Encouraging Additional Summer Enrollment (EASE)

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MDRC is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization with experience conducting demonstrations in postsecondary education.

Specializes in:
- RCT evaluations
- Qualitative studies
- Program enhancement & technical assistance
MDRC’s Center for Applied Behavioral Science (CABS) uses **behavioral science** to make programs **more effective**
Agenda

EASE Overview

Why the EASE Project?

A Behavioral Science Approach

Barriers to Summer Enrollment & Solutions

Study Design

Questions
What is the EASE project?

» Study involving up to 10 Ohio Community Colleges

» Target population:
  » Low-income
  » First-year
  » Enrolled in the Spring

» Increase the number of students who enroll in summer courses
Community college provides a significant pathway to higher earnings and improved employment opportunities.

19% of first-time, full-time students complete a degree within 3 years. 37% of all students complete within 6 years.

14% of the lowest income students (<30k) earned a degree within 6 years; Pell Grant recipients less likely to complete.

60% of low-income, first-generation students who drop out of college do so within their first year.

Why the EASE Project?

Research finds that students who enroll in summer - especially after their first year - are more likely to:
  » persist
  » graduate within five years

Summer courses could:
  » Bridge gap between spring and fall
  » Mitigate loss of learning
  » Accelerate time to completion

Inform recent policies and proposals:
  » Reinstatement of Third-Term OCOG
  » Proposals for year-round Pell
Why the EASE Project?

Experimental research conducted by MDRC demonstrates the malleability of students’ decision to enroll during the summer.
A Behavioral Science Approach

• Incorporates insights from behavioral science
  » Focuses on how people actually make decisions and behave
  » Actions do not reflect intentions
  » Framing matters
  » Small—and often low cost—changes can affect outcomes
A Behavioral Science Approach

- **Behavioral messaging only**
  - Low-cost
  - Potential to reach large numbers of students
  - Easily scalable

- **Behavioral messaging + Summer Scholar Grant**
  - Inform current and proposed state and federal policies
Behavioral Diagnosis and Design

Define
What is the problem?

Diagnose
Why is it happening?

Test
What happened?

Design
How can it be addressed?
Barriers to Summer Enrollment

Contextual Factors

1. Institutional Norms and Social Networks
2. Paying for Summer Courses
3. Degree Planning and Course Decision-Making
4. Conflicting Obligations
5. Intention-Action Gap
Behavioral Messaging Design

8 Emails

2 Postcards

1 Letter

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Summer classes keep you moving toward your degree!
Register now on CougarWeb.

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Dear [First name] [Last name],

I wanted to follow up on the email I sent you last week with the good news to share! Columbus State has opened a new Summer Scholar Grant. You are one of a limited number of students eligible to receive this grant if you enroll in summer classes. This grant will fully cover the cost of your tuition and fees for the Summer 2017 semester.

You do not have to pay back this grant, and you can use it for as many courses as you would like to take this summer. If you do not use your grant this summer, you will lose it and it cannot be carried over to another term. You should take at least one summer class, since you have the grant available.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grant Name</th>
<th>Grant Amount</th>
<th>Free tuition and fees for summer classes*</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Summer Scholar Grant</td>
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To use your Summer Scholar Grant:
- If you have not already done so, register for summer classes. We will automatically apply this grant to your summer bill.
- Once you enroll, review your aid package on Financial Aid Self Service. The grant amount listed may be adjusted based on the number of credits you take.

For more help, if you have questions about this award or your financial aid package, visit Student Central in Woodson Hall on the Columbus Campus or Student Services in Molder Hall on the Darlington Campus. We can also be reached at 614-297-3535 or at summerscholar@csc.edu.

Sincerely,
Stephanie Albrochi
Student Center
Columbus State Community College

*Grant is contingent on good academic and Financial Aid standing. The amount will be adjusted based on the number of credit hours and any remaining Federal Pell Grant or state grant funding. The Summer Scholar Grant use only the unused portion and fees for Summer 2017.
Barriers to Summer Enrollment

Contextual Factors

1. Institutional Norms and Social Networks
2. Paying for Summer Courses
3. Degree Planning and Course Decision-Making
4. Conflicting Obligations
5. Intention-Action Gap
Barrier 2: Paying for Summer Courses

» Financial aid is complex – few students had the full picture about summer aid
  » Lengthy letters may confuse or cause students to ignore information
  » Hassles, such as additional forms, may discourage students from enrolling
» Lack of financial aid reported as a barrier to summer enrollment

80% of students have Pell remaining that could be used during summer
Personalize and simplify the information delivery

- Efforts to personalize and simplify information, or give students personal assistance through a difficult task can improve outcomes.

Dear Camielle,

I took some time to review your financial aid package and want to make sure you know that you have grants available for summer courses. Based on my review, you have up to $2,908 from your Pell Grant (which you do not have to pay back) that you can use for summer courses.
✓ Provide financial incentives for those in the scholarship group

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Barrier 3: Degree Planning and Course Decision-Making

- Lack of summer course availability
  - Real and Perceived
- Students may not know what’s available or what to take in summer
- Summer courses are more difficult
  - Compressed timeline (8, 10, 12 weeks vs. 16 weeks)

60-80% of students are part-time
• So likely do not complete all gen ed requirements in first 1 or 2 semesters

Summer course pass rates similar to fall & spring

Solutions: Degree Planning and Course Decision-Making

✓ Simplification

- Especially useful in cases where a process is currently complex or tedious, and people are likely to give up before reaching the conclusion or make mistakes.
For both groups, highlight key course availability in summer.

I took some time to run a degree audit for you. According to the system, you are a Business Management major. Here are a few courses you still need for your degree that are offered this summer:

- MATH 1160 Statistical Concepts
- BADM 2204 Principles of Marketing
- ECON 2206 Principles of Macroeconomics
Barrier 5: Intention-Action Gap

Decide to enroll → Select courses → Register → Pay → Attend

Students **intend** to enroll next summer
✓ Create Implementation Prompts
  - Encouraging people to plan the steps they will take to complete a task can move people from intention to action.
Solutions: Intention-Action Gap

» For both groups, created implementation prompts to help students plan for registration.

Follow these four steps to enroll in summer classes:

1. Log in to MyMTC
2. Use your academic plan to find classes that you need to take (click on “View Academic Plan”)
3. Search for Summer 2017 courses (many MTC courses are offered in summer)
   - Click “Find Courses” and choose the 2017 Summer period
4. Register for your summer classes by going to the “Register” tab
» Psychology of Scarcity
  » Having scarce resources (money, time) produce a cognitive bandwidth tax
  » Constant tradeoffs
  » Must make higher quality decisions but you’re in a worse position to do so.

» Goal of a Behavioral Intervention

Source: Shafir (2012).
Study Design

• Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT) to build causal evidence

• What is the effect of each EASE intervention on summer enrollment?

• Will increased summer enrollment lead to better academic outcomes?

Random assignment evaluation with 3 groups

Group 1: Behavioral messaging

Group 2: Behavioral messaging + Summer Scholar Grant

Control: College’s usual messaging
Interested?

- EASE Phase II RFP available on OACC’s website.
- Submissions are due to EASE@MDRC.org by Monday, May 15, 12PM EST

Don’t miss out on this opportunity to participate in a national evaluation, potentially increase summer enrollment and graduation rates, receive funding to support research efforts, AND full support for Summer Scholar Grants