General Questions about the Accountability Reporting for the Community Colleges (ARCC) Report

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Introduction

What is ARCC/AB 1417?

In 2004, California State Assembly Bill AB1417 (Pacheco) [Chapter 581, Statutes of 2004] established the Accountability Reporting for the Community Colleges (ARCC) program that required the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges to recommend to the Legislature and Governor a workable structure (framework) for annual evaluation of community college performance in meeting statewide educational outcome priorities.

How was ARCC/AB 1417 developed?

Pursuant to AB 1417, the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office (Chancellor’s Office) worked with community college institutional researchers and an external panel of nationally recognized experts in higher education accountability to develop the mandated performance evaluation structure. The Chancellor’s Office worked with the technical advisory group, consisting of college and district institutional researchers to further define each of the college and system-level performance indicators.
listed in the framework. In March 2005, the Chancellor’s Office issued a report to the Legislature that described the performance framework. Over time, this framework will contribute to improved instruction and related programs for students by providing valuable information to state policymakers and local community colleges and districts. The implementation of AB 1417, which began in the Spring of 2005, is known as ARCC (Accountability Reporting for the Community Colleges).

**How can I get a copy of the legislation and framework?**

Link to the [legislation](#)

Link to the [framework](#)

Link to the [performance indicators](#)

**What is the general timeline for the ARCC report?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>First ARCC draft released to the colleges. Colleges review data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>MIS resubmissions due for data correction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January/February</td>
<td>Second ARCC draft released to the colleges. Contains peer grouping. Begins 30-day self-assessment period for the colleges.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February/March</td>
<td>College self-assessment due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>ARCC report issued</td>
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**How often will the report be produced? How will the report be disseminated to the colleges and districts?**

The report will be produced annually. We will publish it on the ARCC website because it is a voluminous report (800+ pages). Colleges and districts will then be able to download and print the parts of the report they need. We will send an e-mail to the field when it is available.

**How do I get ARCC information?**

There is standard distribution list called arcc-all ([ARCC-ALL@CCCCO.EDU](mailto:ARCC-ALL@CCCCO.EDU)). This is an Alias List maintained by the Chancellor’s Office. Mail recipients for arcc-all are determined by each college and district. Please direct this request for the arcc-all list to your college or district Email Administrator.

The Email Administrator creates the district and college entries ([arcc##0@domain.edu](mailto:arcc##0@domain.edu) for the district office, and [arcc###@domain.edu](mailto:arcc###@domain.edu) for the colleges) on your email server and point this email account to the appropriate staff.
If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Scott Gallawa, sgallawa@cccco.edu.

The arcc-all list would have real (mailbox) e-mail accounts at the district/college. See the example below.

    District Example:  arcc110@butte.edu
    College Example:  arcc111@butte.edu

Data

What is the source of data for the study? Can the colleges review their data?

The source of data for the study indicators will be college-level data submitted as part of the regular MIS process. The Chancellor’s Office asks that each college review the data behind the indicators to ensure the data are as accurate as possible. During the annual ARCC report cycle, we offer one formal review period (October through December) where colleges have a chance to review and update their data. Any changes to the data must occur through the resubmission process.

What happens if a district fails to provide needed data by specified deadlines?

By adhering to the normal data submission timelines for MIS data submission used for allocations, districts and colleges will be in compliance with the data submission requirements for ARCC/AB1417.

Education Code Section 84754.5(b) directs the Chancellor to withhold, delay, or reduce the funds specified in the annual Budget Act (2006-07 Budget Bill, AB 1800, page 449, item 6870-101-0001, provision 4) if a district fails to provide needed data by specified deadlines; these funds are a part of each district's yearly ongoing apportionment base which is part of the annual apportionment.

However, if colleges and districts provide the data within the normal MIS data submission deadlines, there should be no need for concern.

What is the Legislature actually going to do with the results (i.e., will results affect funding)?

The Chancellor’s Office does not know of any concrete plan to link results in the ARCC report to state funding. A college’s results will probably undergo review by the state senator and the state assemblyperson whose district has that college. It appears that the
Department of Finance, the Governor’s Office, and the Legislative Analyst’s Office will focus their attention upon how each college will work with its local board of trustees and its community—to demonstrate the efficacy of the principle of local accountability in lieu of centralized action from the Capitol. The state oversight bodies did review the data for each college as well as all of the college self-assessments in the 2007 report.

**How should performance be evaluated?**

Because this system of performance indicators is new, without any precedents, nobody has benchmarks with which to label a performance one way or the other. More importantly, the wants and needs of each community will determine if

(a) a particular year-to-year pattern, or
(b) a particular position in a peer group

on a given indicator constitutes a problem or not. For some boards and communities, a particular indicator may have a low priority, and an average (a) or (b) may be deemed as very acceptable (especially if the college has done well on indicators of high priority to them). Moreover, the local board of trustees should examine the self-assessment and the college profile along with the year-to-year pattern and the peer group position for a comprehensive and fair approach to evaluation of the college’s performance. The design of ARCC deliberately promotes this holistic and equitable form of evaluation, and undue focus upon only (a) or only (b) would defeat the purpose of the ARCC.

**How do I make changes to my data? Do I need to resubmit the whole file if I just need to update one section?**

Changes to data will only be accepted through resubmission. You will mostly need to resubmit the whole file if you want to update any part of the file. Although there are certain data elements that require other procedures (i.e. TOP Code, Student Identifiers), check with MIS.

**If we do resubmit, how do we verify our MIS resubmission? And, how do we verify the changes to the indicators reported in ARCC?**

All submission, as well as resubmission, produces a report the morning after a college/district requests the load to the COMIS database. Information and Technology (IT) departments at the colleges and districts should be quite familiar with those reports and the overall resubmission process.

