

## Testing an Urban Legend at Oakton: Do Students Wait Until “The End” to take Required Speech, Mathematics and English Courses?

Oakton, as do most institutions, has its share of “urban legends.” One legend asserts that students wait until nearly the end of their associate degrees at Oakton to take required speech, mathematics and English courses. To test the accuracy of the legend, and to examine other aspects of course-taking patterns among associate degree recipients, the Office of Research conducted a transcript analysis of students whose first term at Oakton was Spring 1995 or later and who earned an Associate of Arts (A.A.) degree in the period Spring 2004 through Summer 2005. A total of 509 students are included in the study. These students attended Oakton for an average of 7.8 terms, including summers. Two-thirds attended between 4.7 and 10.9 terms.

Before looking at whether students took courses at the end of their time at Oakton, we wanted to see how often students enrolled in key general education courses required for graduation, specifically, English 101 and 102, Mathematics, and Speech 103. The table below provides results.

| Course | Times Taken |    |    |   |   |   | Total Enrollments<br>in Course | Percent Students<br>Taking Only Once |
|--------|-------------|----|----|---|---|---|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
|        | 1           | 2  | 3  | 4 | 5 | 6 |                                |                                      |
| EGL101 | 334         | 32 | 15 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 385                            | 87%                                  |
| EGL102 | 367         | 64 | 15 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 450                            | 82%                                  |
| MAT052 | 163         | 38 | 7  | 1 | 0 | 0 | 209                            | 78%                                  |
| MAT120 | 235         | 44 | 18 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 299                            | 79%                                  |
| MAT125 | 187         | 11 | 1  | 1 | 0 | 0 | 200                            | 94%                                  |
| MAT131 | 146         | 10 | 2  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 158                            | 92%                                  |
| SPE103 | 407         | 37 | 11 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 456                            | 89%                                  |

Next, to examine the timing for taking these key courses, we created a variable that looked at the number of terms from the *first term* a specific course was taken through the term of graduation. Note we counted all possible terms of attendance, not just the ones in which a student was enrolled at Oakton. We call this variable “elapsed terms.” The table below depicts the number of possible terms of attendance, including summers, from the term in which students took the course and the term in which they received their A.A. degrees. Again, recall that a student may not have actually attended Oakton in all terms counted. Data indicate that in most courses under consideration, students took the course in terms well before they graduated. For example, only 18 percent of students took English 102 and only 25 percent of students took Speech 103 in the last three terms prior to completion. The pattern changes for mathematics. While the majority of students took general education mathematics (MAT 125 and MAT 131) in the last few terms, students took prerequisite MAT courses (MAT 052 and MAT 120) substantially earlier.

| Course | Elapsed Terms – Possible Terms of Attendance Between<br>First Taking Course and Graduating |               |              |           |                    | Total<br>Enrollments in<br>Course |      |        | Percent Students Taking<br>Course Within Three<br>Terms of Graduation |
|--------|--|---------------|--------------|-----------|--------------------|-----------------------------------|------|--------|---|
|        | 15 or<br>more<br>terms   | 8-14<br>terms | 3-7<br>terms | 1-2 terms | Graduation<br>term |                                   | Mean | Median |   |
| EGL101 | 43   | 124           | 203          | 15        | 0                  | 385                               | 9.4  | 8      | 4%  |
| EGL102 | 29   | 82            | 259          | 58        | 22                 | 450                               | 6.9  | 6      | 18%   |
| MAT052 | 28   | 80            | 95           | 6         | 0                  | 209                               | 9.9  | 9      | 3%  |
| MAT120 | 23   | 60            | 159          | 53        | 4                  | 299                               | 7.3  | 6      | 19%   |
| MAT125 | 0  | 10            | 71           | 55        | 64                 | 200                               | 3.4  | 2      | 60%   |
| MAT131 | 4  | 14            | 50           | 41        | 49                 | 158                               | 4.1  | 3      | 57%   |
| SPE103 | 19   | 88            | 236          | 76        | 37                 | 456                               | 6.3  | 5      | 25%   |

For more information call the Office of Research, 847-635-1894.