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# Placement Tests, Initial Enrollments, and Student Outcomes in the Technical College System of Georgia

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# Placement tests and student outcomes in the Technical College System of Georgia

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Institutions in the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) offer programs that lead to technical certificates of credit, diplomas, and associate degrees. TCSG uses placement tests, such as the ACCUPLACER, to direct students into courses for these programs. We analyzed how placement test results and other student characteristics are associated with students' program choices, program completion, and post-program outcomes.

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## What did we learn?

Women, White students, older students, and students without high school diplomas have high rates of enrollment in certificate programs. Men, Black students, and economically disadvantaged students have high rates in diploma programs. Younger and economically disadvantaged students have high rates in associate degree programs.

Placement test scores are only moderately associated with program enrollments and certificate and degree program completion. Retaking tests, which many students do, appears to reduce the impact of placement criteria on initial program enrollments.

Initial program level is an important predictor of whether students complete a credential and what type of credential they obtain. However, a plurality of students in each program earns a certificate, with many students who earn diplomas or associate degrees also earning certificates.

## What are the policy implications?

Placement test criteria do not appear to be a substantial barrier to program entry but also only provide limited information about students' chances of academic success.

Advice on students' initial course placements needs to consider their circumstances holistically.

TCSG institutions encourage diploma and degree students to organize their coursework so that they obtain "embedded" certificates as they complete their primary programs. This increases students' success in obtaining marketable credentials.

The high rates of some types of students in particular programs, especially men, Black students, and economically disadvantaged students in diploma programs, should be examined more closely.

## What questions did we answer?

1. What are the characteristics of students who enroll in TCSG's certificate, diploma, and associate degree programs?
2. Do placement test results and criteria influence program enrollment and subsequent student outcomes?
3. How does initial program enrollment relate to progression within TCSG, including retention, academic progress, and program completion?

## What data did we use?

We analyzed student records for beginning students who first enrolled in TCSG certificate, diploma, or associate degree programs between the Fall 2013 and Summer 2020 terms. The data included students' scores on academic placement tests, demographic and economic characteristics, program enrollments, academic outcomes, and post-program employment and education outcomes.

## Why is this issue important?

Placement tests are frequently used by technical colleges and other post-secondary institutions. The test results can help ensure that students have the math and language skills they need to succeed academically. However, test-based criteria can also be an obstacle to enrolling in programs or initiating necessary coursework.

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## Want to learn more?

A technical report is available at  
[gpl.gsu.edu/gpl-publications](http://gpl.gsu.edu/gpl-publications)

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The **Child & Family Policy Lab (CFPL)** is a component of the **Georgia Policy Labs (GPL)**, a research collaboration between Georgia State University and a variety of government agencies committed to leveraging the power of data to drive policy and programmatic decisions that lift children, students, and families—especially those experiencing vulnerabilities.

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