Methodology Questions about the Accountability Reporting for the Community Colleges (ARCC)

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College Profile Data

How did you derive the annual unduplicated headcount used for Table 1.7 of the 2012 ARCC Report?

Is the FTES count based on MIS data or 320?

Data Collection, Analysis, and Review (Includes peer grouping)

What type of research or evaluation design will be used to evaluate the performance of community colleges in California?

Can you explain the peer grouping analysis?

Why not use American Community Survey data, instead of Census data, for the Service Area Indices?

How are out-of-state populations that are significant for some colleges captured in the Service Area Indices?

If you have a large Continuing Ed program that draws students from throughout the state, how does this affect the indices (i.e., BA Plus)?

Why did you choose to define six clusters for the peer grouping of each indicator?
Student Progress and Achievement Rate:
Degree/Certificate/Transfer

College Indicator: Student Progress and Achievement Rate

How do we determine First-Time Freshman (FTF)?

First-time students for a cohort year are defined as students taking credit courses in the CCC system for the first time during the year. When Social Security Numbers (SSNs) are available, they are used to search the CCCCO MIS database systemwide for first time students (as far back as 1992); otherwise unique numbers assigned locally by the college or district (Unique Local Identifiers) are used to search district-wide. If a student is enrolled in a Fall term with a prior Summer enrollment, the student qualifies as a First-Time Freshman. The process for determining students with prior enrollments outside the CCC system are based on data matches with UC, CSU, and NSC.

Which college gets credit for a student that completes the cohort requirements or achieves the outcomes at another college?

The college where a student first takes and finishes (includes “F” and “W”) a credit course will count that student in their cohort. If the student completes the cohort requirements or achieves the outcomes at another institution, the original college gets the credit for that student.

The concept of proportional credit for outcomes has been explored but is not implemented in this year’s report.

Are we breaking down the different outcomes (Certificate, Transfer, etc) in the report?

There is no breakdown of each of the outcomes in the final ARCC report. To help each college to do more insightful local research and analysis, the Chancellor’s Office MIS unit created a Data on Demand site, which provides researchers with the student-level datasets for the indicators. ..

Because the ARCC report is already very long, we decided to make this level of data available to researchers through a separate medium (i.e., the Data on Demand site). The datasets are first released on Data on Demand with the October draft and the datasets are replaced when the January draft is released.
Why are we only using certificates of 18 units or more as an outcome?

We decided to use Chancellor’s Office approved certificates (18 units or more) as an outcome for the Student Progress and Achievement Rate (SPAR) indicator for the current report. We will consider the release of a separate report that captures the results of certificates that include less than 18 units. Note that Title 5 revisions have changed the Certificates of Achievement to include certificates of 12 to 18 units. However, we do not yet capture 12 to 18 unit certificates in our MIS (revision of that data element will need to happen first).

Why did the initial framework use 56 units in defining transfer prepared, as opposed to 60 units used currently?

CSU defined transfer prepared as 56 units but changed to 60 units in 2001-2002. UC has always defined transfer prepared as 60 units. Based on additional feedback, we have changed the definition of transfer prepared from 56 units proposed in the initial framework to 60 units in the 2007 report.

Why are we using 6 years to achieve an outcome?

Research at the Chancellor's Office has indicated that the great majority of students achieve these outcomes by 6 years. Although the Chancellor’s Office has monitored time frames beyond the six-year period, 6 years has been the standard time period used since the beginning of the report.

What if the requirements for an Associate of Arts (AA) increase or change next year?

We will adjust our models in subsequent reports to reflect any policy or procedure changes that may affect the outcomes.

What is the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) data used for?

The Chancellor’s Office performs a match with NSC to identify students that were enrolled outside the CCC system or transferred to four-year institutions. First-time students are determined by excluding prior enrollment outside the CCC system. Transfers are used in the Student Progress and Achievement Rate (college indicator) and in two of the system indicators, the Transfer Rate and the Volume of Transfers.
Should we recalculate transfer numbers for those four-year institutions that submit too late to NSC?

