

Basic Skill Assessment Requirements for Placement into Courses and Programs at Iowa Community Colleges

Iowa Department of Education
Division of Community Colleges and Workforce Preparation
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Summary:

In the summer of 2007, the Iowa Department of Education surveyed Iowa's 15 community colleges to gain information about each institution's basic skill assessment requirements for placement into courses and programs. The survey asked what basic skill assessment(s) each institution uses, whether developmental course placement was mandatory, and what scores students needed to obtain to avoid being required or urged to take developmental courses in math, science, and reading. Additionally, staff members at each college were asked what the testing requirements are for students' enrolled full time in high school that are taking community college classes. Below is a summary of the results followed by a table containing the results for each institution.

Survey Results:

Colleges requiring a basic skills assessment (e.g. Compass, Accuplacer) for enrollment – 15/15

Colleges with mandatory developmental course placement – 10*/15

* In Iowa Valley Community College District, Marshalltown Community College is piloting mandatory developmental course placement. However, currently developmental course placement is not mandatory at Ellsworth Community College.

Compass scores below which students are required or strongly encouraged to take courses below the college level:

Reading – 47, 60, 61, 66, 71, 79, 80, 80, 81, 81, 81, 82, 82, 84

Mean = 74

Median = 80

Mode = 81

Scores for colleges with mandatory developmental course placement (including Marshalltown Community College):

47 (only for science courses), 60, 61, 66, 71, 79, 80, 80, 82, 84 Average - 71

Scores for colleges strongly encouraging developmental course placement (including Ellsworth Community College):

81, 81, 81, 82, 84 Average - 82

Notes: Western Iowa Tech Community College reported only Accuplacer scores and was not included. See endnotes for more details.

Continued – Survey Results:

Writing – 42, 55, 55, 58 59, 62, 65, 65, 70, 70, 70, 70, 77

Mean = 63

Median = 63.5

Mode = 70

Scores for colleges with mandatory developmental course placement (including Marshalltown Community College):

42, 55, 55, 58, 59, 65, 70, 70, 77 Average - 61

Scores for colleges strongly encouraging developmental course placement (including Ellsworth Community College):

58, 62, 65, 70, 70 Average – 65

Notes: Western Iowa Tech Community College reported only Accuplacer scores and was not included. Southeastern Community College uses a composite of the Compass score and a writing sample score. See endnotes for more details.

Math – A summary of math scores is not possible because of inconsistent reporting of scores.

**Basic Skill Assessment Requirements for Placement into Courses
and Programs at Iowa Community Colleges**

College	Is a basic skills assessment such as the ASSET or COMPASS tests a requirement for enrollment?	If a test is taken upon admission, what are the cutoff scores? What are the minimum scores students must receive before being urged/required to take college level courses? What are the testing requirements for high school students?	Is developmental course placement mandatory?
Northeast Iowa Community College (NICC)	Yes. NICC offers Accuplacer's CPT but also accepts Asset, Compass, and ACT scores from other colleges.	There is no cutoff score for admission to the college. However, some health programs have cutoff scores (which vary). Students with deficient scores are not immediately admitted into those programs. Cutoff scores below which students are required or strongly encouraged to take developmental courses before enrolling in college level courses are: For reading (suggested): Accuplacer, 66; ACT, 18; Asset, 40; Compass, 79. For writing: Accuplacer, 8; ACT, 21; Asset, 45; Compass, 77. For math: Accuplacer, 75 (elementary algebra), 50 (college level math); ACT, 22 (for college algebra); Asset, 44 (algebra portion); Compass, 54 (algebra portion). Students enrolled in high school (e.g. under the Post Secondary Enrollment Options program) must meet the same requirements as other applicants (i.e. take Accuplacer CPT or submit ACT or Compass test scores).	Yes for math and writing, no for reading. Students are allowed to review and re-test and the highest of test scores in each area is used.
North Iowa Area Community College (NIACC)	Yes. ACT or COMPASS.	There is no cutoff score for admission to the college. Cutoff scores below which students are required to take developmental courses before enrolling in college level courses are: For writing: ACT, 16; Compass, 53. For math: ACT, 18; Compass 76 (pre-algebra level), 40 (algebra). The ENRICH Program is required for students with scores below the following and a high school GPA of 2.0 or lower: For reading: ACT, 16; COMPASS, 66 For writing: ACT, 13; COMPASS, 55 For math: ACT, 16; COMPASS, 49 (pre-algebra) Students enrolled in high school must meet the same requirements as other applicants (take the Compass test or submit other scores).	Yes.

