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BEST PRACTICES FOR SETTING PLACEMENT CUT SCORES IN POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

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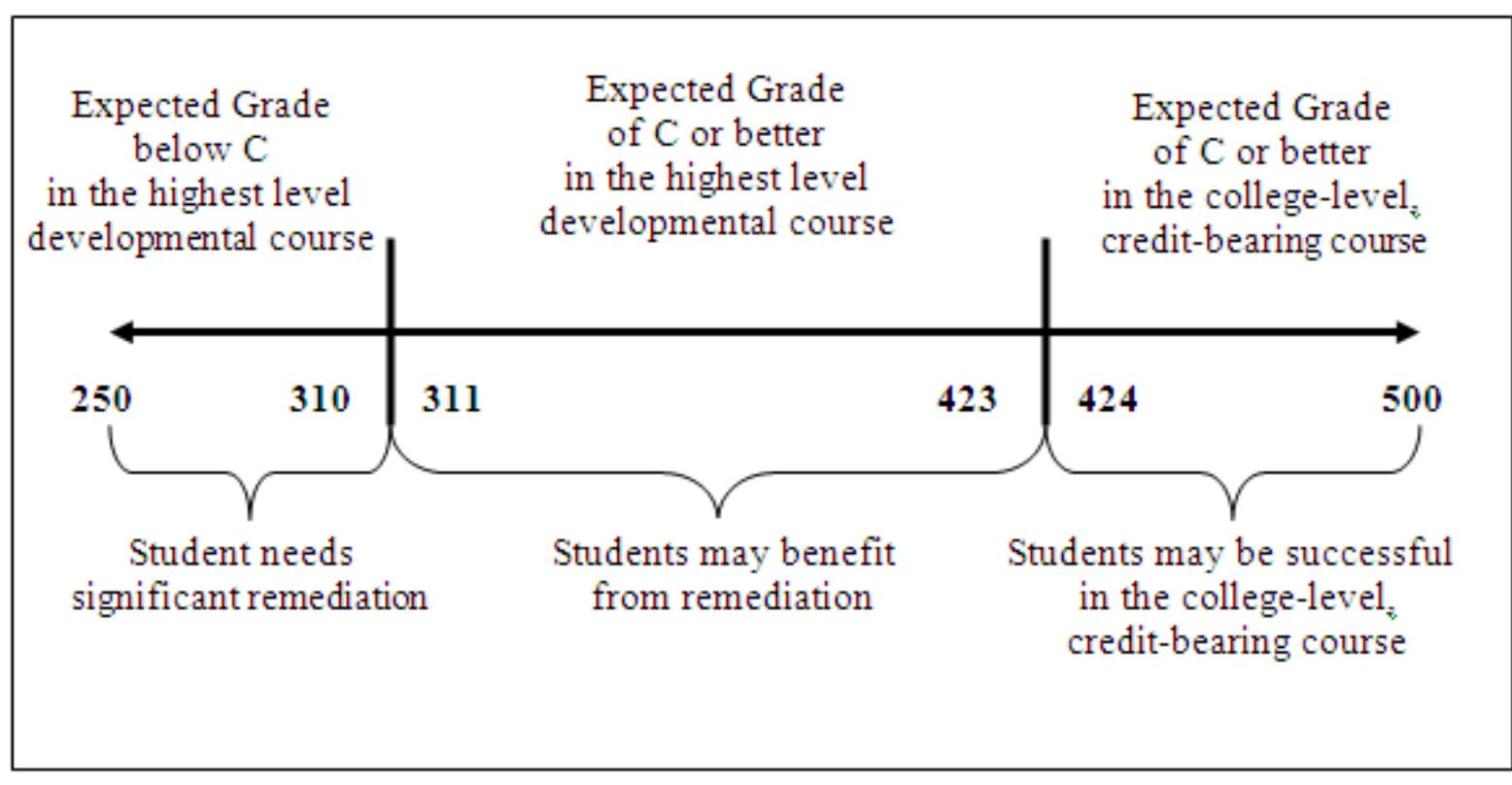


STANDARD SETTING TERMS

- **Content Standards**
 - The knowledge and skills students should demonstrate for placement into a course.
- **Cut Score**
 - The point on the score scale indicating students have demonstrated enough of the content standards.
- **Standard Setting**
 - The process of defining the cut score on the score scale.
- **Standard Setting Methods**
 - Specific combinations of standardized actions and processes that are used to develop cut score recommendations.



HYPOTHETICAL PLACEMENT DECISION





MAJOR AREAS TO CONSIDER

1. The Authoritative Body, or Policymaker
 - Signs off on final cut scores allowing implementation
 - May be one or more people
 - Hires facilitator
 - Determines number of cut scores needed
 - Assisted by facilitator in deciding standard setting method
 - Make policy decisions about use of data and related information during the study.



MAJOR AREAS TO CONSIDER

2. Participants:

■ Facilitator

- Works with Authoritative Body to identify desirable characteristics of panelists, methods to use, and decisions that must be made. Ensures procedures are followed. Must be external to the process.

■ Subject Matter Experts (SMEs)

- Experts in subject to which cut scores will be applied. Familiar with student population. Representative of college population in terms of gender, ethnicity, experience, geographic location, etc. Should be at least 10 SME's but usually less than 25.



MAJOR AREAS TO CONSIDER

3. Performance Level Descriptors (PLDs)
 - Clearly delineate the differences in content and expectations for examinees in one level course from those in the adjacent course(s).
 - Serve to calibrate the SMEs to the same understanding of each course and provide the basis for decision making during the standard setting task.
 - May be developed during the standard setting meeting or in advance in a meeting dedicated solely to that purpose to allow greater emphasis.



MAJOR AREAS TO CONSIDER

4. Standardization and Defensibility

- Standard setting methods have been designed to work with a variety of test configurations and levels of data availability. The standardization of the processes and activities when followed increase the defensibility of cut score decisions:
 - Taking the test; training on the method; multiple iterative rounds; independent judgments combined with discussion from multiple perspectives; collection of SME feedback; and possibly the presentation of impact data.
 - Weigh the choice of method against the stakes attached to the decision.



MAJOR AREAS TO CONSIDER

5. Documentation and Evaluation

- Keep all materials used, data entered, evaluation forms, copies of the PLDs, summary of SME characteristics, rating forms, handouts, etc. This is the supporting material that will be needed to prove that a valid and reliable process was followed should the cut score be challenged.
- Evaluation form data can be used as evidence that SMEs understood and followed the process, as well as, to give input into changes that should be made to the process in the future. The Authoritative Body may use this data to justify an adjustment to the recommended cut score.



CONCLUDING REMARKS

- Standard Setting is an important part of the assessment process. Due diligence in the process and adequate documentation are essential for defensibility.
- No decision should be made on the basis of a single test score. Multiple sources of evidence are best when making decisions.
- A key part in the defensibility of cut scores is ensuring the assessment used produces valid and reliable scores for that purpose.



MORE INFORMATION

Download event materials and learn how to participate in the online follow-up discussion:

[www.PostsecondaryResearch.org/
conference/afterevent.html](http://www.PostsecondaryResearch.org/conference/afterevent.html)

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