Four-year institutions usually submit student files 2 to 3 times a semester to NSC. It’s unlikely that we are not able to capture the transfers. We will not recalculate prior cohorts in our subsequent reports.

How do we know how many bad Social Security Numbers (SSN) we have?

SSN's are used to determine first-time freshman status in the system, as well as to match with four year institutions and wage data from Employment Development Department (EDD). A 2011 report on missing and invalid SSNs by college is now available on the ARCC website.

Are Community Colleges (CCs) getting credit for high school students that are taking courses at the CC while in high school and transferring to four-year institutions?

Students attending high school and concurrently enrolled at a community college will be included in the cohort if they meet the requirements for that specific indicator. For example, the cohort for the Student Progress and Achievement Rate requires the student to have earned at least 12 credit units and attempted degree applicable Math or English, or credit courses with SAM code A or B within 6 years. If a high school student meets those requirements they are included in the denominator. The outcome (the numerator) for the Student Progress and Achievement Rate includes a degree, certificate (18 units plus), transfer, transfer directed or transfer prepared.

In developing the cohort for the Student Progress and Achievement Rate, we use attempted degree applicable Math or English courses to identify behavioral intent. Does this include transferable courses?

We use both credit and degree applicable courses, as well as transferable Math/English courses, to identify the cohort of students with behavioral intent towards degree, certificate or transfer. The courses are identified by Course TOP Code.

How does the SRTK Transfer Rate compare to the ARCC Transfer Rate?

The ARCC report does not include a transfer rate by college. Instead, transfer is one of the outcomes in the Student Progress and Achievement Rate. The cohort for this rate is first-time students with minimum of 12 units earned who attempted degree/certificate/transfer threshold courses within six years of entry.
The SRTK is also a cohort study but is defined as first-time freshman, who are enrolled full-time in a fall term and are degree seeking. The transfer count is the total number of cohort non-completers identified as enrolling in another institution.

The ARCC report includes a systemwide transfer rate. The cohort for this transfer rate consists of first-time students with a minimum of 12 units earned who attempted a transfer-level Math or English during enrollment and who transferred to a four-year institution within 6 years.

**College Indicator: Persistence Rate**

*Are you taking out students that are taking only Physical Education (PE) courses towards a degree?*

We exclude from the rate students who took only PE courses (Course TOP Code 083500 and 083510) to eliminate those students who take classes recreationally and who would therefore not necessarily persist. Analysis indicates that the percent of students taking only PE classes for those 6 units is 3%. We cannot determine if those students who take only PE courses take those courses for a PE-related degree.

*Who gets credit when the 6 units to determine the cohort are split between two Community Colleges?*

Both colleges receive credit for that particular student.

*How are you going to get data to define first census for short-term classes with daily census?*

We use the variable from the CCCCO MIS that indicates if the enrollment record was active as of First Census.

*What about programs not designed for persistence, like a sheriff's training camp?*

If the programs/students do not meet the requirements for the indicator they will not be captured in this first report. Colleges will receive recognition for many of these kinds of students because the ARCC has a measure for vocational certificate completion.

*For financial reasons, we have high school special admit students that start in the summer. Do we get to count them as new students?*

If a student starts in the summer, we will capture them as first-time freshman in the fall cohort. High school students are included if they meet the indicator requirements.
Why are we using Fall to Fall as opposed to Fall to Spring?

Research indicates that Fall to Fall is a more valid indicator for measuring a student’s persistence.

**System Indicator: Annual Number of Transfers to Four-Year Institutions**

How is transfer defined by CSU and UC?

The transfer numbers in the report are based on definitions from the UC and CSU systems. Transfer to the CSU/UC is an undergraduate who accumulated community college credits prior to enrollment.

**Why not use National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) data for the UC and CSU match?**

For this report we will be using the UC and CSU transfer numbers. We use the NSC data to validate the UC and CSU numbers. We also use the NSC match to capture the transfer to Out-of State (OOS) institutions and the In-State Private (ISP) institutions.