College	Is a basic skills assessment such as the ASSET or COMPASS tests a requirement for enrollment?	If a test is taken upon admission, what are the cutoff scores? What are the minimum scores students must receive before being urged/required to take college level courses? What are the testing requirements for high school students?	Is developmental course placement mandatory?
Iowa Lakes Community College (ILCC)	Yes. ACT, Asset, or Compass.	There is no cutoff score for admission to the college. Cutoff scores below which students are required to take developmental courses before enrolling in college level courses are: For reading: ACT, 15; Asset, 35; Compass, 61. For writing: ACT, 17; Asset 39; Compass, 59. For math: ACT, 19; Asset, 43 (numerical), 32 (elementary algebra), 30 (college algebra); Compass, 54 (pre-algebra), 41 (algebra). Students enrolled in high school must take the Compass test or parts of the test related to the college course they plan to take (i.e. students enrolling in a college math course could take only the math portion of the test; students enrolling in a composition course could take only the writing portion; students enrolling in any other college course could take only the reading portion).	Yes.
Northwest Iowa Community College (NCC)	Yes. ACT, Asset, or Compass.	There is no cutoff score for admission to the college. However, some programs have cutoff scores. Cutoff scores below which students are required to take developmental courses before enrolling in college level courses are: For reading: Not used except when students plan to enroll in science courses in which case they need a minimum Compass score of 47. For writing: Compass, 42. For math: Compass 24 (algebra). Students enrolled in high school must meet the same requirements as other applicants (take the Compass test and submit transcripts).	Yes.

College	Is a basic skills assessment such as the ASSET or COMPASS tests a requirement for enrollment?	If a test is taken upon admission, what are the cutoff scores? What are the minimum scores students must receive before being urged/required to take college level courses? What are the testing requirements for high school students?	Is developmental course placement mandatory?
Iowa Central Community College (ICCC)	Yes. ACT, SAT, Asset, or Compass.	There is no cutoff score for admission to the college. However, health programs have cutoff scores. Cutoff scores below which students are required to take developmental courses before enrolling in college level courses are: For reading: ACT, 18; Asset, 40; Compass, 80. For writing: ACT, 18; Asset, 40; Compass, 65. For math: ACT, 20; Asset 46; Compass, 51 or 64 depending on which math portion is taken (an exception is made for students receiving a grade of “C” in Fundamentals of Algebra). Students taking college classes while in high school must present scores to take math and English courses. ITED scores are used if the student has not taken other tests, however, most present ASSET scores because the college goes to high schools and tests students interested in “early bird” classes.	Yes.
Iowa Valley Community College District (IVCCD)	Yes. Compass, or ACT.	There is no cutoff score for admission to the college. However, some programs have entry requirements. Cutoff scores below which students are required or strongly encouraged to take developmental courses before enrolling in college level courses are: For reading: ACT, 18; Compass, 84. For writing: ACT, 14; Compass, 58. For math: ACT, 23; Compass, 81 (college algebra). Students enrolled in high school are screened by their guidance counselors and must have a certain GPA depending upon the high school before they are admitted into PSEO courses. No tests are required for high school students. Additionally, high school students must submit a form from their high school counselor and a parent (if they are under 18).	Yes and No. Marshalltown Community College is piloting mandatory course placement but Ellsworth Community College has not.

