

# Success in Florida's Community Colleges

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Not since the early 1960's has there been such a pervasive concern in this country for academic standards at all levels of education. In Florida, more than in some other states, several legislative mandates, all designed to enhance academic excellence, have forced public community colleges to emerge as front runners in the implementation of standards to improve the quality of education. The College-Level Academic Skills Test (CLAST), entry-level testing, placement and follow-up of graduates, program review, plans and progress reports on indicators of excellence, the English/mathematics rule, cooperative service efforts with other educational institutions and with business and industry, increased funding, and status reports and studies are only a few of the many issues which have surfaced with regard to excellence in Florida's twenty-eight public community colleges.

In 1979, legislation was passed mandating that the Department of Education develop a test to assess basic communication and computational skills at the end of the sophomore year as a condition for admission to upper-division work in the universities and as a requirement for the associate in arts degree. Legislation mandating the test specified that it was to be based on an identification of explicit skills and competencies. After a great deal of work by faculty, a set of 115 skills and competencies in the areas of communication and computation were identified, approved by the State Board of Education, and used to develop CLAST. The first field testing of CLAST began in 1982 when the Legislature required all community college and university students to take the test as a condition for admission to upper-division work and as a requirement for the associate in arts degree.

Students merely had to take the test, but no cut-off score was required by the State Board of Education until August, 1984. To ensure that the more rigorous academic standards were gradually phased in, the initial cut-off scores were set at a relatively low level. In 1986 and again in 1989, the scores will be raised to higher levels, eventually to those levels thought to be in line with sound expectations for student performance at the end of two years of college. In other words, Florida has taken the same stringent position at the postsecondary level that was taken at the public school level with respect to requiring the passage of tests in order for students to progress through the system and to obtain a degree.



*For several years, Senator Maxwell provided leadership as a key legislator in the improvement of quality in Florida education. Since 1983, he has headed the Florida System of Community Colleges. Under his leadership, the 28 community colleges have flourished and developed stronger programs of service to the state.*



*Central Florida Community College Radiation Technology student at work in the CFCC lab.*