**System Indicator: Transfer to Four-Year Institutions**

In regards to the Transfer Rate cohort…Is it any 12 units? Should it not be 12 transfer units?

The Transfer Rate cohort captures students who transfer to CSU, UC, In-State Privates or Out-of-State Institutions with any 12 credit units. To limit the unit count to transfer units would ignore the contribution that many non-credit courses (especially Basic Skills and ESL) make toward student success. Since this is not a rate (no denominator), the type of units is less relevant.

**System Indicator: Annual Number/Percent of BA/BS Degrees who attended a CCC**

Why are we excluding In-State Private (ISP) and Out-of-State (OOS) four-year institutions from this calculation?

There is currently no data system in place that captures the baccalaureate degrees received by CCC transfers at these institutions.
Student Progress and Achievement Rate:
Vocational/Occupational/Workforce Development

Systemwide Indicator: Annual Number of Degrees/Certificates Conferred by Program

Why are we not counting certificates under 18 units?

Actually, we are counting certificates under 18 units for this Systemwide Indicator.

Will Noncredit awards be included in the ARCC report?

Noncredit awards were not included in the 2007 ARCC report. With the 2008 ARCC report we began to include data for the Enhanced Noncredit courses and/or awards implemented in 2007 under SB 361 (Scott, Chapter 631, Statutes of 2006). We also began to produce a supplementary report to analyze the effects of Enhanced Noncredit in more depth than the ARCC format (in Focus on Results) allows.

Systemwide Indicator: Increase in Total Personal Income

Are we able to analyze the effects of CCC awards on wages of those students who are self-employed/entrepreneurs or international students?

We cannot analyze the earnings or income of self-employed individuals at this time. The income information for the ARCC report is limited to available sources. Our wage data come from the Employment Development Department (EDD), and EDD does not capture earnings for the self-employed. If international students are working for an employer that reports wages in California, we will have their wage data. If they return to employment in their home country we have no way of obtaining those data.

What about the demographic shifts in the marketplace and the changing labor market (e.g., outsourcing, regional differences, retraining displaced workers)?

The ARCC Income Indicator provides “fertile ground” for an array of analyses and the possibility for an entirely separate study, which we are considering for the future. However, the project’s tight due dates and current resources compel us to focus on the income analysis as specified in the ARCC framework: Increase in total wages associated with receiving a degree/certificate (Systemwide Indicator). We acknowledge that personal income as specified in the AB 1417 framework encompasses more than just wages.
Will we adjust wages used in our analyses for inflation?

Where appropriate, we will adjust wages for inflation. Some of the potential comparisons (e.g., to California Per Capita Income) do not require inflation adjustment for proper interpretation, but we are aware that other analyses may call for inflation adjustment.

For our income analysis, what about students who took a certain number of units, but did not get an award?

The ARCC framework specifies analysis of personal income for students who received a degree or certificate. However, other research has shown that wage progression may result from completion of a certain number of units, even without a degree or certificate. We have begun to look at the relationship between income and units in the absence of an award, although this goes beyond the current ARCC requirements for this indicator. Additional analyses on this topic are planned.

College Indicator: Annual Successful Course Completion Rate (Vocational Course)

On the annual successful Vocational Course completion rate, are we going to include military withdrawals in the count of grades that serves as the denominator for that rate (and for the Basic Skills course completion rate as well)?

No. Based on feedback received during our field presentations in April and May 2006 we plan to exclude military withdrawals (found in MIS data element SX04 ENROLLMENT GRADE) from our completion rate calculations for Vocational and Basic Skills courses. The current numbers of military withdrawals in certain regions may differentially affect the course completion rates for colleges and so we decided to exclude military withdrawals from our calculations for all colleges.

Why do the denominator (cohort) definitions for Vocational Course and Basic Skills Course Completion Rates now include “DR” as a value for SX04 Enrollment-Grade?

