



# LEADERSHIP ACADEMY FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

## Pathways Project Implementation Memorandum

**TO:** Laura Rittner, Executive Director, Success Center – OACC  
**FROM:** Team 9- Dale Gresson, Denise Rohr, and Stephanie Stauver  
**RE:** Contextualizing the First Year Experience Course to Improve Admission into Selective Programs  
**DATE:** May 31, 2022

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY/INTRODUCTION

Students often gravitate to limited access programs, such as nursing, on the recommendation of friends/family or because of the high profile of the profession, rather than a comprehensive understanding of the nursing field. Many of these students are never admitted into their program of choice and are unaware that community colleges have many allied health programs other than the selective admission program that they may be interested in or have the competencies to complete. Many of these professions are in high need and offer a living wage upon program completion/graduation.

For our pathways project, our team explored contextualizing health careers topics into the First Year Experience/Freshman Seminar courses required in the first semester of most Community College curriculums. These topics will assist students in increasing their knowledge of nursing and allied health professions, inform students about academic and soft skills required in health professions, and assess student strengths and tie these to the health professions that may be the best fit for them to study.

### RELEVANT LITERATURE REVIEWED

Selective admissions programs, which include many allied health educational programs, are extremely popular amongst the community colleges atmospheres. Often times, students do not have a full understanding of these programs when they attempt to gain entrance. A guided pathway is not effective unless a student understands the direction of the path and can easily navigate the path. It is the responsibility of the college staff to place the student on the correct path and to then guide her/him along the path. Likewise, students may be educated and select the program that best suits them, but they may not exhibit the qualities of a student who is successful within that program.

Additionally, community colleges often offer a vast number of allied health programs, which can lead to even more confusion to incoming students. Van Noy, et.al. (2016) suggests that a more structured guided pathway approach is imperative to instill correct and pertinent knowledge to interested students so an educated and informed decision may be made. Program information and expectations may allow the student to determine if he/she is a good candidate for that particular program.

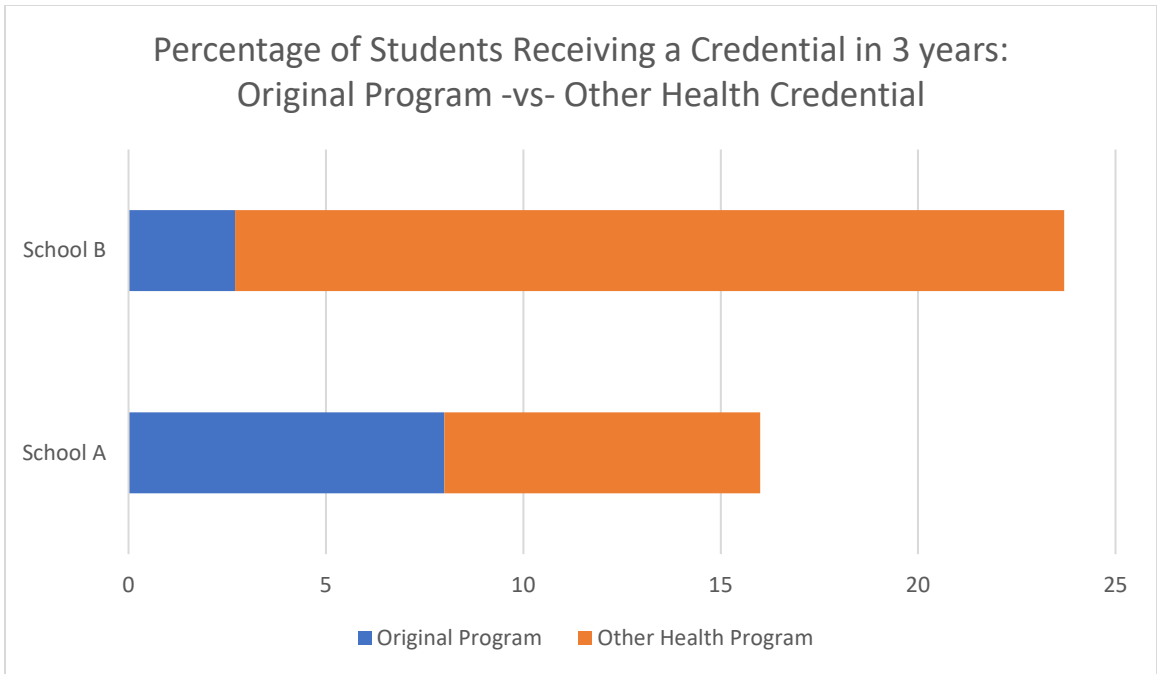
Once the student is better educated, he/she can then choose a program that fits his/her needs and interest. Structure continues to be of utmost importance at this stage to ensure the student is on the correct path to program admission and success.

