



In Brief



University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

March 2009

THE COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS ACT: FINDINGS FROM EVALUATION — YEAR ONE

Sadya Khan
Erin Castro
Debra D. Bragg
Jessica I. Barrientos
Lorenzo Baber

INTRODUCTION

Rising remediation rates among college students are leading to increased time for completion of degree, additional costs for students and colleges, and financial aid being used on courses that do not count towards a degree. In response to these issues, in 2007 the state of Illinois passed the College and Career Readiness Act (CCR Act), Public Act 095-0694, to fund pilot projects consisting of a community college and partner high schools to support the alignment of K-12 curriculum with college level coursework, as well as better prepare students to be successful in transitioning from high school to college. The CCR Act has five main purposes: 1) Align ACT scores to community college courses to diagnose college readiness; 2) Reduce remediation through college prep courses, college readiness skills, and successful transitions; 3) Align high school and college curricula; 4) Provide resources and academic support to students; and 5) Develop an evaluation process to measure the effectiveness of readiness programs.

The CCR Act attempts to address the rising remediation rates among high school graduates who enroll in college and find they are ineligible to enroll in collegiate level coursework because they do not meet the cut-off scores on college placement exams. The CCR Act tests the hypothesis that misaligned curriculum between high school and college creates remediation problems for students who seek to enter college-level course work. The Act purports that the remediation problem can be serious because of its impact on time to degree and financial aid.

This three-year pilot study was initiated and executed by the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB), who granted the Office of Community College Research and Leadership (OCCRL) the opportunity to research and evaluate the pilot projects. This study is co-directed by Debra Bragg and Lorenzo Baber of the Department

of Educational Organization and Leadership in the College of Education at UIUC. Research staff also includes Sadya Khan, project coordinator, and Erin Castro, research assistant. Jessica Barrientos, ICCB Director for Academic Affairs, was a member of the evaluation team in summer and fall 2008.

Background

Enrollment in remedial courses is a commonplace experience for entrants to community colleges. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2003), *Condition of Education* report confirms virtually every community college in the nation offers remedial courses, and a national study by Jenkins and Boswell (2002) revealed over half of community college students require some remedial course work. Lack of rigorous academic course work at the secondary level contributes to students' inability to enter college ready to engage in college-level studies, sometimes referred to as "college readiness". In various studies, Adelman (1999, 2005, 2006) found advanced secondary academic courses were significant predictors of community college readiness, persistence, and attainment of an associate degree. His 2005 study concluded that, with respect to freshmen course-taking, a few missteps could contribute to missed opportunities for students to take sequences of college-level math and English (reading and writing). He recommended a balance of CTE and liberal arts and sciences to improve students' chances of degree completion. Recent research by Calcagna, Crosta, Bailey and Jenkins (2006) shows remedial course-taking is especially problematic for younger college students, including students making the transition to college immediately after high school, and they urge middle schools and high schools to provide "intensive supports" to help students to take and pass "gatekeeping" college preparatory courses in math (p. 27).

This brief summarizes results presented in year one of the Evaluation of the Illinois College and Career Readiness Act Pilot Projects. The authors gratefully acknowledge funding and support from the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB). The content of this Brief does not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the Illinois Community College Board. A copy of the report is available on the OCCRL website at: http://occr.ed.uiuc.edu/Projects/CCR/files/CCRYear_One_Report.pdf

A national project that explores policies and practices associated with high schools, asserting that a core mission of high schools is to prepare students to transition easily to college, is *The Bridge Project* by Venezia, Kirst, and Antonio (2004). Collecting data in numerous states, including Illinois, this project shows many students and parents have difficulty understanding college requirements and the steps required to seek admission. Inequalities in course offerings, counseling services, and information about college requirements exist between schools within educational systems and across states. Further, Venezia, Callan, Finney, Kirst, and Usdan (2005) confirm that K-12 systems are not well connected to colleges, resulting in many students not having the requisite skills to enter college without taking remedial coursework, exacerbating difficulties with retention in completing postsecondary programs. Their research reflects national figures reported by NCES and other scholars, showing almost half of entering college students are required to take remedial courses, with differences in college-going and college success (retention) being correlated with academic preparedness, income-level, race/ethnicity, and other related educational, social and economic variables.

