



IMS Global Learning Consortium Call for Participation:

Piloting an Interoperable Educational Positioning System (EPS) to Improve College Preparedness and Graduation Rates

The Challenge:

In the U.S. the number of students graduating high school that are a poor fit for the college programs they enroll in are reflected in poor graduation rates and a large percentage of students who do graduate requiring more time (and therefore more money) than expected. The resulting rising student debt brings to the fore the issue of the affordability of higher education. Affordability has clear ramifications on national competitiveness in terms of the percentage of the population that can obtain higher education credentials. In turn, governments respond with regulations and controls to attempt to hold down the cost of education. But the root problem of a more effective engagement in the education process is not addressed. College graduation rates can be improved if there is a clear path between a student's goals, preparation and the available academic options.

Imagine for a moment a patient seeking medical advice with only a birth certificate and high-level record of past physician visits vs. having their entire set of medical records to diagnose their pathway to health. Fortunately most free societies allow patients to have full access to their set of medical records. Yet the only two documents K12 and college graduates receive when they graduate is a diploma and a transcript. A student's entire educational record set is somewhere in cyber space split across government agencies, education institutions, learning management systems, and student administration systems. Students, parents, or advisors should have access to the full set of educational records in order to define, assist, and direct students to an appropriate academic program and promising career. It is difficult to believe that with all the advances in information technology within education, we have not solved the single largest issue that is seen from the student's eye --- a defined pathway to a promising education, career, and life.

The above sobering medical-to-educational scenario explains in part why only 24% of all 2010 U.S. high school graduates met all four ACT college-readiness benchmarks, meaning that 76% were not adequately prepared academically for first-year college courses in English composition, college math, social sciences, and Biology. The 76% of first year college students not adequately prepared equates to a total of 1.3 million students; 995 thousand at two-year colleges and 310 thousand at four-year colleges. The cost for remediation services for the 76% of unprepared students is estimated to be \$3.6 billion annually for all U.S. students.

The Opportunity:

How can the fit between academic options, student goals and college readiness be improved? Obviously education institutions and content providers need to continue to innovate in terms of programs that are a better fit to evolving career and workforce opportunities. Institutional and publisher competition and innovation is essential in driving new models that are potentially more effective. That is the “supply” side of the equation.

On the “demand” side of the equation there is the need to enable smart “educational consumers” who are better equipped to make solid educational choices. With the right information a student, or the student’s sponsor (e.g. parents) can play a much more active role in planning their educational journey and finding the right fit for their needs and desires.

Under the smart educational consumer model, college students and students preparing to attend college, as well as their parents, would benefit from:

1. An easy way to determine if they are on a suitable path to their dream career.
2. A way to easily determine their academic options and the fit of their academic accomplishments to each potential path.
3. Understanding the financial commitment and timeframe for each option.
4. Being able to track their progress and knowing immediately if the plan has been disrupted.
5. Being able to easily reevaluate the options as their needs and desires change along the way.

The capabilities described in the preceding paragraph describe the emerging concept of an “Educational Positioning System (EPS)” put forth by StudentAlignment.com (see <http://www.studentalignment.com/eps.html>). The EPS name was selected to create a comparison to the ubiquitous GPS (Global Positioning System) that has improved everyone’s ability to physically navigate.

Putting in place an EPS requires availability of data from a variety of sources. Much of the data needed for the EPS already exists. Establishing an EPS will by definition require cooperation among the owners of these data sources.

The IMS Global Learning Consortium EPS Pilot Project:

The purpose of this IMS project is to provide interested organizations (institutional, supplier, government, NGO associations) an open and fair process to collaborate on putting in place regional EPS pilots. The goal will be to make as much progress as possible by incorporating existing sources of data and evolving those as needed.

As with a GPS system, there must be a way to compare the current position (student progress) with a starting point (past academic accomplishments) and destination (future educational goal). The essence of the project will be to bring together a sufficient set of contributing organizations that can respond to the needs of an institutional pilot while at the same time looking at a potentially broader set of needs.

Relationships between secondary and tertiary education are generally regional in nature. In addition, barriers to provision and comparison of educational options are generally lowest within a region or established educational system. For these reasons, IMS will be working with higher education systems to conduct the EPS pilots under this project. Under the leadership of Shah Ardan, CEO at Lone Star College, University Park; The Lone Star College System has volunteered to be the first pilot site and will be the primary focus of the first year of activity. However, institutional participants representing systems of higher education other than Lone Star can participate to compare their requirements and prepare for future pilots. As one of the most innovative and comprehensive community colleges in America, Lone Star College System (LSCS) is the perfect pilot and sponsor. With six colleges, two university centers, five additional centers, and 11 Independent School Districts, LSCS enrolled over 85,000 students in Fall 2011. In addition to its quality programs, large geographic service area and diverse student demographics, LSCS is also recognized for its innovative partnerships and initiatives. It was recently selected by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to lead a statewide alliance of top-performing Texas colleges representing one third – or 235,000 – of all community college students in the state.

Project meetings, progress, and results will be available to all IMS Contributing Member organizations. The resulting interoperability standards will be vetted, distributed and maintained via the established IMS processes. If an interoperability specification from another standards consortium is utilized, IMS will partner with that consortium to provide vetting, distribution, and maintenance to meet the evolving needs of the EPS.

Interested parties can request invitation to a series of organizing conference calls and webinars by emailing eps@imglobal.org

Background References

ACT's College Readiness Benchmarks. Benchmarks are scores on the ACT subject area tests that represent the level of achievement required for students to have a 50% chance of obtaining a B or higher or about a 75% chance of obtaining a C or higher in corresponding credit-bearing first-year college courses. These college courses include English Composition, College Algebra, an introductory social science course, and Biology. Based on a nationally representative sample of 98 institutions and more than 90,000 students, the Benchmarks are median course placement values for these institutions and as such represent a typical set of expectations. Source: ACT, The Condition of College and Career Readiness 2010

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