

Remedial Education in California's Colleges and Universities

Olga Rodriguez, Jacob Jackson, and Marisol Cuellar Mejia

► Many first-year students at California's colleges and universities take remedial courses.

Remedial courses, also known as developmental or basic skills education, generally cover high school material and are aimed at students deemed unprepared for college-level work. These courses generally have the same tuition costs and structure as other college courses but do not confer credit toward a degree. All three public systems place students into remediation, but a majority of placements are at community colleges: eight in ten students at the California Community Colleges (CCC), three in ten at the California State University (CSU), and less than one in ten at the University of California (UC). (We focus mainly on CCC and CSU because of data constraints.)

► Students underrepresented in higher education are more likely to be in remediation.

At CSU, Latino and African American students are about twice as likely to be placed in a remedial class as their white and Asian American counterparts. At CCC, all groups enroll in remediation at high rates; however, Latino and African American students are more likely to enroll in remedial courses than their white and Asian American peers. What is more, Latinos and African Americans are also more likely to enroll in lower levels of remediation. Similar patterns occur with low-income students and their higher-income peers at both CSU and CCC.

► Students in remediation have poor outcomes.

Remedial courses add to the time it takes students to graduate, and students placed multiple levels below college-level courses require even more time to accumulate credits needed to complete a degree or transfer. CSU students in remediation are less likely than others to graduate and even less likely to do so on time. CCC students are less than half as likely to transfer.

► Placement in remedial courses is inconsistent.

Traditionally, standardized assessments have been used to determine placement in remedial courses. Assessments and cutoff scores are determined centrally at UC and CSU, while community colleges make these choices individually. Across all three systems, students can bypass placement tests by demonstrating college readiness through several other means, including standardized exams such as the SAT. But even then there is inconsistency across systems and CCC campuses. Consequently, the college a student attends will partly determine whether he or she is deemed ready for college-level courses.

► Many colleges are reforming placement policies ...

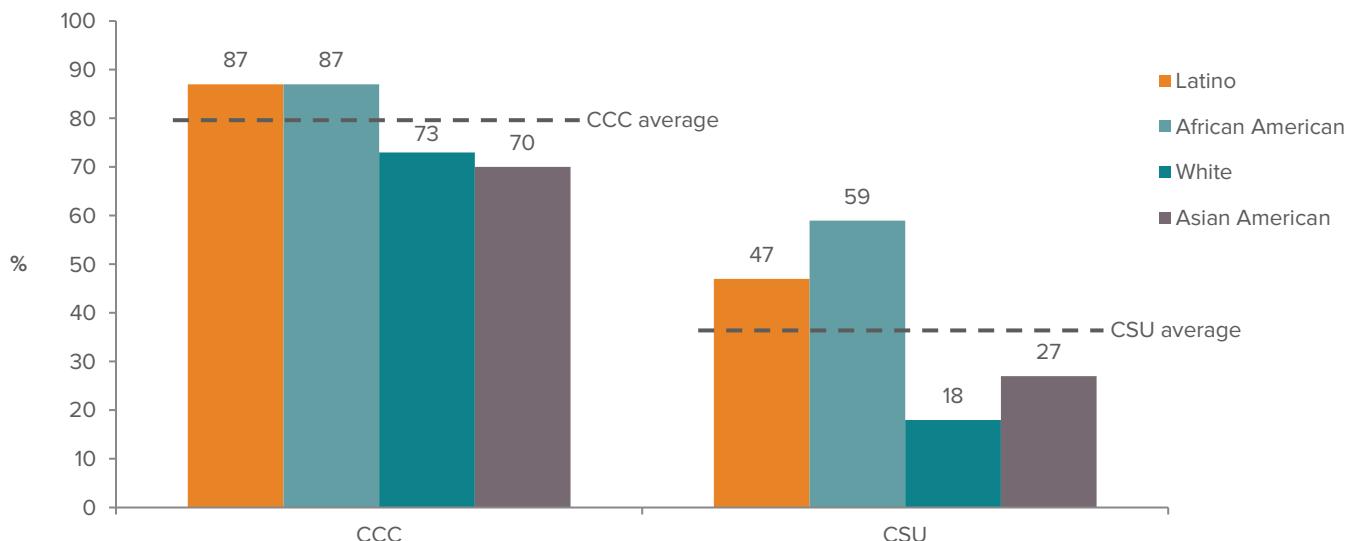
At both CCC and CSU reform efforts have focused on the use of high school records—in addition to, or instead of, standardized placement exams—to determine placement into college-level courses. CSU has eliminated the placement exam altogether and ordered that by 2018 all campuses rely solely on other measures of academic proficiency. CCC is also increasing the use of high school records for placement and moving toward a common placement test, albeit with locally determined placement policies.

