Introduction

Oregon is entering the second decade of its journey to design and implement a standards-based system that connects student performance K-12 with college entry. The Oregon Educational Act for the 21st Century (1991, revised 1995), created a comprehensive system of academic standards and assessments benchmarked at grades 3, 5, 8 and 10. In 1994, the Oregon State Board of Higher Education adopted a policy to require the development of a Proficiency-based Admission Standards System (PASS) for entry into the state's seven public universities. PASS builds on the 10th grade benchmarks to further develop the knowledge and skills that students need for college success. The goal of PASS is to increase student academic preparation for admission, reduce the need for remediation, and increase the likelihood that students will continue beyond freshman year to complete their degree.

The Joint Boards, a partnership of the Oregon Board of Education (K-12, community colleges) and the Oregon State Board of Higher Education (public universities) adopted the K-16 alignment of standards and assessments, and review progress annually. OUS and community college staff in admissions and advising can consider standards information as a potential factor for initial course placement decisions as well as for university admission and entry into programs. The underlying assumption has been that students' progress in meeting standards at the 10th grade benchmark would pave the way for college entry and success in two- and four-year institutions. However, until fall 2001, data had not been generated to support this assumption because no students had actually completed the entire standards pathway and entered Oregon's colleges and universities.

The freshmen arriving on Oregon University System (OUS) campuses in fall 2001 were admitted on the basis of traditional college entry requirements. The freshmen who entered into OUS universities and the state’s community colleges were also the first students to have information about their performance in meeting standards at the 10th grade benchmark. As 10th graders in 1999, their performance was assessed in reading, writing, math, and math problem solving as part of the Certificate of Initial Mastery (CIM).

_The First Year_ studies the performance of these students on 10th grade benchmark standards and subsequent performance in their first year of college.

This study is a collaborative effort conducted by the Chancellor’s Office of the Oregon University System (OUS), the Oregon Department of Education (ODE), and the Oregon Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development (CCWD).
Population Studied

The population of students for this study was identified using 1999-2000 state data provided by the ODE. The students included were those who participated in state assessment while in high school and subsequently enrolled in an OUS institution or Oregon community college in fall 2001 as first-time freshmen (15 or more credit hours). This group includes 6,082 students from OUS and 12,519 students from Oregon community colleges. For OUS this represents 74% of Oregon residents (8,171) enrolled as first-time freshmen. For Oregon community colleges this represents 71% of Oregon residents (17,720) enrolled as first-time freshmen. Students in Oregon private high schools are not required to take state assessments and were not included in this study.

Study Questions and Findings

Question 1: How does the performance of Oregon high school students assessed on the 10th grade benchmark compare with their subsequent performance in college?

Findings

- Performance at the 10th grade benchmark is closely aligned with students’ freshman year college performance two years later. This is true for students at Oregon’s seven public universities and 17 community colleges.

- Students who meet or exceed the standard at the 10th grade benchmark levels defined by the Oregon Department of Education are more likely to earn a higher GPA in related college courses. Students who do not meet or nearly meet the standard are less likely to earn a college GPA of “C” or better that will support their continued enrollment beyond freshman year.

Question 2: What is the relationship of 10th grade benchmark assessments, high school GPA, and the SAT I to first-year college performance?

Findings:

- While there is no one perfect predictor of first-year college success, the study found a positive relationship among state assessments, high school GPA, college GPA, and the SAT I.

- Students' performance on the combined 10th grade benchmark assessments (reading, writing, math problem solving, and math knowledge and skills) and the SAT I correlated with first-year college GPA at comparable levels. This is consistent with findings from content analyses of the Oregon 10th grade benchmark standards and assessments conducted by The College Board and American College Testing (ACT). These analyses indicated a positive alignment of the content of these 10th grade benchmarks with the content of later college entry exams like the SAT I and the ACT.