The DR value was added to the SX04 Enrollment-Grade data element starting with Summer 2007 reporting and is applied to students dropping between the first census date and the first withdraw date, if a W has not been applied yet. For some colleges the W occurs after the first census date, so those institutions do not use a DR. Training sessions were provided when the DR value was introduced to the data element. Adding DR cleaned up the many “XX” codes (None of the above/Unknown) populating the SX04 field. If colleges can document that the introduction of the DR code decreased their rates (e.g., by increasing the denominator/cohort numbers), that reason could be used in their self-assessments. This issue affects two ARCC rates, the Annual Successful Course
Completion Rate for Credit Vocational Courses and the Successful Course Completion Rate for Credit Basic Skills Courses.

Note that the addition of DR to the SX04 data element was not specifically for ARCC purposes, but was included as part of the CRCC project to help answer many questions about student activity.

Why does distance to nearest UC matter in predicting rates of vocational course completion?

For the 2008 report, the low positive correlation (r = .24) between vocational course completion rate and distance to the nearest UC suggests that the further the community college from its nearest UC, the higher that college’s vocational course completion rate. This distance metric might serve as a proxy for another predictor or set of predictors for which the data are less readily available (e.g., urban/rural distinction, proximity of certain community colleges to specific industries that encourage/support vocational programs). Also, colleges tend to tailor their programs to the needs of their communities. Community colleges closer to the UCs may emphasize and support transfer courses over vocational courses to meet local needs, while colleges further from the UCs focus on vocational programs/courses and related support structures.

In the ARCC data specifications for college-level indicators, what is the meaning of a grade of I* in data element SX-04 ENROLLMENT GRADE?

I* means Incomplete, where "*" indicates the default grade to be received by the student if the incomplete is not completed within one year. In other words, if the student does not complete the class, the student’s grade defaults to whatever grade is included in place of the asterisk. An “I” followed by a “P” means “in progress” and students are not included in the specified cohort if SX04 = IP. Neither are they included if SX04 = IX, which means incomplete without a default grade.

Pre-Collegiate Improvement: Basic Skills and ESL

Systemwide Indicator: Annual Number of Basic Skills Improvements

Are we breaking Basic Skills into Math and English as we did in Partnership for Excellence?

No. The ARCC framework for this systemwide indicator calls for a simple count of the annual number of basic skills improvements. A student is counted only once in Mathematics or English, regardless of how many times they improve.
Can ARCC be used to search for best practices, as in basic skills?

Yes, with the proper analyses. The ARCC staff has created peer groups that may facilitate the search for best practices. The peer groups "control" for specific factors that, if ignored, could lead to erroneous identification of outstanding or highly effective programs. That is, without these statistical controls, people might infer a superior program performance when a particular "success" really stems only from a well-advantaged clientele (service population). However, a statistically oriented researcher should probably have involvement in this kind of use of ARCC data and results.

**College Indicator: ESL Improvement Rate**

Why is there no ESL Improvement Rate for my college in Table 1.5 of the College Indicators for the 2011 ARCC report?

Based on the data specifications used to extract the ESL improvement data from the COMIS for the 2011 report, some colleges did not appear in the cohorts used to calculate the credit ESL improvement rates. This may be due to how a college codes its ESL courses (e.g., credit versus noncredit, appropriate TOP code). In addition, some colleges may not have formal ESL programs or may be too new to have sufficient data for this cohort.

Keep in mind that Noncredit ESL courses are excluded for reasons given in the response to the FAQ titled “What about the 75% criterion for Noncredit ESL?” elsewhere in this FAQ document.

What if a student successfully completes multiple courses in the same term? Will same-term completions be counted in course completion and improvement rates?

Where possible, we plan to include same-term completions, as long as the subsequent course meets the criterion for showing progress and it follows the first ESL course in time. For example, if a student successfully completes the first ESL course and subsequently successfully completes a higher level course that meets the improvement criterion (e.g., higher level ESL or English) in the same semester, we will count it as an improvement.