There will be no additional reports that recalculate the indicators after resubmissions.

**Due to issues with our data system, I believe our district will have issues with resubmitting old files. How do we proceed?**
Talk to Debbie Gutierrez (Toner) (916) 327-5903 in the Chancellor’s Office MIS division as soon as possible. They will help you resubmit your data files.

**What data elements are you using?**

The data specifications are available in appendix B of the ARCC report.

**Can the colleges/districts replicate the report results at the local level?**

The Chancellor’s Office cannot guarantee that every college will be able to replicate (or reproduce) the computations or numbers from their own data that appear in the official report. We concede that a full replication of numbers in the official report will be quite difficult for a number of reasons.

Data availability and programming are two major hurdles to replication, especially considering the ARCC’s heavy use of cohorts that cross community college jurisdictions (even cross state boundaries) and cross academic years. The cohort definitions require much program code and a variety of large data sets. So the level of replication for the development of the ARCC data will be limited. We also recognize that some colleges have little or no resources (staff and statistical software) to replicate our computations.

Given the limited resources in the Chancellor’s Office, a feasible level of replication would involve creation of a set of student cohort files that a college could access to compute numbers for its performance indicators in the ARCC report. That is, the MIS staff in the Chancellor’s Office would create a means for each college to access electronically its “own” cohort. Our Data on Demand web site has provided much of this access, and we foresee a continuation of such access for the future. The Research, Analysis, and Accountability staff in the Chancellor’s Office would give each college electronic access to any other relevant data elements (those outside of the main MIS, such as the economic service area index). Given such data, a college can recreate many of the computations that will appear in the official report. Of course, the report’s peer grouping numbers will require some statistical software and background in statistical analysis in order to replicate the peer grouping results.

In many instances, the motivation for replication by a college will come from its need to know that the Chancellor’s Office correctly calculated its performance indicators and correctly analyzed the data related to its peer grouping. Meeting this need does not necessarily require replication. We may also provide assurance to the colleges by disseminating extensive technical documentation so that college researchers can “walk through” the entire process on their own, and this is part of our work plan. That is, a college’s researcher may be able to check the report’s accuracy by understanding how we did each step, rather than by personally executing each step with actual college data. We understand that our proposed documentation may substitute for replication, or it may complement replication. Some participants at our field presentations in April and May of 2006 expressed a desire to obtain such extensive documentation not only for possible replication but also for use in making explanations to local stakeholders.
In many cases, the college may not need to conduct its own replication. They may agree with the report’s numbers and thus see no need to question how we reported performance for their colleges.

**Can I still get data for the performance indicators that Chancellor’s Office historically published for the Partnership for Excellence (PFE)?**

We understand that there is an interest among some colleges to continue reporting PFE numbers to their governing boards.

However, the Chancellor’s Office no longer has any funding, mandate, or authority to publish PFE indicators because the ARCC system has superseded PFE. The Department of Finance and the Legislative Analyst’s Office, et al., expect the Chancellor’s Office to complete the ARCC materials within a fixed, tight schedule, so PFE data can no longer be produced. Furthermore, future emphasis at the colleges and at the Chancellor’s Office should be only on the ARCC performance indicators.

**Will ARCC have an academic senate sign-off?**

ARCC’s legislation does not require an academic senate sign-off. Therefore, it is strictly a local decision for each campus. A representative from the Academic Senate has been actively involved in our Technical Advisory Workgroup since the beginning of the project.

**Will the data be available for access after the report is issued?**

The ARCC Data on Demand Website should satisfy this need, thanks to the MIS Unit in the Chancellor’s Office.

**The Data on Demand allows you to download the ARCC datasets, such as the Student Progress and Achievement Rate (SPAR). Can you suggest ways that colleges can analyze data on this measure? Also, can you suggest ways that college can analyze student achievement and/or supplement ARCC data with analyses of their local MIS data?**

The Student Progress and Achievement Rate (SPAR) dataset was released to the colleges so that researchers can analyze the various outcomes of the SPAR. For example, determine the number or percentage of students receiving a certificate of 18 units or more. Students also achieve multiple awards, so there is always an interest in such analysis. For example, a researcher could study the number of students that transferred and were also ‘transfer prepared”, or received a certificate.

We also released this dataset because colleges wanted to analyze the SPAR, and its various component outcomes, by the demographic variables (race/ethnicity, gender, age).
The unitary data include student identifiers so that colleges can match the ARCC SPAR data with their local MIS data to “drill down” and learn/explain more about the students and courses that led to the ARCC results. For example, for those students that transferred: What courses did they take and in what sequence? What was their GPA? What support services did they receive at the college? The potential research questions and subsequent studies at the local level can be used to inform and guide program improvements at the college.

At this point, we have not provided the colleges with a framework (or suggestions) on how to use their unitary data. Colleges are unique, with different priorities and needs. In the near future, we would like to get feedback about, and report out, how colleges are using the data to improve student success.

**Why did you not include the n’s (counts of students) in the report?**

We did not present the counts (“n”) in the college performance data due to a discussion with the ARCC Technical Advisory Workgroup. The workgroup is composed of representatives from the community colleges—institutional researchers, CEOs, CIOs, Academic Senate, and representatives from the Department of Finance and the Legislative Analyst’s Office.

During report development, we presented the workgroup with a mockup of the report that included the counts, but the workgroup decided that the information cluttered the already complicated report and decided to not present this detail of data.

**Could you explain any procedures that either the MIS office staff or ARCC office staff do to clean, screen, and/or validate data used in analyses for the report?**

The response below covers “validation” from the lay viewpoint and the MIS viewpoint. The concept of *construct validity* is an entirely different topic that this response will leave for someone else to cover at a later point in time if necessary.