The growth in remedial education in recent years draws attention to the distinct division of education that exists between secondary and postsecondary education. Remediation typically consists of courses in basic levels of reading, mathematics and writing. The increased number of students taking these basic courses at community colleges shows how more and more high school students are failing to receive the basic skills they need to enter college in the first place (Bueschel, 2003). Rosenbaum (1998) suggests that the key to minimizing remediation is to make high school students aware of what it takes to succeed in college and to eliminate the idea of “second chances” that “inadvertently convey to students that high school is irrelevant and that there are no penalties for poor effort” (p. 3). Remedial coursework has also been the subject of controversy, as proponents argue that students who take remedial coursework are more likely to complete their degrees successfully (McCabe, 2000), while critics argue that students are bogged down with too many remedial courses, leading to high rates of attrition (Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2002). Still other opponents of remediation feel that colleges have lowered their standards of admission for unprepared students who should not have been admitted in the first place (Bennett, 1994).

A comprehensive study done by Attewell, Lavin, Domina and Levey (2006) shows the breakdown of remediation that occurs in college, as well as the effects of various types of remedial courses on graduation rates and time to degree. The data shows that among community colleges, 58% of students are enrolled in remedial courses, with 44% of students taking between one and three courses. Mathematics is the most common remedial subject, with 28% of students taking courses in that area. Attewell et al. also shows students from the lowest quartile of socioeconomic status (SES) are the most likely to undertake remedial coursework, although remediation is by no means limited to a particular sector of the student population. Nearly one quarter of students from the highest quartile SES enroll in remedial courses. Finally, while Deil-Amen and Rosenbaum’s (2002) research gives the idea

that taking multiple remedial courses is a hindrance to graduation at two-year colleges, Attewell et al. (2006) and Adelman (2006) show that, when controlling for students’ high school academic preparation, remedial course work in and of itself is not a barrier toward college graduation. Weak academic preparation in high school is an even bigger issue when it comes to finishing college.

Thus, the above mentioned literature reveals several issues when it comes to remedial education. The first is that many college students are enrolling in remedial coursework, which has a serious impact on time to degree and financial aid. Additionally, many students and parents do not understand college admission and placement, and they are ill-informed about college requirements. Underlying the CCR Act is the assumption that both high schools and colleges are responsible for ensuring that high school students are prepared to enter college ready to learn at the college level and that they are aware of the college standards that await students. This evaluation examines the issue of college readiness, curriculum alignment and remediation for students, high schools, and community colleges in sites selected to pilot the CCR Act in Illinois. The CCR Act has created the opportunity for Illinois to examine and reflect upon these key educational issues and determine the potential for various strategies and approaches to prepare high schools for college.

Methods

An important goal of the College and Career Readiness (CCR) pilot projects is to determine whether local programs that attempt to enhance high school students’ college readiness are successful. If so, the CCR pilot projects would demonstrate that partnerships between community colleges and secondary schools that offer remedial/developmental education are useful to helping students transition from high school to the community college.

Through partnerships between community colleges and high schools, the CCR Act encourages the identification of students who need additional academic preparation to enter college ready to learn. The Act supports the identification of students and the implementation of remedial instruction and supplementary services to assist high school students to master academic skills, knowledge and dispositions to place into collegiate level studies upon entry postsecondary education. One approach advanced by the CCR pilot project is for pilot sites to address the critical window when high school students at the junior level (grade 11) take the ACT test as part of the Prairie State Achievement Exam (PSAE), enroll in their senior year (grade 12) of high school, and matriculate from high school to college in subsequent years. However, other models are possible and expected to emerge.