► ... and remedial coursework.

Colleges are reforming remedial coursework in order to shorten the time students spend in remediation, to better align remediation with programs of study, and to place students into college courses sooner with additional support. CSU is ending remedial placements systemwide in 2018, while CCC is enacting reforms at some campuses. At both systems, a promising reform allows students to enroll in college-level courses while concurrently receiving necessary remedial support.



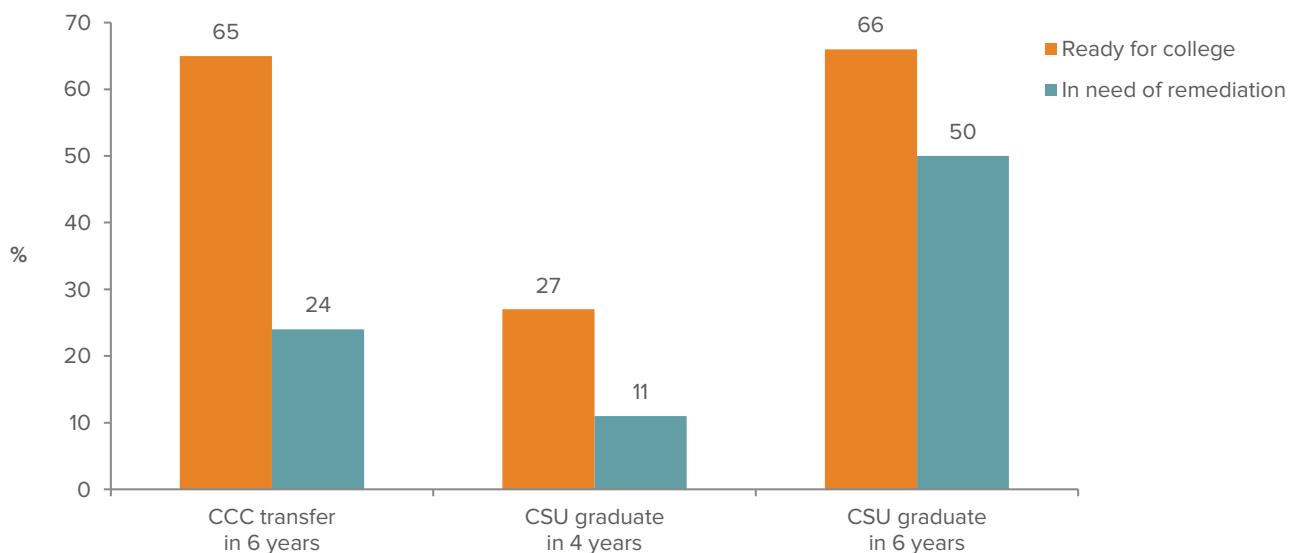
Underrepresented students are more likely to be in remediation



Source: Cuellar Mejia, et al., *Preparing Students for College Success in California's Community Colleges* (2016), CSU Board of Trustees Committee on Education Policy Report (2017).

Note: Based on 2009 entering freshmen for CCC and on the 2016 entering freshman at CSU.

Students enrolling in remediation generally have worse outcomes



Source: CSU Analytic Studies; CCC calculations from Cuellar Mejia, et al., *Preparing Students for College Success in California's Community Colleges* (2016).

Note: Based on 2009 entering freshmen.

Sources: For UC remediation rates see California Senate Committee on Education Hearing, *Status on Remedial Education in California: Barriers and Best Practices*, Stephen J. Handel (March 2017). For math placement policies see Rodriguez, et al., *Determining College Readiness in California's Community Colleges: A Survey of Assessment and Placement Policies* (2016) and Burdman, *Degrees of Freedom: Probing Math Placement Policies at California Colleges and Universities* (Learning Works and PACE, 2015). For information about the CSU placement and remediation reforms, see CSU Office of the Chancellor, Executive Order 110, (August 2017) and Executive Order 1100, Revised (August 2017).

Contact: rodriguez@ppic.org

Supported with funding from the Sutton Family Fund



PPIC

PUBLIC POLICY
INSTITUTE OF CALIFORNIA

PPIC.ORG