Given the above caveat, the response below focuses on how ARCC research staff try to ensure data quality. The MIS Unit documents its general edit and validation rules at the TRIS website.

Also, the Curriculum Reporting for Community Colleges (CRCC) project coordinated by MIS improved the accuracy of course-level data.

ARCC staff use multiple approaches to clean/screen/validate the data for the report. Our guiding philosophy has been one of transparency, i.e., documenting our methodology and data sources and making that documentation part of the report, posting it on the website or making it available upon request. We provide requested *ad hoc* data where time and resources permit, including sharing of cohort numbers and other data so that colleges can check their own information.
Internally, we use the following methods to screen/clean/validate ARCC data:

- Detailed written documentation of the methods for our data pulls from COMIS or other sources (e.g., U.S. Census Bureau, CA Department of Finance) to facilitate replication. We note the data source(s) in the report’s methodology as appropriate.
- Brio Queries on data elements in the COMIS to determine the validity of the logic for individual courses, terms, and colleges that fed into our counts and rates (e.g., to determine why some colleges had missing ESL improvement rates)
- Exploratory data analysis (EDAs) to identify data properties and investigate potential anomalies or outliers in our data
- Duplicate record detection and cross validation routines in SPSS to detect/eliminate duplicate records where appropriate
- Analysis of SSNs for legitimate values
- Review of original SQL where MIS staff pulled the data and provided data in aggregated format

In addition, during production of the draft ARCC report, we randomly sampled colleges and checked the report’s data values against values in original data files to minimize “transcription” errors.

We tried to validate against the CCCC0 Data Mart in several instances, but because of some of the ways our data were derived (e.g., annual versus term), such validation was not always possible. The recent addition of Student Demographics by Academic Year to the Data Mart may provide an additional future avenue for validation (e.g., of rates and percentages if not actual counts).

Beyond the internal checks presented above, we solicited field input on the data specifications and data quality for the 2007 report in numerous ways:

- ARCC Technical Advisory Workgroup (TAG) review of data specifications and analysis, and TAG recommendations for formats, cohorts, data elements, etc.
- Two college/field review periods: One specifically for the college-level data (October-December 2006); the other to respond to the Peer Grouping (January-February 2007). By sharing with researchers and MIS personnel at the colleges, we hoped to have “many eyes” on the data to ensure quality.
- Multiple field presentations to discuss the data and the analysis in order to solicit input from CCC researchers and MIS personnel
- Committee/Organization/Conference presentations (Transfer Center Coordinators, Vocational Research and Accountability Committee, CAIR, CISOA/RP, CCLC, and the Sacramento Statistical Association)
- College-level data specifications posted on ARCC web page starting in July 2006 for college review and feedback
- Ancillary studies/analyses: Reported and presented ancillary studies supporting elements of the ARCC report. These included:
Similar cleaning, screening, and validation procedures will occur for subsequent ARCC reports. We’re also open to suggestions for additional screening and validation procedures.

**Responsibilities of Colleges, Districts, and Chancellor’s Office**

**What are the responsibilities for colleges and districts?**

Colleges and districts are responsible for providing the Chancellor’s Office with accurate and complete data in a timely manner. This essentially encompasses the current submission of data to the MIS unit in the Chancellor’s Office. Colleges and districts will also need to help by learning about the performance framework, reviewing the data and metrics, and responding to the data and peer grouping analysis for the report. If necessary, colleges and districts will resubmit their data. Colleges and districts will also prepare their responses to the report (i.e., a brief self-assessment) that will be published in the final report. Finally, colleges and districts must present the ARCC report to their local board of trustees for their review. See the Board of Trustees section of the FAQ for further information. See the College and District Responsibilities document on the ARCC website.

**What are the responsibilities for the ARCC contacts for the October draft?**

The ARCC contacts need to review their institution’s data that appear in the October draft report for completeness and accuracy. We can only accept data changes through resubmission of the MIS data. Data resubmissions are due in December.

**What are the responsibilities for the ARCC contacts for the January draft?**

The ARCC contacts need to review their institution’s data and peer grouping that appear in the January/February draft. The contacts also need to coordinate the college’s self-assessment response (that must be approved by the college’s CEO/Superintendent/President), due in February/March of each year. For more specific information, please see the “Self-Assessment Guidelines” on the ARCC website.

**Will the colleges and districts be able to provide comments and feedback?**

ARCC staff will continue to accept comments and feedback from the colleges/districts. Interested parties can contact us by e-mail (arcc@cccco.edu) or telephone.
What are the responsibilities of the Chancellor’s Office?

The Chancellor’s Office’s Research, Analysis, and Accountability Unit has primary responsibility for calculating and reporting these performance indicators, using data and feedback provided by the colleges. The unit will continue to refine the evaluation approach, obtain and analyze performance data, and report and interpret results with assistance from a technical advisory group that includes institutional researchers from the community colleges, as well as representatives from the CEOs, CIOs, Academic Senate, California Department of Finance (DOF) and the Legislative Analyst’s Office (LAO).

Will the Chancellor’s Office be addressing improvements?

While the ARCC is designed to assist colleges and districts in making improvements, it is up to the colleges, districts and local Board of Trustees to address improvements.

Is the Chancellor’s Office going to make ratings or rankings of the colleges from these performance indicators?

In brief, that is not our plan. Citizens may be better served if they rely upon word-of-mouth evaluations of community colleges rather than a set of numbers. The ARCC does not rate or rank community colleges.

