



**Office of Academic Affairs**

205 East 42nd Street, New York, New York 10017

(646) 664-8102

email: [david.crook@cuny.edu](mailto:david.crook@cuny.edu)

**MEMORANDUM**

**Date:** December 13, 2018

**To:** Chief Academic Officers

**From:** David Crook, Associate University Provost for Academic Affairs  
Sarah Truelsch, Director of Policy Research, CUNY

**Subject:** Changes in CUNY's Remedial Assignment Practices for Spring 2020 Admissions

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The City University of New York (CUNY) will change its practices for assigning students to remedial courses starting with the spring 2020 entering class (who will be evaluated for admissions starting in fall 2019). As under current policy, applicants who meet certain scores on the SAT, ACT, or New York State Regents exams will be considered proficient and eligible to take credit-bearing courses in the associated subject.<sup>1</sup> Historically, students who had not met those proficiency standards were required to take placement tests at a CUNY college to determine whether they were required to complete remedial interventions before enrolling in credit-bearing math and English courses. Starting in fall 2019, applicants will no longer take placement tests. Instead, they will be evaluated by a proficiency index that combines overall high school grade point average and subject-specific SAT and Regents scores to determine whether the applicant has a reasonably high probability of passing a credit-bearing course in the subject without any additional support. Students who meet this criterion will be considered proficient. Those who do not will be required to participate in developmental supports before enrolling in or while enrolled in credit-bearing courses.<sup>2</sup> The change in placement practices is

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<sup>1</sup> See the CUNY testing webpage for the scores on each exam that satisfy proficiency requirements: <http://www2.cuny.edu/academics/testing/testing-faqs/>. Students who have achieved a score of 3 or higher on an Advanced Placement (AP) test that qualifies for college credit in English or math will also be considered proficient.

<sup>2</sup> The index will use both SAT and Regents scores if both are available on the application, or whichever of the scores is available. The index places more weight on high school grades than on test scores, but higher test scores can help offset lower grades and vice versa. The current algorithm can incorporate either the Common Core Algebra 1 exam score or the traditional Integrated Algebra

informed by research at CUNY and nationally showing that high school grades predict performance in credit-bearing college courses better than standardized test scores. The new placement indexes result from extensive research conducted jointly by CUNY’s Office of Policy Research, the Office of Assessment, and the Office of Undergraduate Studies on the relationship between indicators of student preparation and successful grades in first credit-bearing courses. This change in placement practices is part of CUNY’s comprehensive remediation reform, which will also lead to changes in the way in which colleges provide developmental education. Working in collaboration with faculty and the colleges, CUNY’s strategic goal is to phase out stand-alone non-credit remedial courses over the next several years and replace them with corequisite courses, in which students receive additional developmental supports while enrolled in credit-bearing math and English courses, or with targeted developmental workshops taken before they enroll in credit courses.

**Hierarchy of Placement Results**

We have not yet finalized passing cut points on the new index, but we expect to assign about the same percentage of students to developmental education as we did in spring and fall 2018. Among students who we identify as likely to benefit from some developmental support, we recommend assigning them to the supports that will improve their probability of passing a credit-bearing course in the most efficient manner, minimizing the student’s cost in time and tuition while maximizing effectiveness.

Student profile	Assignment level
~65% or greater chance of passing a credit-bearing course with a C- or better	Deemed proficient by placement index and eligible to enroll directly in credit courses
Likely to benefit from some developmental support	Assigned to a corequisite credit-bearing course, <i>or</i> referred to targeted immersion workshop, after which they should enroll in a regular credit-bearing course
Least prepared (requiring developmental support in multiple subjects or extensive math support)	Recommend enrollment in CUNY Start or Math Start

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score and the traditional or Common Core English Regents Exam. The exact weights of each element in the algorithm and the final cut score for proficiency have not yet been finalized and CUNY may adjust them between admissions cycles.