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Hawkeye Community College (HCC)	Yes. Compass or ACT.	There is no cutoff score for admission to the college. However, some programs and courses require certain scores. Cutoff scores below which students are strongly encouraged to take developmental courses before enrolling in college level courses are: For reading: ACT, 19; Compass, 82. For writing: ACT, 19; Compass, 65. For math: ACT, 19; Compass, 42. For students enrolled in high school, the requirements are the same as for high school/GED graduates.	No.
Eastern Iowa Community College District (EICCD)	Yes. Compass or ACT.	There is no cutoff score for admission to the college. However, some programs such as nursing have cutoff scores (which vary) Cutoff scores below which students are required to take developmental courses before enrolling in college level courses are: For reading: ACT, 14; Compass 80. For writing: ACT, 15; Compass 55. For math: ACT, 19; Compass 50. For students enrolled in high school, the same testing requirements apply as with other students. Additionally, high school students must submit a letter from their high school guidance counselor for fall or spring semesters; and a parental signature for all semesters (if they are under 18).	Yes.
Kirkwood Community College (KCC)	Yes. Compass, Asset, or ACT.	There is no cutoff score for admission to the college. However, some programs such as nursing have cutoff scores (which vary). Cutoff scores below which students are required to take developmental courses before enrolling in college level courses are: For reading: ACT, 19; Compass, 82. For writing: ACT, 18; Compass, 70. For math: ACT, 22; Compass scores vary. For students enrolled in high school, the same testing requirements apply as with other students. Additionally, high school students must submit a letter from their high school guidance counselor and a parent (if they are under 18).	Yes.

College	Is a basic skills assessment such as the ASSET or COMPASS tests a requirement for enrollment?	If a test is taken upon admission, what are the cutoff scores? What are the minimum scores students must receive before being urged/required to take college level courses? What are the testing requirements for high school students?	Is developmental course placement mandatory?
Des Moines Area Community College (DMACC)	Yes. Compass, Asset, or ACT.	There are no cutoff scores for general admission. However, some programs (e.g. nursing) and courses require certain scores. Cutoff scores below which students are strongly encouraged to take developmental courses before enrolling in college level courses are: For reading: ACT, 19; Compass, 81 For writing: ACT, 19; Compass, 70 For math: ACT, 19; Compass, 49 (algebra) For students enrolled in high school, testing is usually not required. However, students must have the recommendation of their guidance counselor and parental permission (if they are under age 18).	No. Although the idea of doing so has been debated in recent years.
Western Iowa Tech Community College (WITCC)	Yes. The Accuplacer CPT must be taken unless students have received an ACT composite score of 22 or higher.	There is no cutoff score for general admission. However, some programs have cutoff scores (which vary). Students with deficient scores are not immediately admitted into the program. These programs include all allied health programs, business, police science, and childcare supervision/management. Cutoff scores below which students are strongly encouraged to take developmental courses before enrolling in college level courses are: For reading: Accuplacer, 87. For writing: Accuplacer, 86. For math: Accuplacer, 69 (elementary algebra), 29 (college math). For students enrolled in high school while taking college courses, testing is not required though high school guidance counselor recommendations are required. However, WITCC is piloting using the Accuplacer CPT for students at one high school and may extent it to others in the future.	No. However, students are “strongly” or “very strongly” encouraged to take the courses if their scores are deficient.

College	Is a basic skills assessment such as the ASSET or COMPASS tests a requirement for enrollment?	If a test is taken upon admission, what are the cutoff scores? What are the minimum scores students must receive before being urged/required to take college level courses? What are the testing requirements for high school students?	Is developmental course placement mandatory?
Iowa Western Community College (IWCC)	Yes. Compass, Asset, ACT, or SAT. Those entering computer programs are required to take an in-house computer programming assessment test.	There is no cutoff for general admission. However, some programs have cutoff scores (which vary). Students with deficient scores are not immediately admitted into the program. Among the programs with cutoff requirements are health occupation programs. Cutoff scores below which students are required to take developmental courses before enrolling in college level courses are: For reading: ACT, 16; Asset, 38; Compass, 71. For writing: ACT, 20; Asset, 41; Compass, 70. For math: ACT, 24; Asset, 50 (numerical), 36 (algebra); Compass, 66 (algebra). High School students are required to submit a copy of their high school transcripts (to date) and a letter of permission signed by the high school principal or guidance counselor.	Yes.
Southwestern Community College (SWCC)	Yes. Compass must be taken unless the student has a composite ACT score of 19 or higher.	There is no cutoff score for general admission. However, the nursing program requires minimum scores for admission. Cutoff scores below which students are strongly encouraged to take developmental courses before enrolling in college level courses are: For reading: ACT, 19; Asset, 41; Compass, 81. For writing: ACT, 19; Asset, 41; Compass, 70. For math: ACT, 19; Asset, 41; Compass, 66 (algebra). High school students follow the same testing requirements as other students.	No. Students are allowed to sign an "Acceptance of Responsibility" form and take other courses. However, students are "strongly advised" to take the courses if their scores are deficient.

