

Academic Preparation Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Updated: April 24, 2017

Note: This FAQ is an iterative document that will be updated frequently based on questions and feedback received in consultation with CSU constituents across the system.

General Questions

1. What changes are we making to our approach to academic preparation at the California State University (CSU)?

At the March Board of Trustees meeting, the Chancellor's Office highlighted four areas of academic preparation where CSU policies must be amended: developmental education, placement and assessment, Early Start and high school quantitative reasoning requirements. Each of these topics are detailed in the sections below.

2. What precipitated the changes to our approach to academic preparation?

The CSU has made steady progress improving college readiness for incoming freshmen. Over the past 20 years, the percentage of college-ready students has nearly doubled, from 32 percent to 62 percent. Despite this progress, nearly 40 percent of admitted freshmen (approximately 25,000 each fall) are informed that they are not ready for college-level coursework and are placed in developmental education courses, which do not count toward a degree.

Many of our campuses are already leading the way on improving academic preparation, whether by restructuring developmental education or through implementation of a more robust Early Start Program. Our goal is to build on this momentum, improving systemwide policies and procedures to better serve all CSU students.

3. How will these changes help CSU students?

Increasing college readiness for CSU students is directly correlated with shortening the time it takes students to complete the degree requirements necessary to earn a degree. A student who arrives ready for college-level coursework has the ability to accumulate credit-bearing units on the first day of class, compared to a student who must begin by taking a series of developmental education courses that do not count toward their degree.

Additionally, students from historically underserved communities—those who identify as African American, American Indian, Southeast Asian or Latino—are far more likely to be required to complete developmental education courses. As a result, these students have a more difficult road to graduation. To close equity gaps we must reframe our approach to serving those who need additional preparation.

4. Will these changes result in lower quality learning experiences for CSU students?

No. The changes are not a mechanism for compromising academic rigor or quality. Rather, they are a means of ensuring that our most underprepared students take additional high school coursework, engage in more academically challenging Early Start experiences, are placed into the appropriate math and English courses and have the opportunity to complete these and all other credit-bearing courses with the additional support needed to ensure mastery of the curriculum.

5. Will the Chancellor's Office consult with faculty, administrator and staff experts across the system to ensure that the best ideas are brought forward?

Yes. The Chancellor's Office has already begun meeting with several campus constituents to solicit ideas and feedback. These meetings will continue over the coming months. Additionally, workgroups comprised of faculty, administrators, students, PK-12 partners and community college constituents will be established to provide guidance and advice for the development of a new set of academic preparation policies. Workgroup participants will be selected based on recommendations from campus presidents and the Academic Senate of the California State University (ASCSU). The first convening will be scheduled for May.

6. What is the timeline for implementing this new approach to academic preparation?

The Chancellor's Office has set an aspirational goal of fall 2018 for our new approach to academic preparation. In fall 2019, the students who will graduate in 2025 following six years on campus will have entered the CSU as freshmen. Our improved academic preparation efforts must be fully in place at this time to have an impact on our Graduation Initiative 2025 goals.

We will not rush the requirement that incoming freshmen must complete a fourth year of high school quantitative reasoning. In response to the [Quantitative Reasoning Task Force report](#), we have received important feedback that school districts may need more time to prepare. As such, we will phase in the four years of quantitative reasoning requirement gradually, ensuring that it does not have a negative impact on these districts and the students who attend them.

7. How can interested parties stay updated on these impending changes?

This FAQ is a living document and will be updated as new information becomes available. Additionally, Chancellor's Office staff will provide regular updates at a number of CSU affinity group meetings (e.g., Presidents Council, ASCSU Plenary, Provosts Council, Student Affairs Council, Math Council, English Council, California State Student Association (CSSA) Executive Committee, Intersegmental General Education Transfer Curriculum meetings, high school counselor conferences, etc.).

Developmental Education

1. Why are we restructuring our approach to developmental education?

The goal is to allow more students the opportunity to earn college credit following their first academic term, without compromising academic rigor. Currently, nearly 40 percent of admitted freshmen are placed in developmental education courses for which they receive no baccalaureate credit.

Many CSU campuses are already leading the way on restructuring developmental education, especially concerning the innovative “stretch” English courses, which have been available at a majority of CSU campuses for several years. Several campuses have implemented similar mathematics/quantitative reasoning courses. We are working to scale these types of programs so that they are available on all CSU campuses, allowing students to earn credit while being supported with supplemental instruction, tutoring and learning assistance.

2. Shouldn't this be left up to campuses?

Course development, curricular modifications and innovative instructional approaches will be at the direction of faculty leaders from campus English and mathematics programs in concert with campus academic leadership. The Chancellor's Office will provide resources and technical assistance, but will not prescribe a specific implementation model.

3. How will faculty be supported?

Funding will be provided through course development efforts for faculty and academic department innovation. This funding will support, but will not be limited to, the use of corequisite, supplemental instruction, stretch and other proven pedagogical approaches in written communication and quantitative reasoning general education courses.

4. How will these changes be communicated to our PK-12 and community college partners?

The Chancellor's Office will be meeting directly with PK-12 and community college partners to solicit ideas and feedback. Additionally, representatives from our PK-12 and community college partners will be included in the workgroups.

