

FAQ – English and AB 705

What Is AB 705? Why Was It Passed?

Recently research has been mounting that assessment tests, our traditional placement method, have been less effective than previously thought. In July 2015, the Community College Research Center (CCRC) published [“Improving the Accuracy of Remedial Placement,”](#) which found underplacement was severe and that “a third of students assigned to remedial English could have passed college-level courses with a B or better.” Around the same time, ACT canceled its Compass test, as noted [in Inside Higher Ed](#), citing, “A thorough analysis of customer feedback, empirical evidence and postsecondary trends led us to conclude that ACT Compass is not contributing as effectively to student placement and success as it had in the past.”

Locally, we were finding out similar news in our own placement. Specifically, [our own assessment of English placement](#) found that there was significant disproportionate impact on students of color who were much more likely to be placed into below-transfer-level coursework.

The following year California, with the collaboration of the RP Group and Educational Results Partnership, published their revised rule sets for English, [“English Placement Models for the Multiple Measures Assessment Project — Phase 2,”](#) and this corroborated the tale that other methods were more effective at placing students, particularly the use of high school GPA (HSGPA). This research helped shift the focus away from skill demonstrations and toward placement methods that focus on factors that predict success in the transfer-level course.

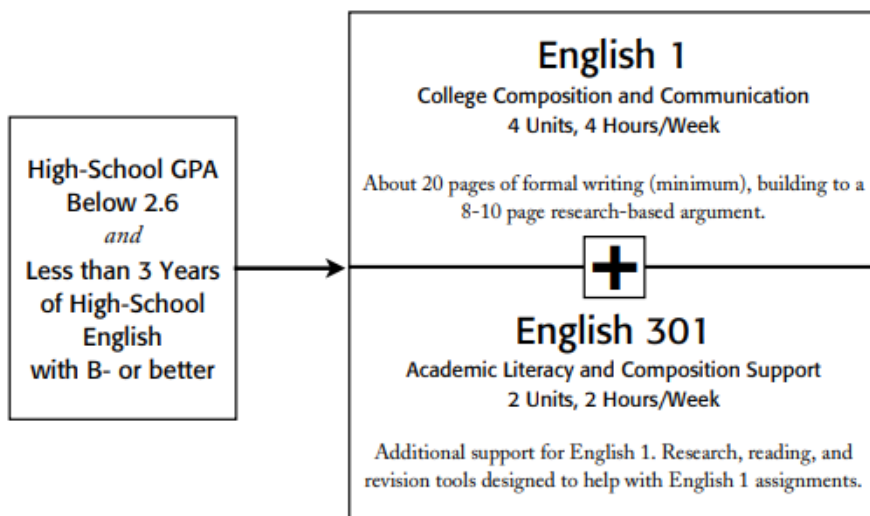
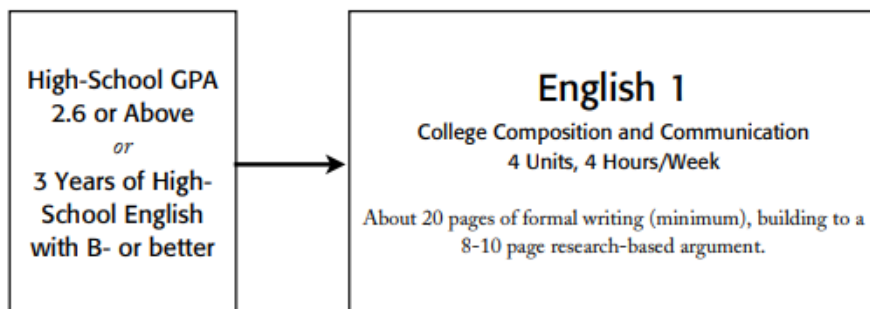
As a result of this mounting evidence, in 2017 the California Legislature unanimously passed [AB 705](#). This mandated that colleges use HSGPA, coursework, and/or high school grades to place students, and it required colleges to “maximize the probability that a student will enter and complete transfer-level coursework in English and mathematics within a one-year timeframe.”

How Will Students Be Placed Now?