There are many ways that a community college can excel or serve the community well, and a rating or ranking of the community colleges probably captures only part of the contributions that each college makes. This is especially true if one considers the multiple missions that California's community colleges serve and the open access philosophy that we apply here. In a way, whether one person regards a college as best really can depend upon whether a college focuses upon the particular mission that he/she personally values. So in addition to multiple missions, each person/student will tend to have different values for different missions, making it misleading to say that one college is "best."

There are important traits of colleges that may also make ratings misleading. Some students prefer colleges that provide a learning environment or social climate that appeal to their personal tastes. We don't measure these types of personal preference or types of environments/climates so any rating based upon existing administrative data would ignore this kind of unmeasured, but real, campus quality that does seem to make a difference in student choice of community college (and satisfaction with that choice). This may disappoint citizens, but the reality is that we don't really have a "rating" of California's community colleges to share with anyone. However, current and past students may provide citizens a practical "rating" if someone were to ask them this question.

For more details on this question, please see the response to the peer grouping question in the Data Collection, Analysis, and Review section below.
How will the Chancellor’s Office present the results of the report?

The Chancellor’s Office plans to present the data by college and for the system as a whole, depending on the level of the indicator (college versus systemwide). In addition, each college will prepare a “self-assessment/response” based on its unique characteristics and history which will appear with the indicator results.

Self-Assessment

Will our self-assessment be included in the final report?

The college’s self-assessments will appear in our final report (following the college’s peer group table) in the college profile. For more specific information, please see the “Self-Assessment Guidelines” on the ARCC website.

Does the self-assessment need to be reviewed by our local Board of Trustees?

The self-assessment is the responsibility of the chief executive of the college and he/she can choose to share the self-assessment with the board prior to its appearance in the final report to keep the Board up-to-date on such matters.

What editing will the System/Chancellor’s Office do to the college self-assessment in the ARCC report?

The Chancellor’s Office will only truncate a college self-assessment if its word count exceeds 500 words. The first 500 words, if that many words are submitted, will appear verbatim as submitted by the college. We will not be editing for spelling or grammar. Of course, authors of the self-assessment will need to defend any verbiage they use because we anticipate that trustees, the general public, state officials (including the Department of Finance, the Governor’s Office, and the Legislative Analyst’s Office) will read and interpret the self-assessment.
Board of Trustees

When is the Board of Trustees interaction due for the ARCC report?

The Board of Trustees interaction with the ARCC report must be completed, and its minutes submitted to the Chancellor’s Office/ARCC via email, by a date in March to be announced. We encourage all colleges and districts to begin this process early.

What information should my Board of Trustee minutes reflect?

- Reference to the Accountability Reporting for the Community Colleges (ARCC) report and the specific report’s year (e.g., the 2008 ARCC Report).
- Reference to the areas discussed in ARCC (e.g., Systemwide section, college performance in a specific area, peer groupings, self-assessment, etc.)
- Reaction of board of trustee members.

What role does the local Board of Trustees have related to the report?

The local Board of Trustees will review and interact with the report (both the college’s data and its self-assessment) for each of the colleges under its jurisdiction. Each college will need to submit a copy of the board’s minutes to the Chancellor’s Office showing the board’s annual interaction with the report, including review and interaction with the report at a public meeting, with public comment allowed (required by Education Code, Section 84754.5(d)). It is also acceptable for a district representative to present to a board the explicit ARCC data for each of a district’s colleges. But the minutes for the public meeting where this presentation occurs must specify the colleges that are covered by that presentation and indicate that college-specific results were given. In this case, a district may submit the documentation to us and relieve the separate colleges within that district from submitting separate items of documentation to the Chancellor’s Office. Send an e-mail with your board’s minutes to arcc@cccco.edu

What does interaction with the report mean? What does “adopt” the report really mean?

Local college administrators are expected to discuss the ARCC final report with their respective trustee boards in public forums to inform trustees as well as their communities about local college performance. Ideally, local college administrators will present ARCC results to their trustees and discuss how they will maintain successful performances or improve upon less successful ones, whichever case applies. Minutes of the meetings before local trustees need to reflect such discussions in order to demonstrate the concept of local accountability that underlies the ARCC. “Adopt” is not really the best term for the expected board interaction. Some form of recognition or acknowledgement by the trustees that they have received and considered the ARCC results is the desired type of response.
Is there a way to see the peer group results sooner, especially by Board trustees?

The Chancellor’s Office will electronically disseminate the peer group results to the colleges in its final draft of the ARCC report (in January). Each college must have this final draft in order to compose its self-assessment. The Chancellor’s Office defers here to the administrators at each college to share these peer group results before the final report is issued in March. We believe that policy makers, such as trustees, should consider the college self-assessment along with other vital information about a college before forming judgments about college performance. So we believe that trustees should have the peer group information in a cohesive package of evaluative information and that the college self-assessment is a necessary component of that package. Because the college self-assessment will only become integrated into the ARCC report in the final report (to be released annually in March), it would be premature to disseminate the peer group results before then. But we reiterate here that the college administration can elect to brief its trustees about any peer group information it has received prior to the final report. Of course, it would be premature to share the draft report with the news media, because some of the results may appear differently in the final report.

Shouldn’t the local Board of Trustees get 60 days to approve the college self-assessment?

This is a matter for each college and district to decide. The Chancellor’s Office cannot require that. In fact, due to our short time-frame and deadlines, the colleges only have 30 days to complete their self-assessment.

How can trustees use this report to evaluate the performance of their colleges?

