COMPASS Placement Frequently Asked Questions

Q. What is COMPASS Testing?
A. COMPASS is a computer-based placement test written by the same company that writes the ACT Assessment Test for college admission. The COMPASS examination is an adaptive program that is self-paced, allowing students to work at their own speed and comfort level. There is no time limit, the scores do not affect admission to SDSU, and there is no pass or fail score. Since the two exams can be compared, the Board of Regents chose COMPASS to assess current skills in math and English.

Q. How much does the COMPASS test cost?
A. There is no fee for COMPASS if the testing is a requirement for the Board of Regents. Students may challenge their initial placement one time by paying a challenge fee and taking the COMPASS test.

Q. How long does the COMPASS test take?
A. Most students take about 30 minutes per section; the questions are adjusted to the ability level indicated by the responses to the previous questions.

Q. What is SDSU's accountability to placement testing?
A. SDSU is mandated by the South Dakota Board of Regents to place all students into their entry-level math and English courses by ACT and COMPASS scores. A student must have valid ACT or SAT I sub-scores OR COMPASS scores that place them in the appropriate level course OR an exception (permission) to be in a different course.

Q. What if a student has no ACT or SAT I scores or the scores are over 5 years old?
A. Students that have no ACT or SAT I scores (or scores are over 5 years old) and have no transfer of English 101 or College Algebra (Math 102) or higher are required to take the English, Math and Reading portions of the COMPASS exam at no cost. Basic Algebra or Intermediate Algebra courses transferring to SDSU from a non-regental school are subject to this placement policy.

Q. How do transfer students fit into the policy?
A. Students transferring English 101 and College Algebra (Math 102) to SDSU are not required to take the COMPASS examination. However, if they will be taking English 101 and/or entry-level math courses at SDSU, they must follow the placement rules, Placement by ACT or SAT I sub-scores, followed by placement with COMPASS.

Q. What will happen if a student is in the wrong course?
A. Students who are not enrolled in the appropriate course based on ACT, SAT I, or COMPASS scores will be notified by telephone, letter, and/or instructor contact by the Math and English Departments. Failure to adjust course, take the COMPASS test, or apply for an Exception prior to the add/drop date for the semester will result in the student being administratively dropped from the math and/or English courses.

Q. What is an exception?
A. An exception is a permission form for the student to be enrolled in a course different than their placement indicates. The student begins this process by contacting the Math or English Department representatives. Exception forms must have final approval by the Vice President for Academic Affairs prior to course alterations.

Q. What if a student wants to take a math course lower than their placement?
A. Students may take a lower-level math course if desired. However, they must contact their College Designee if they wish to go lower into Math 095.