The CCR pilot study consists of four pilots and five community colleges: John A. Logan College, Moraine Valley Community College, Shawnee Community College, South Suburban College, and Southwestern Illinois College. John A. Logan and Shawnee Community College are associated with one pilot project. The state of Illinois distributed grants to these five schools, which were used for a variety of purposes, including the hiring of new

personnel and faculty members and the purchase of student incentives and classroom equipment. Ultimately, the goals of the pilot sites were to create college preparatory initiatives, improve students' college readiness, and better align high school and college curricula in order to reduce remediation of students prior to their entering college.

OCCRL's evaluation team conducted site visits to all five schools throughout year one. Through individual and group interviews with administrators and faculty and focus groups with students, OCCRL staff gathered information about goals, key features, barriers and challenges associated with the initial implementation of the CCR pilot programs. The evaluation questions targeted issues such as collaboration among the multiple partners in the programs, the various policies and practices employed by the CCR partners (high schools, community colleges, others) in conjunction with college preparatory and orientation programs, and the role of the ICCB and other local and state organizations in supporting the CCR Act.

Pilot Interventions

During the first year of the grant, the pilot sites implemented a variety of strategies to address the goals of the CCR Act. Most of the community colleges set up collaborative meetings between community college faculty and administrators and high school faculty and administrators to compare common grading procedures in an effort to align standards and expectations. Some schools implemented semester long programs that offered students the chance to take courses to improve their reading, mathematics, and college study skills before entering college. Other schools offered orientations and workshops to better acclimate students to what they can expect in college. Many of the schools did a combination of these activities. These programs reached a range of students from high school sophomores to recently graduated seniors, with the most participants being at the junior level as specified by the law.

The following is a brief summary of the interventions offered by each community college:

John A. Logan College

The John A. Logan College (JALC) district serves five counties from its location in Carterville, Illinois, and extension centers in West Frankfort and Du Quoin, Illinois. The district is rural; for many area students, it is the only opportunity for a postsecondary experience. Many of the district students are from low income and underrepresented student groups. JALC enrolled approximately 14,400 students in the fall of 2007. Of the college's in-district high school graduates, over three-quarters (75.9%) display the need for developmental mathematics and over 27 % need some form of developmental English.

For year one of the CCR pilot program, JALC implemented a few key initiatives to reduce remediation at the postsecondary level. JALC created a three-day math intervention to provide students with intense math remediation and also implemented a one-day

orientation in the summer to acclimate students to the college and introduce the CCR program. JALC used a combination of COM-PASS and ACT scores to enroll the students. Each of these programs enrolled approximately 20 students. For their curriculum alignment piece, JALC held project planning meetings throughout the year between administrators and teachers from the college and their three partner high schools. JALC also offered tutoring services to students throughout the semester.

As year two of the program is underway, JALC plans to increase recruitment efforts by identifying students through earlier testing. Additionally, JALC plans to implement a six-week summer intervention, as well as field observations among high school and college faculty members.

Moraine Valley Community College

With an enrollment of more than 46,000 students annually, Moraine Valley Community College (MVCC), situated on nearly 300 acres in Palos Hills, is the second largest community college in Illinois. The college offers more than 100 degrees and certificates for transferring to a four-year college or career training in today's growing fields. MVCC is consistent with the national trend of more than 50% of incoming full-time freshmen who need some developmental math, reading or communication classes.

MVCC's approach to the CCR pilot program was to implement an eight-week summer bridge program with three components: Basic Study Skills, College Introduction, and Remedial Math. MVCC targeted students with a composite ACT score between 16-19. A total of 43 students enrolled in the program, with 29 students completing the program with a "C" or better. Curricular alignment was somewhat challenging in the first year of the program due to concern from high schools that curricular alignment strategies could lead to finger-pointing or blame. MVCC administrators emphasized the need to continue to build trust with the high schools in the coming years.

Looking to year two, MVCC plans to add various ACT preparation and test anxiety activities for juniors during the summer, in addition to the eight-week summer bridge program. MVCC is also exchanging course outlines as part of their curriculum alignment strategy.