Trustees should consider the year-to-year performance on each performance indicator in conjunction with the profile of student enrollment, the peer group comparison, and the college self-assessment in its evaluation of local college performance. However, we don’t recommend that trustees place all their attention upon only one of these pieces of information. The uniqueness of each college will often necessitate additional analysis by the local institutional researcher to understand why a college has a given success level on a performance indicator. The ARCC is a general diagnostic tool for boards and communities. Local analysts will need to assume the task of identifying specific causes of problems/successes and appropriate plans of action (and many already do this). Where possible, the Chancellor’s Office will, on request, conduct ancillary analyses to help local analysts/researchers in these local efforts.

Why is there a year given for Board of Trustee interaction to the final report? Won’t this delay mean that the Board interactions will not affect the budget decisions of the Legislature/Governor’s Office?

During the planning phase of ARCC, our advisory members expressed concern about sufficient time for trustee boards to receive, consider, and discuss (the “interaction” component) the ARCC results. A short timeframe would disadvantage those districts that
historically hold less frequent board meetings. In an effort to be fair to all districts, we adopted the one-year window for board interaction.

Because the Department of Finance, the Legislative Analyst’s Office, and the Governor’s Office will use the results in the final report (March) for its budget/policy decisions, the one-year window for board interaction will not affect those decisions. However, the continuing evaluation, by the above state entities, of accountability in the community college system will depend upon the quality and breadth of interaction that the system’s colleges can document in ARCC over the next few years. For this continuing evaluation, the one-year window for board interaction is appropriate.

**Analysis of ARCC Data at the College Level**

**How is the Chancellor’s Office helping local researchers “drill down” in the ARCC data to perform more insightful research and analysis?**

To help colleges perform more insightful local research and analysis, the Chancellor’s Office created the Data on Demand site, which provides a breakdown of ARCC outcomes in addition to other MIS data. For example, the SPAR data are broken down by each of the outcomes, as well as by demographic variables.

The ARCC data files available on Data on Demand are:

- Student Progress and Achievement Rate
- At Least 30 Units Rate
- Persistence Rate
- Annual Basic Skills Course Completion data
- Annual Vocational Course Completion data
- Basic Skills Improvement data for English, Math and ESL

Because the ARCC report is a public document, we needed to make this level of data available to researchers through a separate source (i.e., the Data on Demand website) to maintain the confidentiality of student data. The tight work schedule for the development of the ARCC report necessitates that these breakdowns and relevant updates occur after the Chancellor’s Office completes the legislatively mandated components of the report.

**The Data on Demand allows you to download the ARCC datasets, such as the Student Progress and Achievement Rate (SPAR) data. Can you suggest ways that colleges can analyze data on this measure? Also, can you suggest ways that colleges can analyze student achievement and/or supplement ARCC data with analyses of their local MIS data?**

The Student Progress and Achievement Rate (SPAR) dataset was released to the colleges so that researchers can analyze the various outcomes of the SPAR. For example, a researcher can determine the number or percentage of students receiving a certificate of
18 units or more. Students also achieve multiple awards, so there is always an interest in such analysis. For example, a researcher could study the proportion of students that transferred and were also “transfer prepared” or received a certificate. Another question that the local researcher could explore may be the link between local assessment practice and student progress. This exploration would address a topic that system level researchers have difficulty in studying, and it concerns an area where the individual college or district has the ability to make changes.

We also released this dataset because colleges wanted to analyze the SPAR, and its various component outcomes, by the demographic variables (race/ethnicity, gender, age). The unitary data include student identifiers so that colleges can match the ARCC SPAR data with their local MIS data to “drill down” and learn/explain more about the students and courses that led to the ARCC results. For example, for those students that transferred: What courses did they take and in what sequence? What were their GPAs? What support services did they receive at the college? The potential research questions and subsequent studies at the local level can inform and guide program improvements at the college.

At this point, we have not provided the colleges with a framework (or suggestions) on how to use their unitary data. Colleges are unique, with different priorities and needs. In the near future, we would like to get feedback about, and report out, how colleges are using the data to improve student success.

**What academic terms constitute an Academic Year?**

For purposes of COMIS and ARCC, an Academic Year refers to all the terms in one year beginning with the Summer term and ending with the Spring term (Summer, Fall, Winter, Spring).

**Why are the rates for some of the indicators for the same cohort different in the 2009 report when we compare them to the 2008 report?**

The changes could occur in a college’s denominator, the college’s numerator, or both. The changes in the data relate to the following factors:

1. The data for all three cohorts were pulled from COMIS again, before being reanalyzed. Therefore, any resubmissions since the data pull for the final 2008 report could change the rates.

2. Although the Curriculum Reporting for the Community Colleges (CRCC) project was completed in October 2007, colleges/districts continue to clean up their course data by making changes to the Master Course File (MCF). The changes to the MCF not only affect the current term, but all course data in the system back to 1992. MCF clean up is continuous.
3. Several times a year colleges/districts have an opportunity to clean up data element SB00 Student-Identifier. The system can have multiple student identifiers for a single student and this clean-up process provides an opportunity for COMIS to unduplicate them, or make them whole. The result might be a change in counts (denominators and/or numerators) for some of the indicators that could affect rates.

4. Last year we started submitting all students with SSNs to the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) to determine their transfer status. In prior years, we only matched students previously not submitted. By giving NSC all students, we go back in time and rematch all students. For example, transfer institutions previously not part of NSC might now be members, and therefore create additional transfers.

Career Development and College Preparation

How will the ARCC report address Career Development and College Preparation (CDCP) Instruction - Enhanced Funding, also known as “Enhanced Noncredit”?

Beginning in 2008 the ARCC report has included college level data for CDCP courses that receive enhanced funding, as implemented in 2007 under SB 361 (Scott, Chapter 631, Statutes of 2006). In response to requirements from oversight agencies (Department of Finance and the Legislative Analyst’s Office), we also produced a supplementary system level report to analyze CDCP data in more depth. We published the first CDCP report in June 2008 and it can be found at the Research, Analysis and Accountability website.

