



MHEC 7th Annual Policy Summit
Ready or Not Here They Come
Ensuring the College Success of All Students

Summary of Curriculum and Academic Preparation: Session One

November 14-15, 2011, Iowa City, Iowa

Min Young Cha, University of Minnesota
Leah Reinert, Midwestern Higher Education Compact

The first session in the curriculum and academic preparation track of MHEC's 7th Annual Policy Summit introduced Wisconsin Center for the Advancement of Postsecondary Education's (WISCAPE) policy analyst, Elizabeth Vaade. April Hansen, director of Postsecondary Services at ACT, and Elaine Johnson, vice president of Academic Affairs and Workforce Development at the Illinois Community College Board, joined Vaade to discuss the college readiness issues of curriculum and academic preparation.

Vaade began by discussing the private and public benefits of increasing the number of individuals graduating with college degrees. These benefits include financial benefits to the economy and increased civic and tax revenue public benefits. By opening the discussion with an emphasis on positive solutions, Vaade quickly grasped the attention of the summit participants. She accentuated the importance of knowing that disparities and gaps still exist and continue to grow in education. First-generation, low-income, and minority students do not attend college or obtain college degrees at a growing rate. This student population also often requires remediation in the first year in college. The areas of math and science show the biggest gaps in college readiness and therefore are the areas with the greatest remediation needs.

ACT's April Hansen furthered the conversation by introducing ACT's efforts that seek to improve test scores and college readiness for all students. Although only 25% of all students who take the ACT meet the college readiness benchmarks on all four subjects, ACT is working on improving both student preparedness and access. More important, however, is decreasing the race/ethnicity gap in ACT scores and college readiness and success. Hansen pointed out three major gaps in the barriers to student access and success: aspirations, enrollment, and retention. As ACT continues to be a leader in assessing college readiness, seeking ways to improve student test scores and helping to decrease the achievement gap are critical issues to absolve.

Elaine Johnson from the Illinois Community College Board presented information about the Illinois College and Career Readiness Act (IL CCR Act), which was developed from a bill sponsored by Senator Edward Maloney. This bill was enacted to help students transition from high school to higher education, thus reducing the need for remedial education. In Illinois, 50% of first-time, full-time college students need remedial or developmental coursework. With the help of over 200 higher education institutions in the state, the data is being examined to determine the areas of assistance most needed to help students prepare for college and decrease their need for remedial education.

All three speakers provided suggestions and recommendations on how to increase college readiness and access. Each presentation provided information and data to support an increase in attention and effort to improving college readiness and degree completion. For example, Vaade encouraged session participants to start thinking creatively about the goal and interventions needed to increase college readiness and degree completion. Hansen urged those in postsecondary education promote efforts to inform high school students about taking the right courses in high school, to master the core curriculum, and she also suggested that more attention needs to be placed on assisting middle school students prepare for college. Johnson concluded that education needs to focus more on enriching the senior year of high school.

Concluding the session, the panel opened for questions from the summit participants. Several participants inquired about alternatives to the ACT for schools that cannot afford preparation tests and courses. Both Hansen and Johnson suggested that schools can collaborate with their local community colleges as a resource for assisting with student assessment tests.