



SOUTHERN CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY

Using Multiple Assessment Measures to Inform
Course Placement and to Improve Retention

Key Takeaways

- ✓ Southern Connecticut State University encourages students to use **multiple measures of readiness** to ensure accuracy of placement in math and English.
- ✓ The university recognizes the **important relationship between accurate placements and retention**; devoting resources to appropriate placement upfront offsets costs endured later by student attrition.
- ✓ The university has worked closely with **faculty and student advising teams** to develop policies most likely to support student success, which they continuously examine and refine.

Institutional Profile

Overview	Admissions	Enrollment & Success
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regional public university• Part of the 6-member Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU) system• Located in New Haven, Conn.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Undergraduate enrollment: 8,900• 90% in-state	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Number of applicants: 8,316• % admitted: 83%• % admitted who enrolled: 16%

Source: National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Fall 2022

Policy and Practice: Admission

As a regional public university with the capacity to serve more students, Southern Connecticut State University has simplified their application process to lessen barriers to admission. In 2019, letters of recommendation were eliminated. In 2020, test scores became optional for admissions and scholarship consideration, but the institution continued to use them for course placement.

Although they cannot directly attribute changes in the composition of their student body and enrollment to policy change alone, enrollment leaders observed a 10% increase in first-year enrollment for fall 2023, and the student body continues to diversify. Over half of the entering class is first in their families to attend a four-year college, and slightly more than half are Pell Grant eligible.

Policy and Practice: Post-Admission

Before adopting a test-optional policy, Southern Connecticut University used SAT and ACT scores for math and English placement, aligning their standards with the other three public universities in the CSCU system. While ACT and SAT scores can still be used for math and English placement, their test-optional policy along with the limited availability of testing during the first year of the pandemic, provided an opportunity to expand course placement options.

At present, Southern Connecticut State University gives students three ways to determine placement:

- An SAT or ACT score;
- Completion of the ALEKS (Assessment and Learning in Knowledge Spaces) Placement, Preparation, and Learning exam (PPL) for math placement and/or an in-house writing assessment for English placement; or
- High school grade point average (HSGPA) on a standardized 4.0 scale, and for math placement only, an evaluation of prior high school math courses taken.

SCSU's new placement policy was rolled out over two years, allowing for observation and adjustment based on student behaviors and academic performance. In year one, students selected one of the three placement options prior to registration. In year two, the advising office used initial high school transcript GPA for placement. However, this approach yielded an unintended outcome: Fewer students submitted scores or attempted the institution's in-house placement exam (ALEKS) for English and math. Subsequently, students were placed in lower math classes which, in turn, resulted in more students complaining about their placement and seeking course changes during the first week of school.

Recognizing that incorrect placement can contribute to a student's decision to leave the university and that using multiple measures of readiness often leads to more accurate course placements, SCSU now encourages students to send an SAT or ACT score and/or take the ALEKS or in-house writing assessment to validate or challenge the initial placement based on their HSGPA alone. Students placed in the lowest level classes also receive targeted communications describing the content of those classes so they can self-assess whether they are appropriately placed; they are then reminded how they can re-place prior to the start of classes by using one of the other assessments.

While Southern Connecticut State aims to place students in the courses aligned with their current skill level, they acknowledge that the pandemic resulted in significant learning loss, especially in math and STEM, and that many students need remedial instruction. As they continue to examine the relationship between placement exams, placement, student performance, and retention, and continue to enroll cohorts of students whose learning was impacted by the pandemic in different ways, they'll continue to re-evaluate their testing and placement policies, as well as their available support services to help students reach their educational goals.