Enhanced funding is available for noncredit programs that create opportunities for career development and college preparation through career-technical education (short-term vocational), educational development (basic skills, ESL and VESL) and workforce preparation. For noncredit courses to be eligible for enhanced funding they must be part of a sequence of courses that lead to either a certificate of completion or a certificate of competency with the intended result of improving student progress towards college or a career path. (Title 5, Section 55151).

How are Career Development and College Preparation (CDCP) awards being captured in COMIS?

CDCP awards are currently not captured in COMIS. MIS is working with Academic Affairs to create 5-digit codes that identify those awards. We expect to implement those
codes in the near future. For now, colleges can continue to submit their data for noncredit awards, but these do not show up as CDCP awards.

The Basic Skills Initiative

How does the ARCC project interact with the Basic Skills Initiative (BSI)?

As required by AB 194 [Chapter 489, Statutes of 2007], which specifies the details of the Basic Skills Initiative:

“The Office of the Chancellor shall work jointly with the Department of Finance and the Legislative Analyst to develop annual accountability measures for this program. It is the intent of the Legislature that annual performance accountability measures for this program utilize, to the extent possible, data available as part of the accountability system developed pursuant to Section 84754.5 of the Education Code. By November 1, 2008, the Chancellor shall submit a report to the Governor and Legislature on the annual accountability measures developed pursuant to this process.”

Although not part of the original ARCC project, we have added the Basic Skills Initiative as well as the CDCP analysis to the ARCC effort at the request of oversight agencies (the Department of Finance and the Legislative Analyst’s Office). Thus, by November 2008, the ARCC team developed the required BSI accountability framework using our current Technical Advisory Workgroup. Wherever possible, we will incorporate data already available for the ARCC in the BSI accountability reporting.

The November 2008 BSI report detailed the framework for assessing basic skills performance that will lead to BSI accountability analyses in future reports. BSI metrics have been reported separately from 2009 rather than as part of the ARCC report, which is already extensive.

Peer Grouping

Will the report or any other material explain the peer grouping in lay terms?

For lay audiences, the Chancellor’s Office will give briefings about the peer group approach through in-person meetings to be scheduled. But if technical questions arise, the Chancellor’s Office will inevitably need to use technical language to respond. Districts, colleges, and trustees will probably need to rely upon the institutional researcher in the district (or on campus) to help them understand the methodology. The Chancellor’s Office will work to give local institutional researchers a technical review of the peer group approach so that local institutional researchers will understand the ARCC’s method enough to explain it to local officials and residents.
Will we have the same peer group year after year?

In the developmental stage of ARCC, we recalculated peer groups each year in order to capture the effects of data corrections over time. However, we recognized that the use of annual recalculation created undesirable levels of peer group volatility, and we subsequently “froze” peer group memberships to establish some stability in the system. We will continue to freeze these peer groups until we have a large enough change in data (such as the use of new data for the Service Area Indices) to justify recalculation of peer groups.

Can the system’s colleges obtain the data used in the peer group so that they can conduct local analyses?

Yes

What does it mean from a policy perspective that two of the peer group analyses use uncontrollable factors (i.e., exogenous variables) that explain a small amount of the variation in the corresponding performance indicators?

For the 2008 report, the ARCC staff could only produce regression models that explain less than one-fifth of the variation in the Basic Skills Course Completion Rate and about one-fourth of the variation for the Basic Skills Improvement Rate. This means that the ARCC staff may need new data to produce stronger peer groupings to “level the playing field” for between-college comparisons.

For example, one major unmeasured predictor could be student motivation, but we lack statewide data on this factor. Furthermore, motivation occupies a gray area in terms of status as an uncontrollable factor (an exogenous variable) for which we should “level the playing field.”

Nobody can be certain that there are more exogenous variables to explain a larger portion of the variation in these two indicators. It is theoretically possible that the controllable factors (i.e., budgeting, counseling, and program structure or staffing) do have a huge effect upon these two indicators, much more than the level of effects from uncontrollable factors we seem to have found for the other four indicators. All this implies that much more empirical research should occur in our system to understand the basic skills situation.

Would being moved from one peer group to another (e.g., in next year’s peer grouping) affect benchmarking?

From the local viewpoint, this scenario (which assumes peer group recalculation) creates the potential for a major realignment of the college’s strategy to respond to the ARCC if the new peer group indicates a very different performance perspective. Because some
colleges will see material shifts in one or more of their peer groups, some colleges will need to align their strategies with any new peer group results.

**Why did the peer groups change so much in the 2009 report?**

It would be natural for the peer groups to change each year, given the year-to-year variation in some of the relevant uncontrollable factors for a particular performance indicator. Data that change for a set of uncontrollable factors in the 2008 ARCC report can result in peer group changes in the 2009 report. In addition, because the Chancellor’s Office tries to update its peer grouping model for the sake of currency, each year it conducts new regression and cluster analyses with the most recent data for each performance indicator. So, if data for the performance indicator vary from year-to-year, then it is possible that the Chancellor’s Office will identify different relevant uncontrollable factors with which to form peer groups. The use of different uncontrollable factors for the cluster analysis can often result in different peer groups. In the foregoing situations, we address the change stemming from real change in performance and environment at the colleges.

