

**Association of Independent Colleges and Universities
of Pennsylvania (AICUP)
House Republican Policy Committee
Student Remediation in Higher Education**

Mr. Chairman, members of the House Policy Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to testify today on behalf of the eighty-seven (87) members of the Association of Independent Colleges and Universities of Pennsylvania (AICUP). My name is Ron Uroda and I am the Vice President for Research. I am here with Don Francis who is the President of the Association.

We were asked by the Committee to collect data relating to remedial coursework offered by private colleges and universities in Pennsylvania and my testimony will focus on the results of our data collection.

Few subjects in higher education have generated as much controversy as the need for colleges and universities to offer remedial coursework to entering students. A study by the National Center for Education Statistics found that about 75 percent of higher education institutions across the country offer remedial education courses¹. This study also notes that about 30 percent of students entering colleges and universities in the United States have to enroll in remedial coursework because they lack needed skills in English, mathematics, writing, or reading.

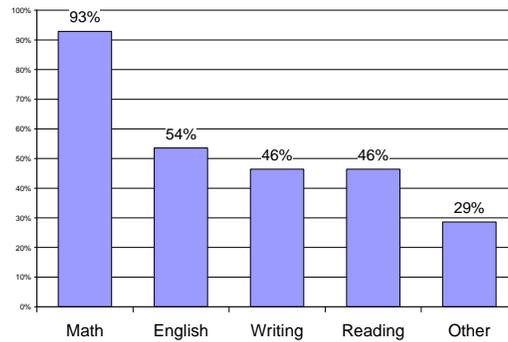
Earlier this month we asked a group of our member schools to respond to a series of questions relating to remedial education. We wanted to know if they offered remedial coursework, how students were enrolled in remedial classes, how many students were in remediation during the most recent Fall term, and in what subject areas did most students need assistance. We targeted the 50 members of our Association that we believed offered remedial instruction (a group that excludes specialized institutions and highly selective schools) and we received responses from 33 of these institutions.

The 33 private colleges and universities in Pennsylvania with remedial coursework that responded to our survey report that in the Fall of 2008 twenty-seven percent (or about 3,500) of their first-time freshman students had to enroll in one or more remedial courses because they lacked college-level skills in mathematics, English, reading, or writing.

How are students placed into remedial coursework? Almost 85 percent of the private colleges and universities with remedial coursework say that they utilize a proficiency exam or placement test to determine whether entering students have necessary skills in particular subject areas while the remaining 15 percent of the respondents say that they use scores on the ACT or SAT examinations or high school transcripts to place students into remedial coursework.

In which subject areas do institutions administer placement exams? Almost all (93 percent) of the private colleges and universities with placement exams test students on math skills, with about half testing on English skills, and a smaller proportion testing on reading skills and writing skills. (Chart 1) Not every private college and university with placement exams has an exam in every one of these subject areas.

Chart 1: Percentage of Pennsylvania Private Colleges and Universities Offering Placement Tests In Specified Subject Area, Fall 2008

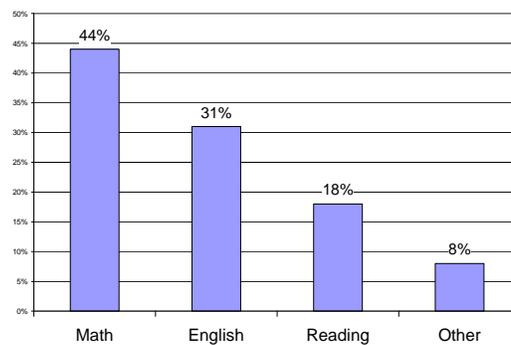


Note: Based on 28 private colleges and universities responding to AICUP survey who reported that they offer remedial education placement exams.

What students take placement exams? At 15 of the private colleges and universities that offer placement exams all first-time freshman students are required to take the tests. At the other 13 institutions students may be assigned to take the placement exams based upon certain academic criteria (i.e., low high school GPA, low SAT/ACT scores, etc.) or upon the recommendation of an admissions or academic counselor.

In what subjects are most first-time students lacking college-level skills? From our survey of private colleges and universities we found that most students were enrolled in remedial coursework in mathematics (44 percent) followed by coursework in English (31 percent) and then reading (18 percent).

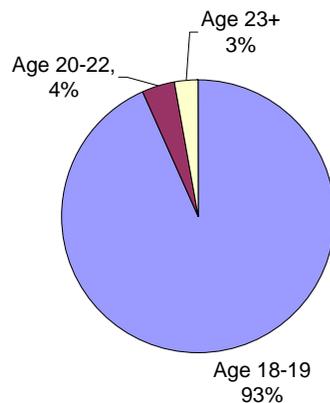
Chart 2: Proportion of Students Enrolled in Remedial Coursework At Private Colleges and Universities in Pennsylvania by Subject Area of Instruction, Fall 2008



Note: Based on the 33 colleges and universities responding to AICUP survey who reported that they offer remedial coursework.

Some researchers suggest that most students enrolled in remedial coursework are those who have been out of the educational system for some time and are returning to college to pursue a degree. However, our survey of private colleges and universities in Pennsylvania found that the vast majority of students in remedial coursework are 18 and 19 years of age. Only about 3 percent of students enrolled in remedial coursework in Fall 2008 were age 23 and older (Chart 3).

Chart 3: Age Distribution of Students Enrolled in Remedial Coursework At Private Colleges and Universities in Pennsylvania, Fall 2008



Note: Data from the 33 colleges and universities responding to AICUP survey who reported that they offer remedial coursework.

Colleges and universities offer remedial coursework for one simple reason - to provide certain groups of students with the skills necessary to complete college-level coursework and ultimately to obtain an associates or a bachelor's degree. The benefits of having a college degree have been widely publicized. Individuals with a college degree are less likely to become unemployed, they will earn more over their lifetime than high school graduates, and they will gain a set of skills that are applicable in a wide variety of work settings. Our member institutions are committed to helping promising students with weaknesses in certain academic areas to gain the skills they need to succeed. Unfortunately this commitment comes at a cost to both institutions and to students.

Colleges and universities that want to help students who lack college-level skills must invest significant amounts of staff and financial resources into placement exams, student counseling, and developing and managing remedial courses. While students do benefit from remedial coursework, the fact that they enter college deficient in certain academic skills means that they too will have to commit greater energy, time, and money into completing their college education.

For decades private colleges and universities in Pennsylvania have partnered with local school districts to improve the educational experience of elementary and secondary students. Our institutions provide tutoring and after-school programs for K-12 students, workshops and training for elementary and secondary teachers, and consulting assistance to administrators and school board members. We believe that colleges and universities across Pennsylvania, both public and private, must create better lines of communication with local school districts to ensure that schools and students understand what is needed for success in college. And we are committed to assisting that process.

I am happy to answer any questions.

¹ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. *Remedial Education at Degree-Granting Institutions in Fall 2000*. November 2003.