

The Impact of a Computer Proficiency Exam on Business Students' Admission to and Performance in a Higher-Level IT Course

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ABSTRACT

Many colleges of business now assume incoming freshmen arrive on campus possessing high levels of computer skill and ability. Students are frequently offered the opportunity to take and pass a computer proficiency exam (CPE) in lieu of a freshman information technology (IT) course. While promoted as an efficient alternative, our analysis of the implementation of a CPE as a replacement for the freshman IT course at a small, Midwestern university revealed mixed results. As expected, we found those students who took and passed the CPE generally scored higher in their follow-on, sophomore IT course than those who passed the prerequisite, freshmen IT course. However, the CPE pass rate proved to be significantly lower than that of the course it replaced. This created an unexpected backlog of students unable to enroll in the sophomore IT course, delaying their program of study. Furthermore, over time the CPE highlighted patterns of weakness in students' Excel skills, proving it to be a valuable diagnostic tool. Finally, while the original objective of the CPE had been to replace the freshman IT course, it instead supported the need to reinstate at least some portion of it. This suggests that a hybrid approach may be most effective in ensuring that freshman enter their sophomore year with those IT skills needed most for follow-on course success.

Keywords: Computer Proficiency Exam, Computer Skill Assessment, Prerequisite Course Requirements, Computer Skill Development, IT Course Success