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Research Report

Imperial Valley College ESL Cut Score Validation Using ACCUPLACER®

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Introduction

Gordon Associates, LLC was engaged to conduct analysis of data supplied by the college for the purpose of validating cut scores for placement into ESL courses using the ACCUPLACER® ESL tests. Imperial Valley College (IVC) staff provided an electronic file with student background information, demographics, and placements. Survey results were input to electronic files by Gordon Associates staff, and the survey forms were incinerated. Student files were combined, then the student identification was removed from each record.

Methodology

Placement survey results were compared with ACCUPLACER® score information for five levels of ESL courses using SPSS® statistical software. Students could be rated under-prepared, adequately prepared, or over-prepared. By definition, over-prepared students are judged ready for the level above that in which they were enrolled. All students rated over-prepared were evaluated as if they were rated adequately prepared for the next higher level. Over-prepared students in ESL 095 were ignored.

There are three tests in the ACCUPLACER® ESL series: Reading Skills (RS), Language Usage (LU), and Sentence Meaning (SM). Each score was analyzed separately for its relationship to the survey results. Then the scores were combined in various ways to help determine the most effective combination for use at IVC. In the tables below, combining the scores at (34% RS + 33% LU + 33% SM), and (35% RS + 40% LU + 25% SM) are illustrated. These proved to be the most effective combinations for student placement.

The optimum cut score was determined to be the point in the score distribution at which the fewest students would be rated over-prepared, and the number of adequately prepared students was at or near the maximum level. Each placement level was analyzed separately to determine the optimum admitting score.

Findings

The tables below illustrate the faculty and student responses to the survey as they relate to the ACCUPLACER® ESL score combinations. The Placement Accuracy level is the percentage of adequately prepared students who would be admitted at the suggested score level. The Over Prepared level is the percentage of students who are judged to be qualified for the course who would be denied access at the suggested cut score.

ESL Course Placement Validation, Imperial Valley College Faculty Response						
Course Level	**Optimum Score**					
	34% RC, 33% LU, 33% SM	**Placement Accuracy***	**% Over-Prepared****	**35% RC, 40% LU, 25% SM**	**Placement Accuracy***	**% Over-Prepared****
091	Minimum	N/A	N/A	Minimum	N/A	N/A
092	48	88%	4%	44	87%	4%
093	61	85%	5%	60	87%	4%
094	73	87%	3%	71	89%	4%
095	87	90%	0	84	89%	2%

Notes
* Percent of students who would be admitted at the optimum cut score who would be rated adequately prepared
** Percent of students at the lower level who would be rated under-prepared at the optimum cut score
*** No optimum cut score can be determined at this level. Only five percent of the students at the 094 level are rated over-prepared. All of them had very high scores.

ESL Course Placement Validation, Imperial Valley College Student Response						
Course Level	**Optimum Score**					
	34% RC, 33% LU, 33% SM	**Placement Accuracy**	**% Over Prepared**	**35% RC, 40% LU, 25% SM**	**Pla cement Accuracy***	**% Over-Prepared****
091	Minimum	N/A	N/A	Minimum	N/A	N/A
092	45	84%	4%	45	84%	5%
093	58	86%	5%	58	85%	3%
094	70	88%	2%	73	85%	2%
095	83	91%	0%	84	89%	1%

Notes
* Percent of students who would be admitted at the optimum cut score who would be rated adequately prepared
** Percent of students at the lower level who would be rated under-prepared at the optimum cut score
*** No optimum cut score can be determined at this level. Only five percent of the students at the 094 level are rated over-prepared. All of them had very high scores.

Disproportionate Impact

There was not sufficient ethnic variation among the surveyed students to compare the overall effect for each group. Placement accuracy appears to be evenly distributed, but no statistical significance can be attached to any one group. Upon visual examination of the data, no individual ethnic identity stands out as having more or fewer under-prepared ratings.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Cut scores can be determined at which ACCUPLACER places students at all levels of ESL with acceptable accuracy. There is not a significant difference between the two combination methods shown in terms of placement accuracy.

> Recommendation: Choose between the two combination methods and set cut scores accordingly.

This analysis should be followed with another study within two years. Although no disproportionate impact could be determined here, it cannot be shown that none actually exists. A larger sample will be necessary to make that determination. Although the optimum cut scores were determined from the data and seem stable, a new data set may yield different results. A larger sample should be used if possible.