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Contact: Claudia Morain  
cmmorain@ucdavis.edu  
530-752-9841  
University of California - Davis

## Study finds college students better prepared

Freshmen entering California State University, Sacramento, are better prepared to tackle college-level work than they were in 2004, suggesting that a five-year-old statewide program to assess college readiness among high school juniors is paying off.

Those are the conclusions of a new study of California's Early Assessment Program by Michal Kurlaender, an assistant professor of education at UC Davis, and researchers at California State University, Sacramento (Sacramento State) and the University of Minnesota. The study will be presented on Friday, April 17, at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association in San Diego.

Kurlaender and her co-investigators found a 6-percentage point drop since 2004 in the number of entering Sacramento State freshmen who need remedial English, and a 4-percentage point drop in those who need extra classes in math.

Across the 23-campus CSU system, a decline of this magnitude would equal about 2,000 fewer students in remedial math and 3,000 fewer in remedial English courses, a substantial reduction.

At Sacramento State, the decline did not appear to be due to an increase in the number of unprepared students who opted not to apply to college, the researchers report.

"This is perhaps the best part of the story: Students and high schools appear to be using the information from the Early Assessment Program to act in the senior year of high school," Kurlaender said.

Historically, more than 60 percent of the nearly 40,000 first-time freshmen admitted to the CSU system each year have needed remedial classes in English, math, or both -- even though all admitted students have taken CSU-required courses and earned at least a "B" grade point average in high school.

To address the problem, the State Board of Education, California Department of Education and California State University instituted an Early Assessment Program in 2004 to offer high school juniors additional information about their college readiness in English and mathematics, with a goal of identifying gaps in time for students to work on them in their senior year.

"The Early Assessment Program is a really important and novel educational intervention because it provides students with information and empowers them to better prepare themselves for success in college," Kurlaender said.

Kurlaender's co-authors are Jessica Howell, an assistant professor of economics at Sacramento State, and Eric Grodsky, an assistant professor of sociology at the University of Minnesota.

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