

Institutional Effectiveness in Fostering Student Retention and Success in First Year

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Abstract : The objective of this study is to examine the relationship between college readiness characteristics and learning outcome assessment scores. About this, it is important to examine the first-year retention and success rate. In order to undertake this study, it will be necessary to look at proficiency levels on general and domain-specific knowledge and skills reflected on national benchmark test scores (NBT), in-college interventions and course-taking patterns. Preliminary results based on data from more than 1000 students suggest that there is a positive association between NBT scores and students' 1st-year college GPA and their retention status. For example, 63% of students with a proficient level of math skills in the NBT had the highest level of GPA at the end of 1st-year of college in comparison to 56% of those who started with a primary or intermediate level, respectively. The retention rates among those with proficiency levels were also higher than those with basic or intermediate levels (98% vs. 93% and 88%, respectively). By the end of 3rd year in college, students with intermediate or proficient entering NBT math skills had 7% and 8% of dropout rate, compared to 14% for those started at primary level; a greater percentage of students qualified by the end of 3rd-year qualified among proficient students than that among intermediate or basic level students (50% vs. 44% and 27% respectively). The findings of this study added knowledge to the field in South Africa and are expected to help stakeholders and policymakers to better understand college learning and challenges for students with disadvantaged backgrounds and provide empirical evidence in support of related practices and policies.

Keywords : assessment, data analysis, performance, proficiency, policy, student success

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