5. What will happen to students who do not pass their new general education stretch math course?

Students who do not pass their new general education stretch math course would likely be required to complete a version of the course in the following term. As long as existing policy remains in place ([Executive Order 665](#) and [2008 Board of Trustees action](#)) if foundational coursework were not complete by the start of the second academic year, students would only be permitted to take — subject to individual circumstances and advisor review — a version of the new general education stretch math course. Once the course was completed, these students would be permitted to take additional courses leading to their degrees.

Early Start

1. What parts of the Early Start Program will change and why?

The Early Start Program will be more focused on students completing the academic preparation in written composition and quantitative reasoning. The goal will be for all students to be “college ready” on the first day of the regular academic term or to be well on their way to completing the foundational college-level courses by the end of their first regular term or first academic year. New courses will likely be created for the Early Start Program to achieve these goals. The use of multiple methods to measure student preparation and accomplishment are possible.

2. How will these changes impact low-income students and those who need to work in the summer?

Early Start has always had an impact on students who work in the summer, particularly students with significant financial resource requirements. The CSU provides financial support to cover tuition for students based on standard financial aid practices (i.e. the estimated family contribution). The Chancellor’s Office will be looking at opportunities to identify other forms of aid for students who participate in Early Start, including micro-grants, the utilization of low-cost textbooks, etc.

3. If a campus is currently running a successful Early Start Program, will it be forced to make changes based on this new approach?

More than likely, a campus will be able to adapt the successful elements of its current program to any requirements of the new program. If a campus operates a residency program and enables students to take courses in subjects other than written composition and quantitative reasoning, the new proposed approach should not interfere. If a campus offers online instruction to reach more admitted students from distant locations that campus will be encouraged to continue that approach. And if a campus provides instruction to students intending to enroll at other campuses, it will be expected to continue to support those students.

4. What will happen to students who attend an Early Start Program at a different CSU campus than the one in which they intend to enroll?

As is currently the case, a student’s home campus will be sent the results of the academic work he/she completes at the service campus. The credits will be positioned to advance students to full readiness or to completion of basic subjects by the end of the first term or by the end of the first academic year.

5. What will happen to students who do not pass their Early Start course?

More than likely, these students will be placed in a corresponding credit-bearing course in the regular term and be provided supplemental instruction.

Placement and Assessment

1. How will the Entry-Level Mathematics (ELM) and English Placement Test (EPT) change and why?

These two exams may be retired from service as other measures are adequate surrogates for these tests. The EPT and ELM are already positioned for replacement insofar as equivalent passing scores from the ACT and SAT are already in place. Moreover, a significant number of students no longer need to test as they either achieve readiness through the Early Assessment Program in high school or they fulfill the requirements of conditional readiness by the time they graduate.

2. If these tests are retired, what will replace them, and how do we know that the new instrument will be accurate?

Now that we have the technological ability to do so, the CSU can introduce the review of high school grades as part of appropriate course selection and placement. For students who are admitted late for any reason, campuses can adapt other measures to assist in this process including ALEKS, writing samples and directed self-placement.

3. What does this mean for the campus testing center?

If these tests are retired, campuses will be challenged to develop new opportunities for campus testing centers, which may include more support for testing as it is needed in the delivery of the actual curriculum; monitoring performance on electronic examinations such as ALEKS; or a new focus on the administration of ACT, SAT and possibly College-Level Examination Program (CLEP) exams.

High School Quantitative Reasoning

1. What are the specifics behind requiring a fourth year of high school quantitative reasoning, and why are we making this a new a-g requirement?

The [Quantitative Reasoning Task Force report](#) recommends requiring four years of high school quantitative reasoning for incoming students. This requirement, once implemented, will allow entering CSU students to continuously develop their quantitative reasoning skills while in high school to improve readiness for placement exams and college-level coursework.

2. Could a student complete this new requirement in his/her junior year of high school?

No. The requirement will initially benefit students with four years of mathematics/quantitative reasoning in high school regardless of what may have been accomplished in the 8th grade. The typical sequence will be algebra, geometry, algebra II (or their integrated alternatives), followed by another solid course in mathematics or by an elective (area g) with a strong quantitative reasoning basis (computer science, personal finance, statistics). More advanced students may have the same opportunity in both their junior and senior years.

8. What role will the Center for the Advancement of Quantitative Reasoning play in supporting academic preparation related to quantitative reasoning?

The Chancellor's Office has begun work to establish the Center for the Advancement of Instruction in Quantitative Reasoning and has received grant funding to support this effort. The Center will address the need for improving high school mathematics instruction statewide and will be primarily responsible for developing, maintaining and sustaining a 12th grade modular quantitative reasoning class that will be modeled on the CSU's Expository Reading and Writing Class (ERWC). The 12th grade class will meet the "c" requirement of the a-g requirements, will satisfy the "conditionally ready" requirement for the CSU and will provide that students who pass the class with a "C" or better are exempt from further testing before taking a college-level quantitative reasoning class.

3. What will happen to students who attend under-resourced high schools? Will they be penalized if their schools do not provide them the opportunity to complete four years of quantitative reasoning courses?

No. We will phase in the four years of quantitative reasoning requirement gradually, to ensure under-resourced school districts have more time to prepare and the requirement does not have a negative impact on these districts and the students who attend them. Students will not be penalized if their school does not offer them to take a fourth year of quantitative reasoning or mathematics course.

More information on Graduation Initiative 2025 can be found on the [website](#). If you have additional questions not covered in this document, please contact [Jeff Gold](#) or [James Minor](#).