Shawnee Community College

The main campus of Shawnee Community College is located in Ullin, IL on 152 acres of rolling hills and woods just a few miles north of the Ohio River and approximately seven miles east of Interstate 57. Shawnee Community College (Shawnee) also has four centers in addition to the main campus in Ullin. Shawnee enrolls over 8,000 students each year, with 92% of students attending full time in 2007. Just over a third of students plan to receive an associate's degree and transfer, while approximately a quarter of students come to Shawnee for a career and technical education.

In the first year of the program, Shawnee recruited students with a composite ACT score below 20 and/or in need of credit recovery. Their intervention consisted of two, six-week summer programs combining an existing academic enrichment program and credit recovery program. The credit recovery program, a popular and established program that Shawnee has offered in the past, allows high school students to take courses at Shawnee to gain necessary credits toward a high school diploma. A total of 75 students completed the program in summer 2008, with approximately 61% of students showing improvement in their TABE scores. Shawnee also hired a part-time coordinator who worked closely with area high schools to recruit teachers and students to the program and raise awareness of the program.

Shawnee is planning to add various workshops and enrichment programs for students during the fall and spring of year two. College officials are also planning discussions between English and math faculty at Shawnee and their partner high schools early in year two.

South Suburban College

South Suburban College, located in South Holland, Illinois, serves residents of 20 communities in the south suburban region of Chicago. More than 17,000 students, on average, are enrolled during a typical year. South Suburban College offers a wide selection of career education and college transfer credit programs. Additionally, South Suburban College's Business and Career Institute offers non-credit customized training, short-term instruction for business, and dozens of special interest classes. Just over 36% of students receive associate's degrees, while the remaining 63% receive other certificates.

South Suburban College implemented an eight-week summer intensive program called the Academic Intervention for Matriculation program, or A.I.M. The A.I.M. program had two distinct cohorts which remediated students in math and English. The program also had a mandatory counseling component, which administered Myers-Briggs tests to students and taught students study skills for college coursework and time management techniques. Students were identified for this program based on a combination of practice ACT scores and communicative networks already in place with local high schools. A total of 11 students completed the math cohort and 9 students completed the English cohort of the A.I.M. program.

For the second year of the pilot program, South Suburban College plans to continue the A.I.M. program during summer 2009. The college is planning to hold articulation meetings between faculty and administrators as well as after school interventions throughout the year. South Suburban College is planning to implement a summer employment opportunity in conjunction with the A.I.M. program. This could help retain students who do not want to forego part-time employment over the summer.

Southwestern Illinois College

Southwestern Illinois College (SWIC) is the sixth largest community college in the state of Illinois, with campuses in Belleville, Granite City and Red Bud. The college also has an Industrial Training Center at the Sam Wolf Granite City Campus, and at 26 off-campus sites, most of which are located in district high schools. SWIC enrolled just over 16,000 students in 2007, with 65% of students working at least part time. SWIC has over 86 associate degree programs and 90 certificates of proficiency that can usually be completed in one year or less.

For the first year of the CCR pilot program, SWIC administered a variety of programs to reduce remediation and better align high school and college curricula. They implemented a College Success Initiative (CSI) program that included a Freshman Seminar course and a Basic Algebra course targeted toward high school seniors. SWIC also administered a High School Math Project and High School Writing Project to facilitate dialogue between high school and college math and English faculties and administrators. Another part of the High School Math Project included sample COMPASS testing for high school faculty members to experience the content and format of the test and COMPASS testing for juniors in their partner high schools. Finally, SWIC offered workshops for students who did not qualify for the college success intervention, as well as workshops for high school and SWIC faculty interested in professional development. It is also important to note that some of SWIC's interventions were already in place due to previous grants, when the CCR grant was administered.

One key addition to SWIC's interventions for the second year of the pilot program is to create more courses and spread them out during the year, rather than offering all classes during the summer. Also, SWIC plans to administer a writing ambassador program for its students.