Evidence shows that students at all levels of initial academic preparation do better in corequisite courses than in traditional zero-credit course sequences. Consequently, we do not recommend that any student be placed into traditional prerequisite, non-credit remedial courses and urge colleges to replace these courses with corequisite options as soon as possible. However, students who require developmental support in multiple subjects should consider enrolling in CUNY Start and those who have deep needs in mathematics, in Math Start. Depending on the USIP offerings at each school and the availability of corequisite courses, colleges may recommend that some students enroll in USIP workshops followed directly by enrolling in regular credit-bearing courses. Final authority for placing remedial students rests with the chief academic officer, after full consultation with faculty.

### **How colleges and students will learn about proficiency status**

The proficiency index will run just before the application is processed for admissions purposes, and proficiency status will be posted in the CUNYfirst Student Self-service after. The central Office of Academic Affairs (OAA) is working with the Office of Enrollment Strategy and Management to develop guidance for how colleges should communicate the placement results to applicants. We anticipate that applicants will be able to learn their proficiency status sooner than has been possible in the past and consequently have more time to learn about and consider enrolling in alternatives to traditional remedial courses, such as summer workshops, Math Start, and CUNY Start. We anticipate that the proficiency index score will also be available on the Testing Page for academic advisers to use in referring students to targeted USIP offerings or Math Start.

### **Placements for Students Missing Key Information and Transfer Students**

The placement algorithm runs using data collected in the freshman admissions process and requires that students have a high school GPA in the admissions file plus at least an SAT score or a Regents score. Students who do not have SAT or Regents scores will be deemed proficient or not based on their GPA alone. Students with no GPA in the admissions records (typically those with foreign diplomas or high school equivalencies) will not be deemed proficient, but colleges should allow these students to present additional evidence to a college advisor that demonstrates their readiness for credit-bearing courses and allow them to enroll in credit courses if appropriate. We expect to provide further guidance in the coming months on the kinds of alternative evidence that should be accepted to demonstrate proficiency. The proficiency index will also be run for transfer applicants, but transfer applicants will also be deemed proficient if they have passed a credit-bearing course in the subject, earned an associate degree or higher from a CUNY college, or earned a bachelor's degree from a non-CUNY college. The vast majority of students accepted for transfer at senior colleges have already passed math and English courses. For the relatively small number who have not, assessing them based on their high school GPA and test scores is consistent with the current university policy of assessing transfer students who have completed fewer than 24 credits using the same admission criteria as freshman applicants.

**Assignments to reading, writing, and ESL interventions:**

When placement testing ends, CUNY will no longer offer tests to assess reading and writing skills separately. Most students will not be affected by this change because most students who were assigned to reading in the past also needed additional preparation in writing, and vice versa. Furthermore, several colleges already combine reading and writing instruction in the same courses. Colleges that want to continue making separate assignments to developmental reading and writing should consider how to identify the students most likely to benefit from their offerings in each subject. In consultation with the ESL Discipline Council, OAA is developing a separate procedure for identifying and placing ESL students. This procedure is summarized in the chart below.

<b>Student Group</b>	<b>College actions</b>
Students not eligible for English at colleges that wish to make separate reading and writing assignments	Use additional diagnostics aligned with the college’s developmental offerings. Colleges are responsible for procuring and administering diagnostic tests if they choose to use them for this purpose. However, we recommend combining reading and writing instruction in the same interventions.
Non-proficient ESL Students (Identified by admissions)	The ESL Discipline Council will develop a modified CATW exam with a reading component that should be administered to students and read by ESL faculty at the college to determine appropriate placement
Possible ESL (not identified by admissions)	Administer a questionnaire about home language and/or allow self-identification as ESL, then administer the CATW as a diagnostic and have it read by ESL faculty at the college to determine appropriate placement

In the past, colleges also administered standardized tests to determine placement into their credit-bearing STEM math sequence (College Algebra, Pre-Calculus, Calculus 1, Calculus 2, etc.). A companion memorandum will present options for colleges to make those placement decisions without placement tests, using information collected for admissions decisions. Unlike the proficiency determination, those mathematics placement decisions are made at each college and the colleges may choose whether to adapt those recommendations or develop their own placement mechanisms for credit courses.

cc:

- Laura Bruno, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Strategy and Management;
- Mark Ciolli, University Director of Recruitment, CUNY