



LEADERSHIP ACADEMY FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

Pathways Project Implementation Memorandum

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RE: Connecting Students to Pathways to Educational Completion
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY/INTRODUCTION

Student's struggle to identify a major causing unneeded courses taken, delays in graduation and additional costs to the students and institutions. Through the development of meta-majors institutions can help to better align students into majors based on the student's interests. The Aspen Institute's "The Workforce Playbook" defines meta-majors as "the clustering of programs within broad occupational or disciplinary categories, help students explore interests and careers with a lower risk of wasting time or credits. First-term maps organized by meta-major can give students a taste of their potential career path but still leave room for them to change programs in their first year without significant repercussions." While developing meta-majors / academic pathways is a step to improved student success and completion, simply developing them is likely not enough to change how students interact with the organization. Instead, the development of meta-majors, coupled with a variety of other student centric initiatives, is needed to improve student success and completion.

RELEVANT LITERATURE REVIEWED

Throughout the course of the OACC Leadership Academy we have been provided with and reviewed many sources of information related to best practices in developing guided pathways. The most relevant sources of information we considered were "The Workforce Playbook" from ASPEN, "The Transfer Playbook" from ASPEN and "Redesigning Your College Through Guided Pathways" from the Community College Resource Center.

Imperative values in leadership come from an understanding and acknowledgment of the institution's mission to create and maintain organizational cultures that will develop and nurture student success. Change and implementation as a result of these modifications while generating the energy and focus to create transformative change is not an easy task and will take a period of time to achieve. It is imperative to have a solid commitment from the entire campus community along with local, regional and state wide industry partners for a successful implementation. Key stakeholders will embrace and own the opportunity to focus on student centric initiatives, which will allow an opening to increase student engagement through the creation of meta-major communities of interest and keeping equity at the forefront in the student outcomes.

As Institutions work together to cultivate equitable programmatic pathways that enhance their institutions, they must also develop and encourage pathways between their institutions and students' careers. In the Next Frontiers of Transformation Emerging Practice 4 section on how to Connect transfer pathways to regional labor market needs in The Aspens Institute's "The Transfer Playbook" summed it up very well "because institutions of higher education—in particular community colleges and regional public four-year colleges—often serve local students and function as local economic development hubs, it is important for these pathways to be responsive to local economic needs." All colleges work hard to ensure that students complete but they visibly must connect the goal of completion to what comes next for students in the form of employment and or to utilize the meta-major foundation acquired to pursue a four-year degree.

DATA EXAMINED

In order to add clarity to our assumption that the development of meta-majors could be an improvement to increase student success and completion rates, we reviewed several key sources of data. Some of these sources included:

- 1) Per Complete College America which was accessed on 1.28.2020
 - a) Nationally, 5% of first time full-time students at 2 year schools graduate on time, this statistic is only 2% in the state of Ohio.
 - b) Nationally, first time full-time students take 3.9 years and an average of 82 credits to earn an Associate Degree. Within Ohio, those same students take 4.6 years and 86 credits to earn an Associate Degree.
 - c) Nationally, only 16% of first time full-time students at two year institutions complete the required college level math and English within the first year. The state of Ohio statistic is very close to the same percentage.
- 2) Ohio community college retention and graduation rates to attempt to find a correlation between an increase in retention and graduation rates with those schools that have already implemented meta-majors.

- 3) Ohio colleges transfer statistics, both 2 year and 4 year institutions. Particularly were transfer statistics from 2 year institutions to 4 year institutions improved at schools that had implemented meta-majors.
- 4) Various early momentum metrics: credit, gateway, and program. Again, used to identify if these metrics were improved at schools that had implemented meta-majors.
- 5) We also reviewed Cuyahoga Community College Cost per Completer Data. This data is used to help determine what extraneous credits students take prior to completion. The data is used as part of Tri-C's annual program review and, since the implementation of meta-majors, seems to indicate students are completing their program of study with less extraneous credits.
 - a) When reviewing institutional data for students who graduated with an Associate Degree in 2018 from Cuyahoga Community College, the average student graduated with 7 credit hours more than needed. The additional courses/credit hours taken beyond program requirements costs students at this institution approximately \$1.8M. In addition, the additional course/credit hours cost the institution \$8.5M.