The State's Role

The Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) is leading this important initiative and has granted OCCRL the funds to evaluate the impact of the CCR Act. The ICCB has demonstrated a high level of commitment and urgency in executing the grant, identifying pilot sites, working with ACT, and providing support for the pilot projects. Since the beginning of the grant period, numerous meetings have been held in Springfield and via telephone conference calls, and these meetings have yielded valuable conversations to move program planning forward. Communication has occurred across the pilot sites and more is encouraged and expected as the project evolves. Various workshops and professional development opportunities have been held by each of the community colleges during the first year, and these meetings have been supported by ICCB staff. At present, the ICCB is planning a training session for professionals associated with the pilot sites to explore issues associated with aligning ACT and COMPASS scores and curriculum. Open and active channels of communication between the

ICCB, OCCRL, and the pilot sites have facilitated the evaluation process, assisting with documenting the project goals and facilitating an on-going dialogue regarding the current status and future direction of the grant.

Findings and Conclusions

Cross-case findings and conclusions can be divided into three main categories: goals and implementation, collaboration of partners, and state and local support.

Goals and implementation:

- All pilot sites shared a few common goals in implementing programs for the CCR program, including facilitating discussion and collaboration between high schools and the college, providing students with the skills and knowledge to score higher on placement exams, and preparing students for the transition from high school to college.
- Because ACT test scores were not accessible in the timeframe needed to place students, most sites used COMPASS testing to determine the level of remediation and college placement.
- Each site that offered a college preparatory (developmental) program sought ways to incorporate a tutoring component. In some cases, tutoring was built into the coursework, while other colleges offered students the chance to receive extra academic assistance outside of the classroom.
- Most pilot programs focused on college preparatory programs in math, with only a couple of colleges offering English courses.

In conclusion, the diversity of approaches to the CCR pilot project has strengths and weaknesses. While it allows for multiple ways for remedial/development education to evolve, it is difficult to gather sufficient evidence to conclude whether one approach is working better than another.

Collaboration of partners:

- The community colleges relied on established partnerships with feeder high schools to promote the CCR pilot program and recruit students.
- Collaborative efforts and meetings between high school and college faculty were very rewarding and encouraging of curriculum alignment.
- High school counselors and parents were crucial to the interest, recruitment, and retention of students.

In conclusion, the data show that while positive strides were made in the collaboration of high schools and college sites, it would be helpful for the colleges to go beyond the communicative networks already in place, to reach out to other networks and schools in need.

State and local support:

- Most of the pilot sites had limited local evaluation processes for this first year of the program, due in part to the short timeline to begin CCR in year one.

- Some of the schools are combining the funds of this grant with other grants they have received to accomplish similar goals.

In conclusion, more state and ACT support is needed to ensure that the pilot sites receive test scores in a timely fashion as well as to provide further assistance in developing more thorough evaluation processes.

Moving Forward

Key issues will be examined as the pilot sites and OCCRL move forward into years two and three of the CCR Act. One priority will be enhancing the coordination of state-level activities with the evaluation of local pilot programs. Identifying the target student group and college preparatory program components and aligning them with student learning outcomes is important. Also, to address the intent of the CCR legislation, it is important to demonstrate the value of a sub-set of outcomes on college and career readiness and understand how these measures fit with other “pipeline” initiatives employed in the state. There must also be a greater focus on examining ways to recruit and retain students, especially after the CCR grant ends. Long-term solutions and sustainable practices that address the growing remediation problem are key as OCCRL’s evaluation moves to years two and three.

Throughout the next two years, the evaluation will seek to ascertain the impact of the CCR pilot programs on high school students’ academic preparation to enter college without needing remediation. The study will explore whether the college preparatory programs and supplemental services are effective. Do students complete the programs, and how do they perform in math, reading, and writing? Are students prepared to begin college and able to succeed in taking college level coursework? Results of the evaluation are vitally important to determining the impact and viability of future programs and practices associated with improving college and career readiness.