College	Is a basic skills assessment such as the ASSET or COMPASS tests a requirement for enrollment?	If a test is taken upon admission, what are the cutoff scores? What are the minimum scores students must receive before being urged/required to take college level courses? What are the testing requirements for high school students?	Is developmental course placement mandatory?
Indian Hills Community College (IHCC)	Yes. Compass must be taken unless the student has a high enough ACT score (broken down by section).	There is no cutoff score for general admission. However, some health programs use cutoff scores for screening purposes. Cutoff scores below which students are strongly encouraged to take developmental courses before enrolling in college level courses are: For reading: Compass, 81. For writing: Compass, 62. For math: Compass, 46. Students enrolled in high school follow the same procedure as other applicants (COMPASS or ACT scores are used).	No. However, students are “strongly encouraged” to take the courses if their scores are deficient.
Southeastern Community College (SCC)	Yes. Compass, Asset or ACT.	There is no cutoff score for admissions. However, some health programs have cutoff scores (which vary). Cutoff scores below which students are required to take developmental courses before enrolling in college level courses are: For reading: ACT, 14; Asset, 35; Compass, 60. For writing: A composite of test scores and a writing sample score. For math: ACT, 18; Asset, 41 (numerical or elementary algebra); Compass, 49 (pre-algebra), 35 (algebra). Students enrolled in high school follow the same procedure as other applicants if they plan to take math or English courses.	Yes.

Notes:

- 1) There was confusion about cutoff scores. For colleges uncertain about what was meant by “cutoff”, it was defined as the level at which students could enroll in “college level” courses. For colleges uncertain about what “college level” entailed, for math it was defined as the score needed for students to enroll in College Algebra. However, intermediate algebra and some other math courses may count toward graduation depending on the student’s program and college. For colleges uncertain about writing cutoffs, it was defined as the score needed for students to enroll in Composition I. Usually the colleges have a chart with a number of reading (or writing/math) courses and range of reading scores required for students to enroll in those courses. The confusion usually resulted from unclear definitions of “college level” and “developmental” coursework.
- 2) All of the colleges use the skills assessments to place students within a continuum of reading, writing, and mathematics courses at the appropriate level (which may be above or below entry college level).
- 3) Students failing to score above the cutoffs or wishing to place higher may either study and retake the exam at a later date or take developmental courses as a prerequisite for college level courses.
- 4) The skills assessments are usually only required for students taking courses for credit or who are enrolled in degree/diploma-seeking programs. Sometimes part-time students are not required to take the Compass or other tests.
- 5) Test waiver requirements vary; usually a high ACT score is adequate though it often must have been taken within the previous two or three years. Usually students transferring with a substantial number of credits are exempt. Other exceptions may also exist.
- 6) The issue of mandatory developmental course placement is not black and white but rather involves shades of grey. While most colleges have mandatory developmental course placement, advisors are often given discretion in considering placement for individuals with scores close to the cutoffs. Colleges without mandatory placement strongly encourage students to take developmental courses (and often use higher cutoff scores).
- 7) Usually the only programs with cutoff scores for admission are health programs that often have more applicants than slots available. The community colleges usually use placement tests to screen for the most qualified applicants.