This last July the Chancellor’s Office, which guides colleges and interprets legislation, [provided guidance](#) that colleges should use HSGPA to place students into transfer-level English, with or without corequisite support. The guidance was broken down as follows:

High School Performance Metric for English	Recommended AB 705 Placement for English
HSGPA \geq 2.6 Success rate = 78.6%	Transfer-Level English Composition No additional academic or concurrent support required
HSGPA 1.9 - 2.6 Success rate = 57.7%	Transfer-Level English Composition Additional academic and concurrent support recommended
HSGPA < 1.9 Success rate = 42.6%	Transfer-Level English Composition Additional academic and concurrent support strongly recommended

The English department, using the language of AB 705, decided to choose slightly more permissive placement rules, using a disjunctive rule for HSGPA and high school English grades. Starting Fall 2019, COS students will be placed into English according to the following rules:



Has the English Sequence Changed?

Yes, there really isn't a sequence anymore. All students will be placed into ENGL 001. However, some students, based upon multiple measures, will be required to take a corequisite support course, ENGL 301, to help them succeed in the transfer-level course. Others may choose to enroll in the support course if they feel they need to.

Will There Be Any Below-Transfer-Level Courses?

Yes, we will be keeping ENGL 261 on the books, but we cannot direct or place students into this course. We may keep a section or two of these courses for potential student need. However, that need has not been clearly identified, and all future students will be placed into transfer-level English.

Can We Still Encourage Students to Take Remedial English?

No, we cannot. The guidance from the Chancellor’s Office is clear in regards to placement: students have the best chance of completing transfer-level course work in a year if they place directly into transfer-level English. As well, we would need to also demonstrate that students are highly unlikely to succeed in the transfer-level course.

Further, this change provides us an opportunity to close the equity gaps we’ve discovered in our past placement procedures.

In September 2018, the California Legislature passed [AB 1805](#). This bill follows up AB 705, requiring colleges to publish placement information and communicate that information to students. Probably the most important piece of information from this addition to Education Code is that colleges should “[i]nform students of their rights to access transfer-level coursework and academic credit English as a second language (ESL) coursework, and of the multiple measures placement policies developed by the community college, as provided in Section 78213” (emphasis mine). This, in addition to AB 705, greatly limits us from encouraging students to take below-transfer-level coursework, and colleges that do not comply will put their Student Equity and Achievement Program funds in jeopardy.

Can This Be Good for Students?

While these changes may understandably cause concern, it is important to remember that students who place below transfer level are at a serious disadvantage for completion, and historically we regularly placed 60+% of our students into below-transfer-level courses:

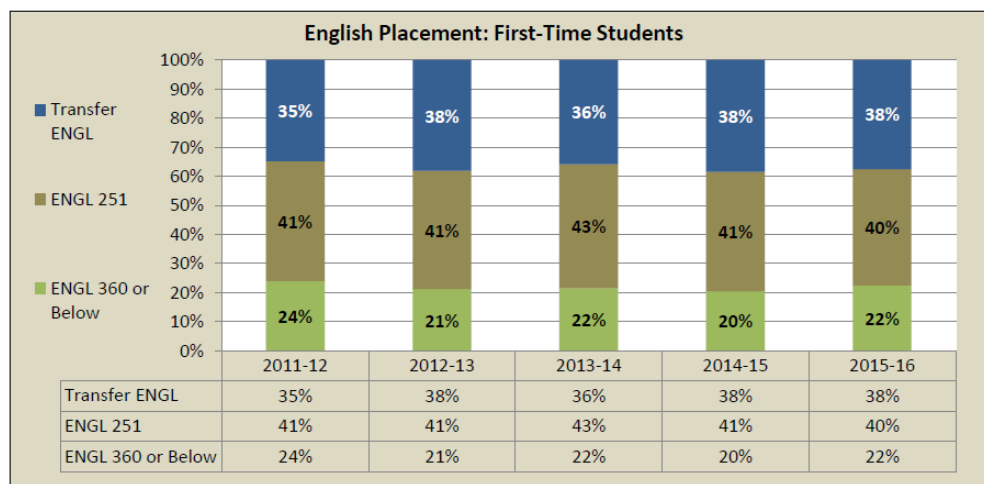


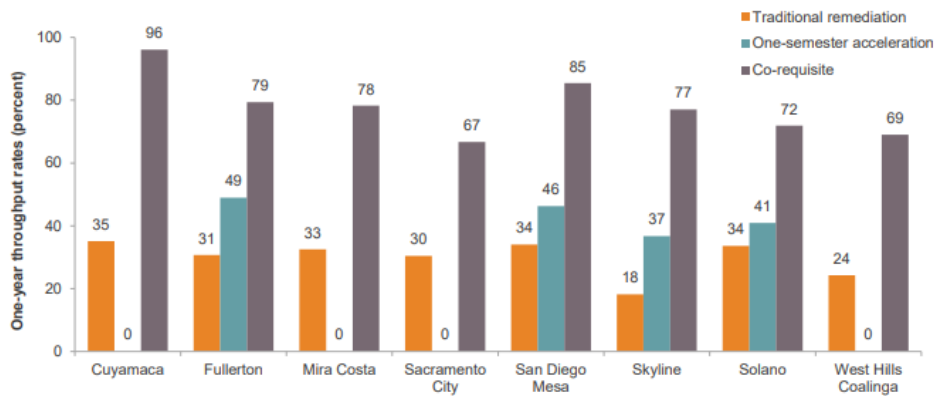
Figure 1: Source: COS Office of Research, Planning, and Institutional Effectiveness