References

- Adelman, C. (1999). *Answers in the tool box: Academic intensity, attendance patterns and bachelor’s degree attainment*. Washington DC: Office of Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education.
- Adelman, C. (2005). *Moving into town—and moving on: The community college in the lives of traditional-age students*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.
- Adelman, C. (2006). *The toolbox revisited: Paths to degree completion from high school through college*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education.
- Attewell, P., Lavin, D., Domina, T., & Levey, T. (2006). New evidence on college remediation. *The Journal of Higher Education*. 77(5).
- Bennett, W. (1994). *The devaluing of America*. New York: Touchstone.

-
- Bueschel, A. C. (2004). The missing link: the role of community colleges in the transition between high school and college. In Venezia, A. and Kirst M.W. (Eds) *From High School to College: Improving Opportunities for Success in Postsecondary Education*. (pp. 252-284). Indianapolis: Jossey-Bass.
- Calcagno, J. C., Crosta, P., Bailey, T., & Jenkins, D. (2006, October). *Stepping stones to a degree: The impact of enrollment pathways and milestones on older community college student outcomes*. New York: Community College Research Center Brief, no. 32, Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Deil-Amen, R., & Rosenbaum, J. (2002). The unintended consequences of stigma-free remediation. *Sociology of Education*, 75, 249-268.
- Jenkins, D., & Boswell, K. (2002). *State policies on community college workforce development: Findings from a national survey*. Accessed October 31, 2008, <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/40/82/4082.pdf>.
- Kirst, M.W., Venezia, A., & Antonio A.L. (2004). What have we learned and where do we go next? In Venezia, A. and Kirst M.W. (Eds). *From High School to College: Improving Opportunities for Success in Postsecondary Education* (pp.285-321). Indianapolis: Jossey-Bass.
- McCabe, R. (2000). *No one to waste: A report to public decision-makers and community college leaders*. Washington, DC: American Association of Community Colleges, Community College Press.
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2003). *The condition of education*. Washington, DC.
- Rosenbaum, J. (1998). *Unrealistic plans and misdirected efforts: Are community colleges getting the right message to high school students?* New York: Institute on Education and the Economy.
- Venezia, A., Callan, P. M., Finney, J. E., Kirst, M. W., & Usdan, M. D. (2005). *Betraying the college dream: How disconnected K-12 and postsecondary education systems undermine student aspirations*. CA: Stanford Institute for Higher Education.
-

Sadya Khan is a Visiting Project Coordinator with OCCRL. She received her Masters Degree in Education from Northwestern University and can be reached at skhan2@illinois.edu.

Erin Castro is a PhD student at the University of Illinois and a Research Assistant for OCCRL. She can be reached at ecastro2@illinois.edu.

Debra D. Bragg is Professor of Higher Education and Director of the Office of Community College Research and Leadership (OCCRL) at the University of Illinois. She is Principal Investigator of the College and Career Readiness Act Evaluation project. You can contact her at dbragg@illinois.edu.

Jessica I. Barrientos is Director of Academic Affairs at the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB). She received her Masters Degree in Education from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and can be reached at jessica.barrientos@illinois.gov.

Lorenzo Baber is an Assistant Professor of Higher Education at the University of Illinois and co-Principal Investigator for the College and Career Readiness Act Evaluation project at OCCRL. He can be reached at ldbaber@illinois.edu.

The Office of Community College Research and Leadership (OCCRL) was established in 1989 at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Our primary mission is to provide research, leadership, and service to community college leaders and assist in improving the quality of education in the Illinois community college system. Projects of this office are supported by the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB), and are coordinated with the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), along with other state, federal, and private and not-for-profit organizations. The contents of our Briefs and bi-annual UPDATE newsletters do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the ICCB, OCCRL, or the University of Illinois. Comments or inquiries about our publications are welcome and should be directed to OCCRL@uiuc.edu. This issue and back issues of UPDATE can be found on the web at: <http://occr.ed.uiuc.edu>.



University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
College of Education
51 Gerty Drive, CRC Room 129 · Champaign, IL 61820
217-244-9390 · Fax: 217-244-0851
Website: <http://occr.ed.uiuc.edu>