



Gator Stats

The Office of Institutional Research (OIR)

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Do Placement Tests Place Students Correctly?

Not every time! Let's examine some data from Brazosport College's testing files and then try to analyze the results. First, some background material. We give mainly two placement tests: the Texas Higher Education Assessment (THEA) which is similar to the old TASP test and the computerized COMPASS test, which is published by ACT. The COMPASS also includes a writing sample. Students are placed based on the scores they make on these assessments. These scores are referred to as "cut scores." Brazosport College's Intake Committee (subcommittee of AtD) is studying the whole arena of placement testing including the question of whether or not the cut scores Brazosport College uses are efficacious and if those scores should be the only criteria used in the placement decision. The committee includes English and math faculty, counselors, the Transitional Ed Director, and as an *ex officio* member, the IR Director.

For several semesters faculty who teach the transitional courses have been surveyed to give their perception about whether or not students have been placed correctly. From the analysis of the fall, 2008 and spring, 2008 surveys, TE faculty felt that approximately 13.3 % of their TE students had been placed incorrectly. Approximately 79.6% placed too high, and 20.4% placed too low. This was but one data item used as evidence in the Committee's overall study of placing students.

Another item investigated was the success rates of those students placed in the different transitional courses. The following table shows a summary of those rates over a period of 6 years from 2002 to 2007.

	THEA (2002-07)	TASP (2002-07)	COMPASS (2002-07)
PLACED INTO	Success Rates		
MATH0404 (Pre Algebra)	56.6%	59.7%	55.6%
MATH0406 (Beginning Algebra)	48.1%	48.3%	56.2%
MATH0408 (Intermediate Algebra)	44.4%	43.3%	47.1%
MATH1314 (College Algebra)	58.2%	57.0%	51.7%
ENGL0406 (Transitional Reading)	37.4%	65.4%	27.9%
ENGL0409 (Transitional Writing)	45.3%	64.9%	74.4%
ENGL1301 (Composition and Rhetoric)	79.2%	74.4%	65.6%

From these data, one can make many "guesses" as to what could be a problem. For one, why the seemingly large gap between THEA and COMPASS with regard to ENGL1301 in the success rate? Does THEA do better at placing students into this course? The data may suggest similar questions.

Another input into this process was to examine best practices. From this search came a conclusion that examined whether or not community colleges even do this type of evaluation of their cut scores. We discovered that it is a rarity to find colleges that have an evaluation methodology for the process of placing students, a part of which is the validation of cut scores. So, this committee seems to be doing something very unique.

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Transfer Students

Brazosport College is a member of the National Clearinghouse (NCH), a national, non-profit organization that collects transfer information from colleges and universities and shares those data with member institutions. Brazosport College sends a list of students to that organization and it sends back a database that includes where those students are going to school at a point-in-time in which Brazosport College is interested. Usually, the semester in which we are interested is a fall semester—for retention purposes and to collect data for Achieving the Dream purposes. From the last match where information about the leavers from the previous three years was sent to the NCH to find where those students were attending college fall, 2008, there were 252 colleges found where Brazosport College students were going to college. Colleges such as Pepperdine, Letourneau, and Linfield were on the list as were most of the colleges and Universities in Texas. Nice trivia to know and to recognize that we are fulfilling our mission of preparing students for transfer.

Trends

What are the most important trends about which Brazosport College should be the most concerned. Enrollment is the easy one, so you can't use that one. Can you name 15? 10? Even 5? You could look through previous *Gator Stats* and get an idea for some; but, surely, you can think of 10 ("And don't call me Shirley!"). Send an email to David.Preston@brazosport.edu with a meaningful list of 15 trends (relative to Brazosport College) that Brazosport College should track in order to _____ (yes, you must give its importance), and the first two fulltime faculty members to do so get a gift (and its better than a candy bar). Since this edition is late, you will have until May 9th, 2009 to send the email. I would like to find out who reads *Gator Stats*.

Ethnicity/Race

If you are not already aware of the changes that have been mandated with regard to reporting ethnicity/race, you need to be. (It took more than 10 years to do this, by the way.) Below is a list of the old and new categories of this characteristic.

Old Categories

Nonresident Alien

Black, non-Hispanic

American Indian/Alaska Native

Asian/Pacific Islander

Hispanic

White, non-Hispanic

Race and Ethnicity unknown

New Categories

1. Report Hispanic/Latino individuals of any race as Hispanic/Latino

2. Report race for non-Hispanic/Latino individuals only

Hispanic/Latino

American Indian or Alaska Native

Asian

Black or African American

Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

White

Two or more races

You can immediately see some of the complications for data collection and entry (along with data verification), and the student's understanding of the change. Students now can report more than one race/ethnicity: for instance, Hispanic and White. Another issue is: What does an institution do about students who return and are already coded the old way (referred to as "bridging")? Recode them to the new coding system or leave the code alone? Does one code the new system back to the old categories, internally report race/ethnicity that way, or change all the reporting to the new categories? The student, when filling out an application or other form requiring ethnicity/race, will respond to two items, an Hispanic item (Hispanic, non-Hispanic), and one of the "New Categories" items listed above.

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What can we do for you?

If you need our assistance to help design, construct, administer, or scan a survey or help in the analysis of the data collected by a survey, please feel free to call the OIR for assistance. If you would like to have the OIR produce a specialized study or report, please contact us. Presenting the results of analysis to an internal or external group is also something the OIR is more than happy to do.