PROPOSED CHANGES/REFORMS TO BE ADOPTED

As we have seen through our research and data, it's obvious that students struggle to complete on time within the current environment. The evidence suggests the development of meta-majors would help to remedy that problem. However, in order to truly bridge the completion gap, we identified ten additional reforms that can and should be considered:

- 1) Through the development of a meta-major model, students would have structured educational pathways that would help to reduce the time to college completion and increase the number of students who earn their desired credentials.
- 2) Additionally, students will have an improved view of the programs and majors based on their area of interest as well as the associated careers and estimated earnings they could expect from the various types of degrees/certificates. Through the development of meta-majors various programs can be linked together to show students which courses apply to various degrees or certificates in their general area of interest. This linkage would provide the students with a holistic view of all offerings (academic and/or workforce) at the institution.
- 3) Students who come to the institution with only a general idea of what type of career they want to pursue are better supported at the point of application by implementing exploratory majors under the meta-major approach. This allows students to select from broad areas of interest (usually 10 or under) instead of the hundreds of specific programs and majors, thus changing the conversation to be more career focus while reducing wasted credits.

- 4) Students would receive more deliberate guidance and support during their first year with the institution allowing them to develop, and be more apt to follow, a completed academic plan.
- 5) During the first year, students would receive more career focused activities with other students in the same academic pathway. This would allow students to “test the waters” of their academic pathway to ensure the academic program aligns with their interests and passions.
- 6) Math courses would be more deliberately aligned to majors so that the curriculum matches the real-world career needs.
- 7) Due to a more deliberate alignment of course offerings, the course selection process will be simplified. In addition, students will be more likely to take courses with the same individuals throughout their academic journey and would become more invested with each other and have a built in support system of their peers.
- 8) Students would be better supported by the institution through the implementation of various case management initiatives.
- 9) Advising activities would be improved. Each academic pathway or meta-major could have dedicated advisors whose only focus is within that pathway. Narrowing the focus of advisors would allow them to more fully immerse themselves within the requirements of that area, thus being able to more adequately support those students.
- 10) Mandatory advising would be implemented. Every student would be required to have an academic plan and students will be required to meet with an academic advisor when establishing their schedule for each semester. This will help to ensure students are taking courses that align with their designed credential, thus reducing the risk students are taking unnecessary courses.

IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

There were key implementation challenges identified regarding meta-majors. Several community colleges in Ohio have begun implementation. This has been exceptionally useful in identifying best practices for challenges that may be faced in implementing the meta-majors across campuses. The primary challenges include; maintaining the student voice, allocating funding for implementation, and ensuring buy-in from across campus.

In student success and completion there is a strong focus on providing holistic student services or student centric services – remembering to keep the student voice at the center of the conversation. A noted challenge will be to ensure the communications that are designed and created will be well understood and utilized by the student. For instance, the word meta-major – consider the sound of the word to students. Will they understand what it implies and be able to see the value? Several community colleges have moved to “career communities” or career clusters”. It will be essential to ensure engagement of students throughout the meta-majors implementation.

Development of meta-majors and the associated support services is costly. Some costs will be a one-time expense, however, many costs will be recurring. As many of our institutions are seeing enrollment declines and reductions in our revenues, those revenues will need to be realigned and/or additional revenue sources (i.e. grant funding) will need to be identified. Additional redesign (from traditional major selection to meta-major concepts) costs can come from a variety of areas, which include:

- 1) Website redesign
- 2) Marketing materials development
- 3) Staff time
- 4) Admissions application redesign
- 5) Maintenance of marketing materials as career and transfer opportunities change

The costs illustrate the numerous areas on campus that can be effected by meta-majors implementation. The meta-majors can effect processes in every student services department. From the admissions to advising to financial aid even extending outside of the student services area. Additionally, there could be contractual challenges, requiring staff members to increase work load that extends their employment contract. These changes in structure can be costly and cause institutional fatigue as processes change to incorporate the meta-majors.

Through the research there are best practices for implementation of meta-majors. Faculty and staff buy-in from across campus is critical. Faculty play a key role in ensuring the meta-majors are aligned with local workforce and transfer opportunities. Further development of cross functional teams with adequate financial resources will be essential. The teams are necessary as college processes may need to be re-aligned from the traditional major selection. Additional funding sources to defray some of the additional costs that will be associated with meta-majors is also recommended.

A journal article written by CCRC states, “The AACC Pathways colleges are finding that organizing their programs by meta-major can help students and others make sense of their many programs. Interviewees at some colleges told us that organizing programs around a relatively small number of fields can help students understand and begin to explore the many programs their college offers (p. 4).” It is being proven through increased credential awards and various loss momentum metrics that the positive outcomes of meta-majors implementation far outweighs the challenges.

CONCLUSION

At the onset of this research an assumption was made that the development and implementation of meta-majors alone would be enough to help to increase student

success and completion rates. Data suggests that institutions of higher education at both the state and national levels have a long way to go to ensure students are completing on-time and without extraneous credits. These numbers seem to be better at institutions who have developed programs such as meta-majors. However, institutions with meta-majors have also developed a variety of other student centric initiatives that may also be helping in this effort. As a result, we've determined the development of meta-majors is only one step in the process contributing to increased rates of student success and completion.