

Answers to Frequently Asked Questions for Faculty and Staff

This document addresses the most common questions that arise when a college decides to use Multiple Measures Assessment (MMA) for course placement. In lieu of relying on a placement test, MMA draws from multiple measures that can provide a more comprehensive view of student performance over time and give students multiple avenues to demonstrate college readiness. Questions are grouped according to the stakeholder group for whom they will be most relevant. Additional resources to support the use of MMA can be found in the [CAPR MMA Toolkit](#), including guidance on how to [develop a communication strategy for MMA](#). These FAQs are meant to support discussions with faculty and staff. The responses should be edited as needed to make them relevant and accurate with regard to the specifics of your institution's placement context and plans.

General Inquiries

Why is the college making the decision to use MMA for course placement? Does MMA work?

- The decision to adopt MMA varies by college and is driven by factors like policy changes and local decisions. The most compelling reason to use MMA is the evidence showing that it can be an effective way to increase access to college courses. Research also shows that students who are bumped up—that is, students placed into college-level courses with MMA who would have taken developmental courses otherwise—are more likely to complete college-level courses in both English and math. A summary of the research about MMA is available [here](#).

How will we know which measures to use?

- Years of study have shown that high school GPA is the best available predictor of student performance in college. This remains true across different high schools and even [when students have been out of school](#) for several years. We thus recommend that MMA systems prioritize high school transcript information during placement. The use of other measures in addition to high school GPA increases the accuracy of placements, but not by much.
- Other placement options can be used for students who do not have a high school GPA or other measures required for a given set of placement rules. One option, used as a supplement to MMA in California, is informed self-placement (ISP). ISP offers students information and guidance about available courses in a given subject and the opportunity to determine their own placement. A [discussion of the research on ISP](#) and a [brief that focuses on ISP practices](#) in the field are available in the [CAPR MMA Toolkit](#).

How can we put MMA into practice?

- One challenge with MMA systems is how to gather information on placement measures. To the extent that existing measures are incorporated into an MMA process, they can remain largely unchanged. Several methods exist for collecting high school GPA, including reviewing official and unofficial high school transcripts, consulting state or district databases, and asking students to report their GPA. Studies of student-reported GPAs show that they are quite [accurate](#).
- The process of generating a placement from the different measures varies based on available resources and the placement criteria. [Studies have shown](#) that simpler MMA systems based on a set of rules or cutoff scores can be just as effective as complex systems based on algorithms or ratings. Simpler systems are also much cheaper and easier to implement. Similarly, automated processes, in which the placement platform or a student information system generates a placement based on MMA decision rules, require less time from faculty or staff responsible for sharing placements with students than manual processes.

Can MMA help us reach our equity goals?

- The effect of MMA on equity gaps is not clear. [One study](#) reported higher enrollments and completions of college-level courses for all demographic groups, which improves outcomes for all students but may not close equity gaps. [Another study](#) found some narrowing of equity gaps in English placement rates but not consistently in college-level completion rates. These observations point to the importance of designing placement systems with the goal of achieving equitable outcomes across student groups. Guidance on how to do this is available in a CAPR brief entitled [The Next Phase of Placement Reform: Moving Toward Equity-Centered Practice](#).

Common Questions from Faculty

Will MMA affect the types of courses the college offers?

- MMA may require the college to change the number of sections offered for each type of course (e.g., developmental, corequisite, or college-level) in a subject. The number of students affected by MMA in any given course depends on the characteristics of the MMA system; when summed across several courses, this may call for additional sections of gateway math and English. Other initiatives implemented alongside MMA (e.g., corequisites) may also require changes to the types of courses offered by the college.

How will MMA affect who is in my class?

- The number of students whose placements change as a result of MMA is a function of the placement rules adopted by the college. For instance, [a recent evaluation](#) of MMA across five community colleges in Minnesota and Wisconsin looked at outcome data for over 12,000 students for English and more than 15,000 students for math. Approximately 15% of students were bumped up in each subject. This equates to about 1,800 students bumped up in total across the colleges. At the classroom level, this is likely to be no more than a few bumped-up students in each class, with many classes having none. However, the system under evaluation adopted a rather conservative approach to MMA. Those interested in

substantially increasing access to college-level courses can lower cutoff scores or couple MMA with corequisite reform. Corequisite remediation pairs a college-level course with a developmental component like tutoring or additional class time. In this case, MMA can be used to determine which students should receive additional learning support.

Will bumped-up students be up to the task? Will instruction in college-level courses need to be slower or adjusted in other ways?

- The research shows that pass rates can dip slightly but remain relatively consistent under MMA, with a difference of **about 2-3%** between MMA and traditional placement methods. Meanwhile, a greater *number* of students tend to successfully complete college-level courses when MMA is used. Instructors concerned about the performance of students in their class due to multiple measures can provide all of their students with information on how to improve their performance and share information about available resources such as writing centers or tutoring. Institutions can support faculty in making the transition to MMA by providing time and resources for professional development focused on instruction.

Common Questions from Faculty and Staff

Will I have input on the design of the system and decisions about minimum GPAs and/or other cutoffs?

- Gathering feedback from faculty and staff who participate in the placement process is a recommended practice during the design and implementation of MMA. The degree to which this occurs will vary according to specific local contexts.

How will MMA change the nature of advising?

- Advising sessions need not go into extreme detail about the specific measures that determined a student's placement. It is reasonable to inform students that multiple measures were considered when determining their placement and to provide examples of those measures (high school GPA, transcript information, and SAT or ACT scores, for example). Advisors should have access to these measures for each student along with any local policies on retesting or appealing placement decisions, and they should be prepared to discuss these with their students. Additional information on MMA advising and communicating with students about their placement can be found in the tool [Informing Students About Their Placement](#).

[Back to the Toolkit](#)