performance reporting system established by the System Office last year. We felt we were discharging our obligation to clarify the technical aspects of working with MIS data as well as to represent the spirit of the mission of the CCC. But the authors of the report did not agree with our suggestion to include a completion metric. Our advisory relationship had run its course by October 2006. We did not see the final draft of the document until it was released to the public in January 2007. ■

Three Reports—Three Different Approaches to Assessing the California Community Colleges

The California community colleges have been in the news recently with a lot of attention being paid to the colleges' performance, especially about "completion rates" of students.

The first to reach the public eye was from the PPIC, the Public Policy Institute of California (California Counts: Community

College Students, November 2006) concluded that the colleges had a completion rate of 25% for transfer students and 12% for students earning a certificate/award. The Institute for Higher Education and Leadership Policy (IHELP) recently published **Rules of the Game** asserting that the colleges had a 24% completion rate. Most recently the System Office published

its first Accountability Report on the Community Colleges (ARCC) which says that the colleges have a 51% achievement rate.

To help our readers understand the differences between the three reports, we are publishing the following table that provides an analysis of how each report defines success rate. ■

Item	PPIC Report	Rules of the Game Report	ARCC Report
Notable Messages	-CCC students have low rates of completion -CCC students have high turnover	-CCC students have low rates of degree completion -High access has unintended consequence of inhibiting student success	-No messaging yet on report
"Success Rate"	-Only 25% of transfer students succeeded to transfer -Only 12% of vocational students earned an award	-Only 25% of students seeking a degree or certificate do so.	-51% of students who showed "behavioral intent to earn degree/certificate/transfer" earned an award, certificate, transferred, became transfer directed or transfer prepared
Rate Denominator Definition	Identifies "degree/certificate/transfer-seeking" as students who took a majority of their courses in their first year as transfer	Identifies "degree/certificate/transfer-seeking" as: -students who were 17-19 at age of initial enrollment OR -indicated a goal of degree/cert/transfer seeking after meeting with a counselor OR -demonstrated intent to complete by completing 12 units and attempting a transfer or degree-applicable math or English course (ARCC method)	Identifies "degree/certificate/transfer-seeking" as a student who and attempts any transfer or degree-applicable math or English course and completes 12 units anywhere in the system

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Item	PPIC Report	Rules of the Game Report	ARCC Report
Denominator Rationale	<p>If a majority of your courses in your first year are transfer/ vocational, etc., then you are most likely a transfer/ vocational student forever.</p>	<p>Author states:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Research demonstrates that younger (17-19) community college students are more likely than older students to report a goal of earning a degree or transferring to a university, and are more likely to actually achieve that goal. -Two-thirds of students who successfully completed had indicated a goal of completing when they enrolled or after meeting with a counselor, suggesting that age and stated intent are equally valid indicators of degree-intent. -The third criterion, a measure of behavioral intent to complete, was adopted by the CCC as part of AB1417 accountability reporting based on analysis of student course-taking behaviors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Students who are not degree/ certificate/transfer seeking are not likely to take transfer or degree-applicable level math or English for fun. -12 unit threshold eliminates single course takers or concurrent enrollees passing through the CCC system in and out of CSU/UC who might take these classes at a CCC.
Problems with Denominator	<p>A lot of courses are coded as transferable...including PE. Simply taking a majority of courses in a course type does not constitute intent. A student taking one course that happens to be coded as transferable (PE, horticulture) or vocational (Microsoft Excel) will be counted as a non-success, even though they are likely to not desire an award or transfer.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -In Fall 2004, over 26% of students took 3 units (1 course) or less; the classification schema of "majority of units" is a poor predictor for students taking only 1 course. -In Fall 2004, 35% of all students who took transferable courses took only 1 course; all of these students would be included in the rate cohort. <p>The 5 Categories of student intent are treated as mutually exclusive, but a student can be degree-seeking, taking noncredit courses, and taking basic skills courses all in their academic histories.</p>	<p>Assuming all 17-19 year olds are here to earn an award/transfer is a stretch.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Using the same student stated intent data, one-third of all 17-19 year olds in the CCC system in 2005-06 had a goal, after matriculation, of something other than "seeking degree/ certificate/transfer". This is why simply assuming all 17-19 year olds are here to get such an outcome is too inclusive. <p>Student goal, even after matriculation, is a poor predictor of actual student intent. Author claims that 2/3 of all students who earned a successful outcome had such a goal; this actually means that 1/3 of all students who completed had a goal of NOT wanting to complete, an example of what a poor predictor student stated intention (goal) is.</p>	<p>Measuring only those who reach the bar of attempting transferable/degree-applicable math/English leaves out a lot of students who start in basic skills and never reach that threshold.</p> <p>12 units is an outcome in and of itself and leaves out students who come for 1 term and drop out.</p>
Successes or Numerator	<p>For each of the 5 areas, measures transfer, AA/AS, and certificate attainment as positive outcomes.</p>	<p>For only the degree- seeking populations, measures AA/AS, certificate, and transfer attainment as positive outcomes.</p>	<p>For degree/certificate/transfer seeking populations, measures AA/AS, certificate, transfer, transfer directed (completion of transfer level math and English) and transfer prepared (completion of 60 UC/CSU transferable units) as positive outcomes. Also separates out a "persisted to complete at least 30 units rate", based on the rationale that even if the student does not get a formal award or transfer, they will show a wage gain. This rate is 69% statewide for the cohort.</p>