For the 2009 ARCC Report, a set of special circumstances have substantially magnified the expected change in peer groups. Unlike the real change noted above, these circumstances represent administratively-oriented changes to data. circumstance of this sort include the CRCC project (Curriculum Reporting for the Community Colleges), updating the master course file, and the student identifier clean-up. These efforts to improve course and student data were system-wide, and affected our calculation of many of the ARCC performance indicators, as well as some of the uncontrollable factors. We have identified other sources of administratively-oriented data change as follows: (1) coding for CDCP (Enhanced Noncredit) funding; (2) improved programming for the data match with the National Student Clearinghouse; and (3) campus-initiated data resubmissions that are unrelated to any of the three foregoing situations (i.e., the resubmissions stemmed from a college’s general effort to improve its data quality). The System Office MIS Unit has pursued a vigorous, multi-year effort to improve its data quality, and future alterations to data should be anticipated. We consider the cumulative effect of these administratively-oriented data changes as the primary cause for the major changes that occurred in the peer groupings for the 2009 report.

Note that the peer groupings can change if college data for outcomes OR for uncontrollable factors have significant alterations. Although the cluster analysis portion of the peer grouping uses only the uncontrollable factors in its process, the Chancellor’s Office selects these factors on the basis of their statistical (and theoretical) linkage to outcome variables (the performance indicators). Therefore, movement in the data for the performance indicators by itself may result in our selection of a different set of adjustment variables (i.e., the uncontrollable factors for which the peer grouping tries to adjust), which in turn results in peer groupings that differ from those in the 2008 report.

The need for data on all colleges (or as many colleges as possible) in the ARCC analysis can also cause peer group changes. For example, in the analysis for the SPAR, the past
lack of data for a predictor (the Student Average Academic Preparedness Index) at two of the newer colleges in the system (Copper Mountain and Santiago Canyon) forced the Chancellor’s Office to substitute the next best predictor (the percent of students enrolled in a Basic Skills course) into the statistical model. Although the predictive quality of the new model was still quite high, the substitution of a new predictor variable into the peer grouping process probably caused a shift in the peer group composition for the SPAR.

What does it mean from a policy perspective that two of the peer group analyses related to Basic Skills use uncontrollable factors (i.e., exogenous variables) that explain a relatively small amount of the variation in the corresponding performance indicators?

For the 2009 report, the ARCC staff produced regression models that explained only about one-fourth of the variation in the Basic Skills Course Completion Rate and the Basic Skills Improvement Rate. This means that the ARCC staff may need new data to produce stronger peer groupings to “level the playing field” for between-college comparisons.

For example, one major unmeasured predictor could be student motivation, but we lack statewide data on this factor. Furthermore, motivation occupies a gray area in terms of status as an uncontrollable factor (an exogenous variable) for which we should “level the playing field.”

Nobody can be certain that there are more exogenous variables to explain a larger portion of the variation in these two indicators. It is theoretically possible that the controllable factors (i.e., budgeting, counseling, and program structure or staffing) have a major effect upon these two indicators, much more than the level of effects from uncontrollable factors we seem to have found for the other four indicators. All this implies that much more empirical research should occur in our system to understand the basic skills situation.

Why did the 2009 regression model used to identify peer grouping variables change for the ESL Improvement Rate, compared with the 2008 ESL regression model?

The adjusted R² for 2009’s ESL regression model is considerably lower than the adjusted R² from the 2008 ARCC analysis (adjusted R² = .31 versus .47). There are several possible explanations for this change, none of which takes precedence or precludes other explanations. First, the colleges’ percentages of students age 30 or older replaced last year’s BA+ Index as a better predictor in the model. Second, the 2009 model’s other predictors remained the same as last year’s, but the student count variable was updated to reflect more recent data. Changes in student counts from 2008 to 2009 were, on average, larger than changes in the counts from 2007 to 2008. This could have affected the regression analysis. Third, heteroscedasticity in the residuals for last year’s model
justified a weighted least squares (WLS) adjustment that contributed to a higher $R^2$. We did not detect heteroscedasticity this year and did not adjust the data. How do we know that these new peer groups are accurate or valid?

The primary purpose of the peer grouping process is to put each college into a set of similar colleges for a relatively equitable comparison of each college’s performance in a specific area or function. The assumption behind the validity of this concept is that the comparison should allow us to compare a specific college to other colleges that experience similar uncontrollable factors (environmental factors) as an analyst considers the concept of relative performance. The comparative task only needs a reasonable level of similarity, not exact replication or “identical twins,” so to speak. Furthermore, no comparison could occur between colleges if we demanded exact similarity. So, practically speaking, we must accept some level of dissimilarity between a college and its peer group partners. We primarily try to achieve equity by using cluster analysis to minimize the measured dissimilarities between colleges.

Still, it is a judgment call about whether the resulting peer groups have sufficient validity for the task of equitable comparison between fairly similar colleges. Validity is not usually an all-or-nothing concept in program evaluation, and that is true for the ARCC analysis as well. If an analyst wants to compare college X’s performance in 2008 to a college that is most similar to it, then he/she should really use the same college’s performance in other years (i.e., non-2008 performances by college X) as the closest “match” for comparison purposes. This leads us to the year-to-year trend in college performance (also sometimes labeled as the “value-added” approach). The ARCC report includes that approach in it. But even if we get almost an “identical twin” here for the comparison of relative performance, we may still create an inequitable evaluation of college performance if a college’s environmental factors changed substantially from one year to the next (or one cohort to the next cohort).

**How can I explain these major changes in peer groups to my audiences?**

If a college experiences a major change in its peer group classification, then it should note the following circumstances:

(a) College officials may point out that the Chancellor’s Office undertook a several data improvement projects that involved many colleges (e.g., updating the master course file and cleaning up student identifiers). The subsequent changes to the data in the Chancellor’s Office MIS altered much of the peer grouping. So, even if a specific college did not change its data (through a data improvement effort), that college could have a different peer group in 2009 because of changes that occurred in the data at other colleges. Naturally, peer group performance reflects two elements of performance, the college’s own performance and the performance of its ARCC-defined peers. A college’s position within a peer group can change if its own performance has changed and/or if the peer group has changed so much that the performances of its new peers are different.
(b) College officials should first examine whether the average performances of their 2009 peer groups really did change from their 2008 average performances. In some cases, the identification of new peer colleges will have negligible effects upon the college’s performance relative to its peer group average performance.

