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DAVID S. SPENCE
EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR
CHIEF ACADEMIC OFFICER

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To: CSU Presidents

From: David S. Spence 
Executive Vice Chancellor
Chief Academic Officer

Subject: ELM Validity Study

As reported in earlier memos to you (July 5, 2001, January 18, 2002, and June 10, 2002), the Entry Level Mathematics (ELM) Placement test has been modified. There have now been three systemwide administrations of the modified Entry Level Mathematics Placement test. The modified ELM features a new scoring scale and a new cut score that the ELM Development Committee established on the basis of a Standards Setting session held in September 2001. In April 2002, the ELM Development Committee recommended a second “cut” score to help distinguish students who need two terms of remedial mathematics from those who need only one term. Earlier memos to campus presidents provided information about the revised content specifications and the reporting of sub-scores that can be used for more effective advising and placement of students.

The modifications to the ELM and the continuing development of the ELM program require that we initiate a validation study to evaluate whether students are placed appropriately and whether the ELM cut score of 50 accurately identifies students who demonstrate proficiency in mathematics. Further, we need to take into account how accurately the secondary cut score of 42 is in distinguishing between students requiring only the higher developmental course and students requiring both the lower and the higher developmental courses. Placement tests are valid only if they are doing what they are supposed to do—in the case of the ELM, placing entering CSU students into the proper entry-level courses in quantitative reasoning. Validity data were last gathered for the ELM in 1995. At that time, the data suggested that, overall, the ELM placed students appropriately about 78% of the time for GE math, 78% of the time for Intermediate Algebra, and 85% of the time for developmental math.

CSU Presidents
AA-2002-42
August 23, 2002
Page 2

The fact that the ELM Test has been modified recently makes this validity study particularly urgent. We are requesting that campuses participate in this study by asking mathematics chairs to elicit the participation of all math faculty and as many students as possible on your campus in a survey to gather necessary data for this study. The larger the range of developmental and regular GE sections represented, the more reliable the study will be. Professor Robert Stein, Chair of the ELM Development Committee, will be contacting CSU mathematic chairs and testing directors, and sending them a full complement of survey documents in the near future. Your effort is crucial to ensuring that the ELM—our own test developed by our own faculty—is functioning as it should on behalf of our students.

Questions about this study may be addressed to Mr. Allison G. Jones, Assistant Vice Chancellor, Academic Affairs-Student Academic Support, or Mr. J. Leon Washington, Associate Director, Enrollment Management Services. Mr. Jones may be reached by telephone at (562) 951-4744 or by e-mail ajones@calstate.edu. Mr. Washington may be reached at (562) 951-4726 or by e-mail at lwashington@calstate.edu.

DSS:jlw

cc: Academic Council
Vice Presidents for Student Affairs
Deans/Directors of Admission and Records
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