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Predictive Validity of a Multiple-Choice Test for Placement in a Community College

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PREDICTIVE VALIDITY OF A MULTIPLE-CHOICE TEST FOR PLACEMENT IN A

COMMUNITY COLLEGE

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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Indiana University of Pennsylvania
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Title: Predictive Validity of a Multiple-Choice Test for Placement in a Community College

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Multiple-choice tests of punctuation and usage are used throughout the United States to assess the writing skills of new community college students in order to place them in either a basic writing course or first-year composition. To determine whether using the COMPASS Writing Test (CWT) is a valid placement at a community college, student test scores and grades in basic writing and the first-year composition courses from 2000 – 2005 were correlated. Students who scored 13-37 were told to enroll in Basic Writing 1 (BW1) in their first semester, Basic Writing 2 (BW2) in their second semester, and First-Year Composition 1 (FYC1) in their third semester. Of the students who followed this recommendation, 23% successfully completed FYC1. However, 39% of the students who scored 13-37 but skipped BW1 and began in BW2 successfully completed FYC1. Finally, 76% of the students who scored 13-37 but skipped both basic writing courses successfully completed FYC1. Students who scored 38-79 on CWT showed a similar pattern: Fifty percent of the students who followed the recommendation and enrolled in BW2 successfully completed FYC1, but 68% of the students who skipped BW2 and enrolled in FYC1 successfully completed that course. In comparison, there was an 80% completion rate in FYC1 for the students who scored 80-100 on the CWT.

The study also compared the success rates of Hispanic, Native American and White students. Using the Chi-square Test of Significance, it was found that Hispanic and Native American students had a significantly lower average CWT scores and success rates than White students. However, Hispanic and Native American students who scored 80-100 on the CWT had success rates for FYC1 similar to White students.

Finally, although the COMPASS Writing Test focuses exclusively on revision skills, the course outlines for BW1, BW2, and FYC1 emphasize a process approach to writing and the development of reading and critical thinking skills. Recommendations are: (a) community colleges should implement a placement test that is in line with the learning outcomes of their course outlines for both basic writing and FYC1, and (b) community colleges should create new developmental writing courses utilizing a studio model or learning communities to assist students who are not prepared for FYC1.