And, as noted in our own [English Assessment & Placement Program Evaluation](#), those students we placed below transfer level were predominately students of color.

The goal with these changes is that access to transfer-level coursework will help us address completion and equity problems, as demonstrated in the recent [PPIC report on California's educational reforms](#). Specifically, the potential results can be seen in these two charts:

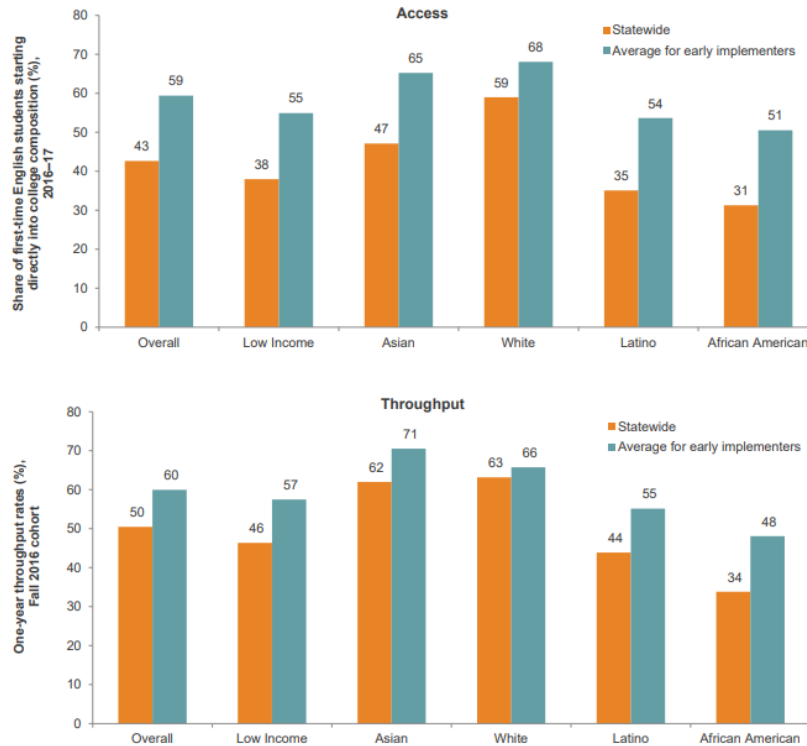
Completion of Composition

FIGURE 4
Co-requisite students completed college composition at more than twice the rate of students who started in traditional remediation



Closing Equity Gaps

FIGURE 7
Access and throughput in transfer-level English are higher than the state average, but the differences are less marked



We hope to accomplish similar results here at COS. Currently, only ~37% of students in our ENGL 251 and 261 classes complete ENGL 001 in a year (Fall 2016 – Summer 2017), and that

is with 60 – 70% success rates in those classes (repeats included) and with an extra, optional term. We think we can improve upon this with these AB 705 changes, in particular by making access to transfer-level coursework more equitable.

What Happens If Students Fail?

Yes, some students will not pass the first time. These changes are not a silver bullet. We anticipate that some students will not pass the course the first time around, so they'll have options to retake the course. We'll also be keeping track of the data surrounding those students so that we can make future adjustments. While failure is a reality in any course, it is important to remember how many students we also lose in the developmental sequence. Our goal is to lose fewer of those students before they complete ENGL 001.

What If a Course Has a Prerequisite for ENGL 251, 261, or 360?

Because all students will be placed into transfer-level courses, they will satisfy any prerequisites for ENGL 251, 261, or 360. Further, starting in Spring 2019, ENGL 360 will no longer be offered, and in Summer 2019 ENGL 251 will no longer be offered.

