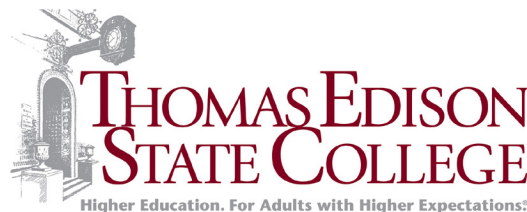


A Specialized Focus on the Unique Needs of Adult Learners



Thomas Edison State College (TESC) in Trenton, N.J., serves a unique student population. Established in 1972, TESC was launched exclusively for adult learners and serves students wherever they live or work. One of New Jersey's 11 senior public institutions of higher education, TESC is among the oldest accredited schools in the country designed exclusively for adults and is a pioneer in the use of technology to create learning opportunities for adults. The college offers both undergraduate and graduate degree programs to more than 21,000 adult learners each year, and more than 23 percent of those students use the CLEP® program to help them complete their degree programs. In FY14, TESC awarded 3,437 degrees, a record high in the institution's 43-year history.

Building Blocks for Student Success

Counselors and advisers at TESC focus attention on the option of credit for prior learning in their earliest conversations with incoming students. Because nearly all TESC students are adult learners, the enrollment and admission teams assume that most have prior learning credentials and are looking for flexible ways to earn credits needed for a degree. For TESC, CLEP is a critical building block in the planning for a degree. In fact, the college has recently introduced an option for earning an Associate Degree in Business Administration that can be achieved entirely via CLEP, a number of free open course options that are aligned with CLEP exams, and TESC's portfolio program.

“Institutions that are open to the idea of optimizing completion opportunities for their students will discover that in addition to the CLEP exams being rigorous and aligned with curriculum, students who prepare for and take CLEP exams are students who are much more likely to persist, to enroll, and to complete their programs of study. Forward-thinking institutions realize that students who are determined to finish their studies using credit for prior learning are valuable additions to their student population.”

Marc Singer

Vice Provost and Director of the Center
for the Assessment of Learning

Many TESC students jump-start their course work by taking CLEP exams in college composition, analyzing and interpreting literature, and sociology. TESC representatives note that students are typically pleased that they can earn credits via CLEP in the humanities, history, the social sciences, and the natural sciences, even though these subjects don't align precisely to TESC degree sequences. This is particularly beneficial to military students who are working to optimize their available educational benefits. CLEP credits pave the way for students to take more advanced course work more quickly and reduce their total cost of a degree. TESC representatives also noted that they are serving a growing number of students who have been home-schooled or are graduates of private religious schools. CLEP credits also help these students leverage their prior knowledge and begin taking courses in their chosen fields more quickly.

Using Student Advisory Sessions to Expand Students' Opportunities

Carla Colburn, acting associate director in the Office of Academic Advising at TESC, noted that during advising appointments with students, counselors discuss various methods of earning credits that will contribute to the students' degree goals. Students who specifically express an interest in earning credits by taking tests receive more detailed information about CLEP and other exams.

Additionally, TESC provides information on CLEP and other tests in response to questions received through the college's Advising Expressline. TESC also has devoted significant real estate in its current course catalog to CLEP, providing a complete list of CLEP exams for which it accepts credits. The catalog provides important details for students so they can plan their degree pathway, including listing TESC course numbers, test titles, minimum ACE recommended passing scores, and the number of credits awarded when a student achieves a passing score. Each CLEP exam is listed under the college's classification guidelines, such as humanities, the natural sciences, the social sciences, and other disciplines. TESC advisers use student information strategically to make certain students will benefit from taking exams such as CLEP, based on the degree requirements a student still needs to satisfy.

Executive Summary

More than 4,200 students at Thomas Edison State College used CLEP exams during the 2013-14 academic year to earn credits for prior learning and to satisfy degree requirements. By including information about CLEP exams and earning credits for prior learning early in the advisory process, TESC helps its adult learner student body achieve their degree goals more quickly and more affordably. By including information about their policies for prior knowledge credits in their course catalog, on their website, and early in student advisory sessions, TESC students can make critical decisions about their course choices and plans for completing their studies for a degree.

TESC CLEP® by the Numbers

- 7,184 students earned between 3 and 12 credit hours in the last four academic years (2010–2014).
- Over 142,497 credit hours were earned in the last four academic years (2010–2014).

TESC Best Practices at a Glance

- Early communication with incoming students about CLEP opportunities.
- Prominence and visibility for CLEP opportunities in student-facing information resources, including the college course catalog, the website, and Advising Expressline.
- Policy that awards CLEP credits in general education courses to help students begin course work in their majors sooner in their college career.

For more information, visit clep.collegeboard.org.