**What use are peer groups for an indicator that you can’t predict or model very well?**

Because the peer group analysis relies upon a statistical model (a regression model) that identifies those salient environmental factors related to a performance indicator, a peer grouping’s relevance for evaluation at the college level does vary with the predictive quality of the statistical model. (See Appendix C in the ARCC report for more details about these models.) Because predictive quality is a factor that has a continuum, rather than a yes/no status, it can be difficult to decide when a specific peer grouping becomes irrelevant. That said, we note that peer groupings that use a model with relatively low predictive quality should receive less attention from the college officials, the trustees, and the public. The college’s institutional researcher should note this for his/her administrators (and for their trustees) to promote efficient use of their time and resources when reviewing the ARCC results.

**Why must there be six peer groups per indicator?**

In the case of ARCC, there was a need to create peer groups that were neither too small nor too large. With 110 community colleges in the system for the 2009 analysis, six equal-sized peer groups would result in an average peer group size of 18 colleges. Using fewer than six peer groups would tend to place too many colleges in groups that contain far different institutions, increasing the chance for unfair comparisons. So this option (fewer peer groups) had low acceptability.

In general, researchers would prefer a higher number (versus a lower number) of peer groups, because the higher number of peer groups would result in more homogeneity within groupings. However, without a six-group maximum, the cluster analysis used in the ARCC peer grouping process would have begun to produce more one-college peer groups (basically an outlier) and two-college peer groups. Colleges that reside in one-college peer groups (somewhat of a contradiction in terms) really have no peer colleges. Thus, they escape any between-college comparison for that indicator (a condition that partially nullifies an evaluation effort). Colleges that reside in two-college peer groups (and to some extent three-college peer groups) can face some comparison. However, placing last or first in such small peer groups may do a disservice for those colleges, aside from imparting little information about their successes.
What’s wrong with using a peer grouping method that matches colleges by student enrollment size, urbanization level, and region?

These factors may create peer groupings that have less validity than the factors that the Chancellor’s Office derived through its statistical modeling (regression analysis). If student enrollment size has no relationship to a college’s performance on a specific indicator, why would one want to “adjust” or “control” for it? When student enrollment size does matter to a performance indicator, our analysis has included it in its peer groupings (see the appendices in the ARCC report). The three traditional factors noted in the question could help if an analyst needed a very global peer grouping, one that has no particular focus. But, in the research literature, we see the precaution about using classifications for purpose that their designers did not intend for them. The application of these three traditional factors for the peer grouping of colleges, for comparison on a specific performance indicator, throws that precaution to the wind. Peer grouping for comparison on a specific performance indicator is no longer a general analysis.

Why were different predictors used for the regression models in the 2009 ARCC report than were used for the 2008 ARCC report’s regression models?

There were several reasons why we used different predictors in the 2009 regression models. These reasons include data availability and data revisions or updates that altered the relationship between predictors and the ARCC performance indicators (outcomes).

For example, with regard to data availability, the lack of data for a predictor (e.g., the Student Average Academic Preparedness Index) at two newer colleges in the system (Copper Mountain and Santiago Canyon) compelled the System Office to substitute the next best predictor (the percent of students enrolled in a Basic Skills course) into the statistical model.

In terms of data revisions that altered predictor/outcome relationships, the most prominent changes in predictors occurred for the basic skills regression models. The CRCC/MCF project led to major revisions in the way colleges coded their basic skills courses which, in turn, affected the outcomes, thus affecting the relationship between outcomes and predictors in the regression models for basic skills indicators.

Finally, as time passes, the ARCC staff may test newly created variables as predictors. For example, we developed a new index as a potential predictor in the ESL Improvement Rate model – the “English Not Spoken Well” index. We tested the new index in several other regression models, but it achieved statistical significance only in the ESL regression model. This year we also added CCC Selectivity, the selectivity of community college transfers to four-year institutions, as a potential predictor variable. The variable did not reach statistical significance in any of the regression models.
Contact Information

Who are the contacts at the colleges and districts?

The Chancellor’s Office asked each college and district CEO to appoint an ARCC/AB 1417 contact person and an alternate contact person to represent their college and district. If your campus has an update to this information, please contact Phuong Nguyen at the Chancellor’s Office by e-mail at: arcc@cccco.edu or by calling (916) 327-5886.

Note that in the fall of 2011, we began to use a different method of communication with the ARCC contacts. We no longer address our communiqués to individuals (and their respective office e-mail addresses). Beginning in 2011, we send notices about ARCC to a mailing list controlled by the MIS at the CCCCO and the IT office at each college or district. The IT office at each college/district now has the responsibility for linking its respective ARCC contacts to the ARCC” mailbox” at the college.

How can I get updates about this project?

We will post updates to this website as they become available. Check the Updates section of the website for more information. If you would like to be on the ARCC e-mail distribution list, please contact your college/district IT office so that it can point the alias ARCC email address of your college/district to your email inbox.

Who do I contact for more information?

For any information regarding this project, please contact the Chancellor’s Office by e-mail at: arcc@cccco.edu or by calling (916) 327-5886.

How is the Chancellor’s Office communicating with the field?

The Chancellor’s Office uses the aforementioned ARCC mailbox concept to send periodic updates to the AB 1417/ARCC contacts appointed by each college’s and district’s CEO.