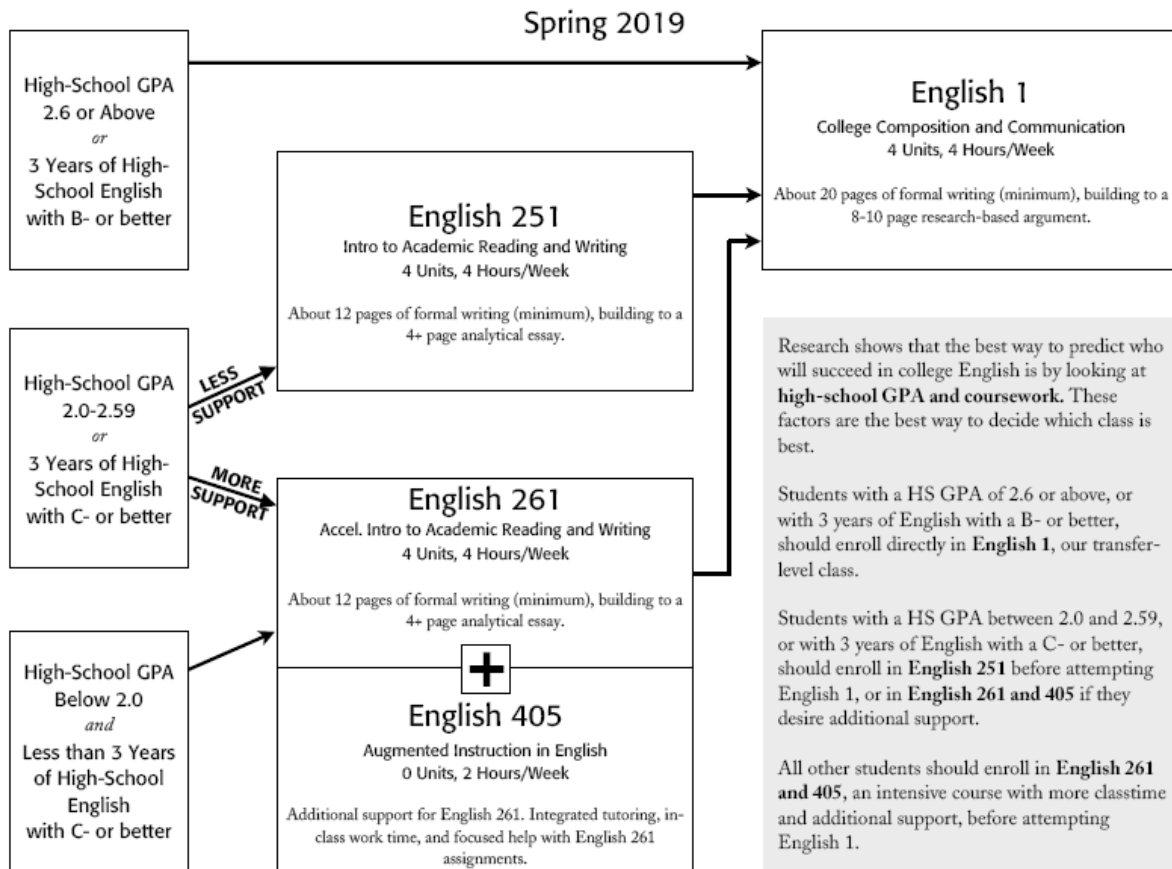
To address the need for student support, departments could choose a variety of ways to help students in their programs, including sequencing courses, supplemental instruction (SI), utilizing tutorial services, or finding other ways to offer concurrent support for students. Additionally, the English department would happily work with any faculty members to explore ways to support reading and writing as students move through different disciplines.

What About Students Currently in the English Sequence?

Fall 2018 will be the last semester we will offer ENGL 360. This will prevent students from registering for ENGL 360 next semester and possibly getting trapped in the below-transfer sequence. Students who may be unsuccessful in ENGL 360 this semester can register for ENGL 261 next semester and continue their progress toward ENGL 001. Students unsuccessful in ENGL 251 this semester can retake ENGL 251 and continue on in the sequence in Fall 2019.

We have also changed the grading for ENGL 251 and 261 from **A – F** to **A, B, C, NP**. This will allow students who are successful to continue their progress in the sequence. Students who are unsuccessful, however, would receive an NP, which would not affect their GPA, important since they may not be able to retake the class in the future. These students could then re-place according to the new placement guidelines the following semester.

In addition to the changes in the sequence, in Spring 2019 we will also be doing a “soft” roll out of new placement procedures. These new guidelines might also be a way for students to re-place according to multiple measure guidelines:



This FAQ is geared specifically for structures at COS. For further information, see the [Chancellor's Office FAQs](#).