How are we identifying the ESL level? Our college has three courses at each ESL level. How will these be counted?

We use combinations of relevant data elements from the CCCCO MIS to identify the ESL level, although we realize the limitations of our current data given the complexity of the ESL structure throughout the CCC system. We use Course TOP codes that identify courses as ESL, plus a combination of several other data elements that help us estimate
the ESL level and determine whether the student successfully completed a higher level course during the cohort period.

The actual logic for deriving counts of ESL (and Basic Skills) improvements is included with the data specifications posted on the ARCC Web page.

Based on our discussions with ESL experts throughout the CCC system, we realize that colleges vary widely in the levels of ESL courses offered and the criteria for success and progress in the ESL curriculum. Some colleges have up to nine or ten levels of ESL courses, while others have considerably fewer. There is currently no way for the Chancellor’s Office MIS to capture the complexity of the ESL course structure.

**How do we account for open entry and open exit?**

The CCCO MIS has a data element (XB01 SECTION ACCOUNTING METHOD) that contains a value for “Positive Attendance (Open Entry, Open Exit),” which can be used as appropriate to account for Open Entry/Open Exit courses.

**What about the 75% criterion for Noncredit ESL?**

The initial ARCC framework (March 2005) included only Credit courses in the college-level indicators for ESL and Basic Skills and that framework applied for the 2007 ARCC report.

The 75% criterion was used to measure Noncredit course success in a previous accountability effort (Partnership for Excellence). The ARCC team proposed using that same criterion to include Noncredit courses in the improvement rate calculations for ESL and Basic Skills. Upon further consultation with the ARCC Technical Advisory Group, as well as feedback from colleges with large Noncredit ESL programs, it appears that the 75% criterion is not valid for use in the ARCC. There is currently no acceptable, standardized performance indicator that will allow us to include Noncredit ESL courses in our analyses.

Given the wide variance in success criteria for Noncredit ESL courses and the complexity of ESL course levels in colleges throughout the system, we have excluded regular Noncredit ESL (and Noncredit Basic Skills) from our college level analyses. However, we have included a specific metric for Enhanced Noncredit courses/awards from the 2008 ARCC report based on the requirements of SB 361.

**College Indicator: Basic Skills Improvement Rate**
Are we going to take ESL out of Basic Skills?
Yes. The ESL Improvement Rate is calculated separately.

Why did the 2007 report include noncredit in the Basic Skills indicator when it did not include it in the ESL indicator?

We did not include noncredit Basic Skills courses in the Basic Skills indicators for the 2007 report. Given the issue of measuring success in noncredit courses, we excluded noncredit courses from the Basic Skills indicators We have had the enhanced noncredit indicator from the 2008 report, as required by SB 361.

Why does the SAT 25th percentile at the nearest four-year college predict basic skills improvement?

In the 2008 report, the low negative correlation (r = -.22) between the SAT Verbal 25th percentile score for the nearest four-year college (which could be either a UC or a CSU) and basic skills improvement indicates that this is a relatively weak predictor. This was the case in the 2007 analysis as well, where the SAT Verbal 25th percentile score also served as a predictor of basic skills improvement rates. This predictor contributed sufficiently to remain in the final regression model for both report years. Intuitively, we would presume a positive relationship here, i.e., the higher the SAT score at the 25th percentile, the higher the basic skills improvement rate, but the correlation indicates otherwise, and this proves somewhat puzzling.

Possibly, the SAT score serves as a moderator or mediator variable in a more complex model that exceeds the scope of the present ARCC report. The negative relationship could also reflect an anomaly in the data for the predictor (e.g., reporting difficulties or changes during the year of the SAT scores used for this analysis).

