

Guided Self-Placement

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Dawn Coleman, PhD
Evaluation Consultant, Coleman Evaluation
Research Associate Scientist, University of South Carolina

How we got here...

We've been trying to figure out the best ways to assess and place students for over a century.

Mandatory assessment and placement (tests) →
Student autonomy and voluntary A&P (a free for all!) →
Mandatory A&P (tests) →
Mandatory A&P (multiple measures) →
Student autonomy and ownership (GSP)

1800s-1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s	2020s
Mandatory A&P	Autonomy and voluntary A&P		Shift back to mandatory A&P			Shift back to autonomy (but with guardrails)	

What is Guided Self-Placement?

Is it Guided Self-Placement, Directed Self-Placement, or Self-Directed Placement?

GSP/DSP/SDP = the student is ultimately in control of deciding which developmental or college-level course(s) to take but arrives at that decision through a process guided by the college

Colleges should give students information and advice (guided/directed) but the ultimate placement decision is up to the student (self placement).

It IS NOT a free for all!

What does GSP look like in practice?

GSP can look very different from college to college, but the basic components are:

- **The student receives information about the course options →**
- **The student completes a self-assessment →**
- **Based on their responses and possibly a conversation with an advisor or faculty member, the student receives a recommended placement level →**
- **The student can choose to accept or reject that recommendation.**

What does GSP look like in practice?

At a minimum, GSP requires:

- **Information about course structure and content**
- **An opportunity for students to reflect on their own skills and abilities (usually through a self-assessment tool)**
- **An opportunity to speak with an advisor/faculty if desired**
- **A final placement decision that rests with the student**

Student autonomy and choice is critical.

- **If a college administers a self-assessment and then the college makes the final decision about placement, that is NOT GSP.**

How does GSP support transitions into college?

GSP helps provide students with a sense of ownership and responsibility over their education.

There may be less resistance from students in the developmental or support courses because they chose to be there.

There may be more motivation on the part of those in the college-level course because they chose to be there and accept the challenge.

“I think no matter what you do, students are always going to be placed incorrectly, and really, what we need to be addressing is doing it the way that's going to allow students to take responsibility for that choice.”¹

How does GSP support transitions into college?

GSP helps set students' expectations about what they will encounter from each of the course options.

GSP is an opportunity to use the placement process to have early conversations with students about their goals and to get them on a clear path (including enrolling in the correct math pathway).

“What I like about guided self-placement is that it has students thinking about what their skills are and what they need to learn before they even enter a course. It's almost like a little warm up for the semester, so they have some expectations coming in of what they're going to be learning and sort of where they stand and what they need to be able to do.”²

Some suggestions...

Avoid overcomplicating the GSP process.

- **Provide enough information for students to make informed decisions but not so much information that they are overwhelmed.**
- **Create SIMPLE self-assessment tools.**
- **Provide opportunities for students to talk with advisors/faculty to clarify their choice.**
- **And then respect students' choices.**

DO NOT replace a high stakes standardized test with strict cut scores with a high stakes GSP self-assessment that uses cut scores.

Evaluate what you're doing!

Evaluate your implementation processes

Are your GSP tools designed to effectively guide students?

- What information are you providing to students?
- Does this info reflect what is happening in the classroom?
- Are the tools easy for students to navigate?

How are you logistically implementing GSP?

- Who is guiding the students?
- Does this occur in a group or individual setting?
- How consistent is the process?

How do students experience GSP?

- Did they actively engage in the process?
- Do they think they got enough info to make a good decision?
- Do they feel like the decision was really theirs to make?

Evaluate your outcomes

If you are using a GSP tool, can you track the recommended placement along with what students chose?

How did proportional placement rates change (how many students place themselves into each level)?

Do students think they're in the right course? Survey them 4-6 weeks into the semester.

What are the college-level completion rates?

Disaggregate everything!



Dawn Coleman
Coleman Evaluation
colemanevaluation@outlook.com
www.colemanevaluation.com



References

The two quotes used in this presentation come from my dissertation:

Coleman, D. R., (2022). Faculty perspectives on assessment and placement: A mixed methods study of the social validity of placement tests, multiple measures placement, and guided self-placement. [Doctoral dissertation, University of South Carolina].

¹ p. 85

² p. 84