- For the students entering OUS institutions in fall 2001 who were part of this study, high school GPA (HSGPA) correlated with college GPA at a higher level than either the 10th
grade benchmark performance or SAT I alone. The range of HSGPA in the current sample is primarily limited to those students who meet the admission requirement for various OUS campuses. Therefore, the high school GPA of OUS students in this study included: 3% below 2.5, 15% at 2.5-3.0, 36% at 3.0-3.5, 41% at 3.5-4.0, and 5% above 4.0. Note: Data were not available from the community colleges on incoming high school students’ GPA.

**Question #3:** What is the value of the state 10th grade benchmark assessment for predicting first-year college performance (college GPA) and persistence beyond freshman year?

**Findings:**

- Each of the four 10th grade benchmark assessments, individually and in combination, proved to be early indicators of overall college GPA at the end of the first year in Oregon’s public universities. The probability of a specified range was estimated based on simple logistic regression coefficients. For example, a student scoring “meets” (239) on the 10th grade benchmark assessment in math has a 41% probability of achieving a 3.0 average or higher at the end of the first year of college. A student scoring “exceeds” (249) on the 10th grade benchmark assessment in reading has a 50% probability of achieving a 3.0 average or higher at the end of the first year of college. Similar analyses have not yet been conducted for the community college population.

- There are various reasons why students decide to continue or not continue their college education beyond their freshman year and this study does not assert a causal relationship between 10th grade benchmark performance and enrollment beyond the first year. However, 82% of the students who met or exceeded 10th grade benchmarks completed their first year and began their second year at OUS, as compared to 76% of the general student population of returning freshman. Data on returning students were not available from the community college. Further study is needed with subsequent entering freshman classes to determine the link between this early indicator of college preparation and first-year success and continued enrollment in college.

- *The First Year* study provides baseline data on the performance of students on 10th grade benchmark standards and subsequent performance in their first year of college. Further study is needed to determine the predictive value of the 10th grade assessment in regards to college success.

**Conclusions and Recommendations**

- The 10th grade benchmark performance can serve as a planning tool for the last two years of high school for teachers, counselors, parents, and students. This early indicator of college academic readiness ensures that a wider range of students will have the opportunity to set clear and achievable goals toward building the knowledge and skills they need for postsecondary education. This information will be particularly valuable for students who may not have considered their college options. Because Oregon’s standards and assessments are aligned throughout K-12, this process can begin in middle school as students work toward high school preparation.
The continued development of a K-16 integrated student data-transfer system would expedite the exchange of information on state standards met. This system would alleviate much of the workload currently experienced by high school teachers and counselors who prepare these records and by college admissions officers and advisors who receive them. This system would be developed through a partnership of the Oregon University System (OUS), the Oregon Department of Education (ODE), and the Oregon Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development (CCWD).

This study also provides colleges with baseline data on student performance in the areas of reading, writing, and math that are considered the foundation for college preparation. Each campus can consider these data in admission and placement decisions to better support students’ success in their first year of college. Colleges can then provide feedback to high schools on the success of their graduates in postsecondary education. For example, as a result of The First Year study, OUS will provide additional information on standards met to all public Oregon high schools that sent graduates to OUS institutions. The expanded annual performance report, the Class of 2001 Entering Freshman Profile, is produced in aggregate for all Oregon high schools with five or more students in OUS institutions.

The population of students in The First Year study took state assessments in 1999-2000, without any information that these assessments might be linked to college entry. As the performance on standards becomes more closely linked to next steps and advantages when applying to college, it is likely that student motivation to reach higher standards will increase.

The 10th grade benchmark assessments in this study address 4 of the 10 required English, math, and science standards in the Proficiency-based Admission Standards System (PASS). OUS has worked with ODE since 1994 to maintain the alignment of the K-12 standards and assessments with college entry. OUS admissions officers and faculty now have these baseline data for identifying the next steps for the implementation of PASS. The implications of standards for admissions, placement and entry-level coursework can be determined. Community colleges may use the findings of this study to examine placement procedures.

The full First Year study is available at www.ous.edu

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