In general, the relatively low adjusted R² for this model suggests the need for additional research to identify additional uncontrollable factors affecting basic skills improvement rates. Of course, it is possible that the factors that determine this outcome are not measured by our data system; are predominantly “controllable;” or interact in ways not tested in the current regression process. The 2008 Report continues to show that SAT Verbal 25th percentile score for the nearest four-year college is a predictor of basic skill course completion. Further research is needed to learn more about why this relationship exists, but that research is beyond the scope of the ARCC report.

College Indicator: Enhanced Noncredit Progress and Achievement Rate

How will you measure outcomes for enhanced noncredit courses to respond to the requirements of SB 361?
See the ARCC reports from 2008 onward and refer to Appendix B for more details.

**College Profile Data**

**How did you derive the annual unduplicated headcount used for Table 1.7 of the 2012 ARCC Report?**

Annual unduplicated headcount for Table 1.7 is based on students actively enrolled in Summer, Fall, Winter, and/or Spring terms. This headcount includes both credit and noncredit students. A student enrolled in multiple terms was counted only once for the year (i.e., not counted separately for each term). However, because this section of the ARCC report specifically addresses college-level demographics, we counted the student at each college where he/she was actively enrolled during that year. For example, if a student enrolled at Yuba College in Summer and Fall 2009 and at American River College in Spring 2010, that student would be counted once at Yuba and once at American River for the 2009-10 academic year.

**Is the FTES count based on MIS data or 320?**

The FTES count in the ARCC report is based on the 320 report (CCFS-320 Report).

**Data Collection, Analysis, and Review (Includes peer grouping)**

**What type of research or evaluation design will be used to evaluate the performance of community colleges in California?**

The evaluation design includes both “value-added” measurements at the individual college level and comparative peer grouping. Peer grouping enables colleges and policymakers to view institutional performance against empirically derived “peers” such as other colleges with similar characteristics (e.g., similar size and distance to transfer partners, similar levels of academic preparedness upon entry).

The AB 1417 performance framework recognizes the unique environment of each college that affects individual college performance and thus recommends against blanket comparisons across colleges or against artificially generated, pre-defined standards.

**Can you explain the peer grouping analysis?**

First, let us cover a bit of history behind the use of the peer grouping method for the ARCC. The peer grouping method stands as the second of two evaluative methods for the college-level performance indicators in the official ARCC report to the Legislature. The first evaluative method is the year-to-year change that each community college may demonstrate for each of the performance indicators. Considering that the year-to-year method has a very simple and clear interpretation for the public, the year-to-year method will appear in the main body of the report. On the other hand, the peer grouping method
presents a relatively complex context for the evaluation of each college’s results for any particular performance indicator, and we will present most of this technical content in the official report’s appendix.

The original accountability framework that the expert panels drafted contained only the year-to-year method (a method sometimes called the “value-added” method). However, the control agency most involved in the AB 1417/ARCC scenario (the California Department of Finance) deemed the value-added method as inadequate for its own accountability requirements. Subsequently, we agreed upon peer grouping as a critical complement to the year-to-year method, and it became part of the legislation passed in 2004 (Education Code Section 84754.5(b)(2)).

In order to make peer grouping a valid approach, we established that we need a peer grouping for each of the seven college-level performance indicators in ARCC. Therefore, we will produce seven peer groupings, and each college will probably fall into a different peer group for each performance indicator. ARCC essentially uses peer grouping to “level the playing field.” Although this will complicate the presentation of a college’s relative performance for its seven ARCC performance indicators, the separate peer grouping approach recognizes (a) the different environmental factors that affect the ability for a community college to generate results in a particular performance indicator and (b) the different missions of the community colleges. In other words, the use of seven peer groupings (one per performance indicator) helps us to avoid “comparing apples to oranges” as the saying goes.

Our peer grouping method basically takes on one performance indicator at a time. For instance, in analyzing the student persistence indicator, we will identify a set of environmental factors (i.e., measured factors beyond the control of the community college) through the use of field input, literature review, and statistical modeling. The term “measured” limits this process to those factors for which we have readily available data. We will then use the identified environmental factors in a cluster analysis (a statistical method) to group the state’s community colleges into peer groups. As a result, each college will have a set of other colleges (peers) that share relatively similar environments with respect to student persistence.

The report format displays both the college’s result in student persistence and the average result in student persistence for that college’s peer group. To augment the average result for a peer group, we also display the minimum and maximum results for student persistence in each peer group. Because readers of the report will expect to see the names of the colleges that fall into each peer group for the student persistence indicator, we will list in the official report the colleges in each peer group. Although some people might argue that such listing of the colleges by peer group may stigmatize certain colleges, it seems unlikely that such a listing will damage those institutions that the public has probably already recognized as disadvantaged colleges. In the context of accountability, it may damage the disadvantaged colleges even more if we fail to identify their magnitude of disadvantage in our analysis by omitting a listing.
For consistency, we apply the same steps and formats, which we just described for the example of the student persistence indicator, to the other seven college-level indicators.

We expect a college’s administrators to evaluate the institution’s strengths and weaknesses to a certain degree by noting where their college stands with respect to its peer group for each performance indicator. Naturally, considering the status of the report as a public document, a similar evaluative process will occur not only at the local board of trustees for each district but at the local news agencies as well. Obviously, this ARCC approach emphasizes local discretion and local standards, so to speak. Through the application of peer grouping, we avoid both the creation of a single statewide “standard” for each indicator and a listing of the top 10 (or bottom 10) community colleges.

**Why not use American Community Survey data, instead of Census data, for the Service Area Indices?**

The American Community Survey (ACS) is replacing the decennial census ”long form.” The ACS, which was intended to be more timely and accurate than the traditional Census, is an ongoing survey that provides yearly estimates of social, economic and housing characteristics. The ARCC team will incorporate the ACS ZCTA-level (ZIP Code) data into the Service Area Indices as soon as this is feasible.

**How are out-of-state populations that are significant for some colleges captured in the Service Area Indices?**

The indices were created by linking Fall 2000 students with economic, educational and social characteristics from Census 2000 data at the ZCTA level. Because of the significant number of students with Arizona and Nevada ZIP codes, ZCTA level data were also included from those states.

**If you have a large Continuing Ed program that draws students from throughout the state, how does this affect the indices (i.e., BA Plus)?**

Because the Service Area Indices used in ARCC (i.e., the BA Plus) are “weighted” by the number of students that each area sends to a college, the extent of the “out-of-district” enrollment will not matter much. The use of data for the local geography associated with each student gives us a “background” factor for each student. If that student lives far away in a neighborhood that is quite different from that of the campus, that does not alter the “background” influence that our analysis attempts to capture with these indices. At the few campuses that enroll students who must move into apartments or “dorms” in order to attend classes, there could be some “bias” in the sense that these students may choose to live in areas with low socio-economic indicators (because those are perhaps the only areas that offer student housing). However, even in this scenario, we assume that student background (primarily family income) will correlate with the kind of area that they choose as student housing.

**Why did you choose to define six clusters for the peer grouping of each indicator?**
We felt that equal-sized clusters of between ten and twenty colleges each would represent effective peer group sizes for comparison purposes. Thus, a target of six clusters for our system of colleges fits this constraint. Specifying a target of more than six clusters creates a problem of too small of a peer group, especially if the cluster contained only one college. A cluster of one would mean no between-college comparison in this framework. Clusters of two or three colleges present relatively weak comparisons. When the analyst specifies ten or twelve clusters as the target number of clusters (rather than six), then he/she increases the chance of obtaining some very small clusters.

On the other hand, specifying a target of less than six clusters would result in some very large clusters. The risk with very large clusters is that the members of a large cluster may have much more heterogeneity (dissimilarity) than we would prefer. The increased heterogeneity of large clusters could lead to the problem of comparing “apples to oranges”—the very problem we want to avoid in the comparison of between-college performances. The use of a target of six clusters for all of the indicators reflects our desire to provide some consistency and simplicity to the peer grouping in the ARCC.