The question remains though, how can community college officials provide the necessary structure required for students interested in allied health programs? At minimum, it is essential that community colleges provide support services that direct students to the correct program and then present options that will enhance student success, including entry and completion of that program (Bailey, 2017). While the concept appears to be easy enough to complete, a deeper dive reveals the complexity of this type of guided pathway. Program directors, academic advisors, and other college staff must form an alliance and work closely together to help students to reach achieve their goals.

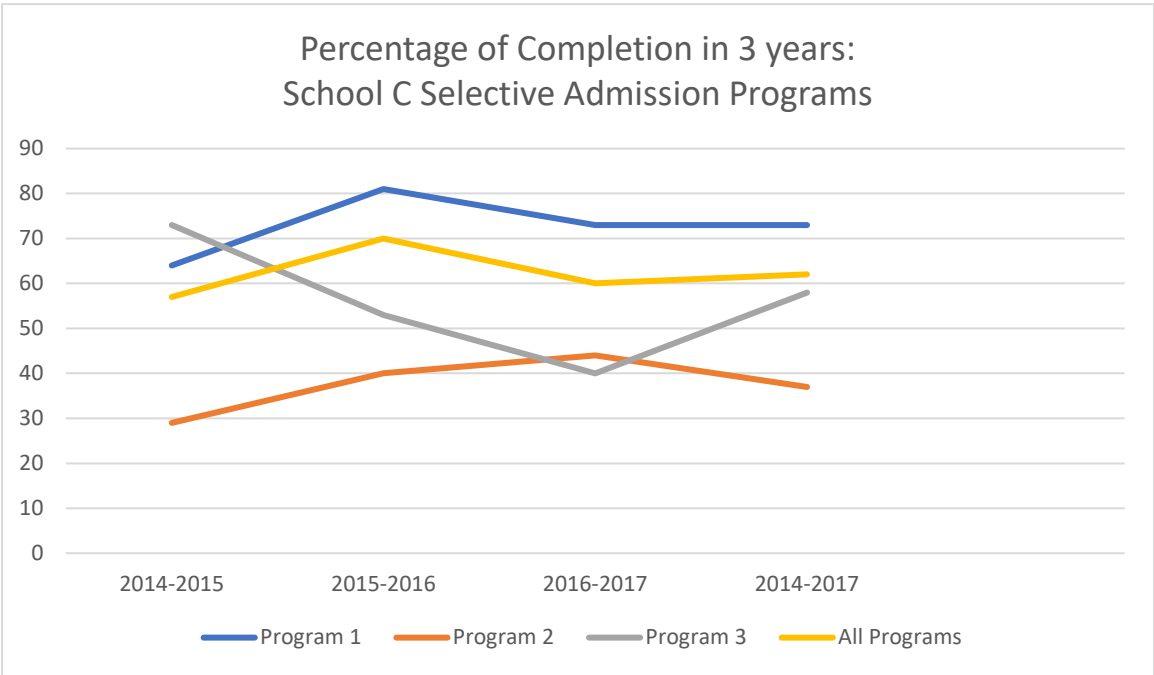
## **DATA EXAMINED**

Data from the Institutional Review Department of three Ohio Community Colleges was reviewed to determine if program completion in health programs was a problem in our areas of influence. Our team chose to examine how many health students admitted between 2014 and 2017 completed their original major, or another major within three years of entry (150% of program length). This benchmark is commonly used to determine a reasonable time to completion for community college students who often must take developmental education or prerequisite courses as part of their educational pathway.

At School A, 8% of health students graduated from their original program in 3 years, while an additional 8% graduated from another health program in that time frame. At this school 2% of students completed a non-health program in the 3-year time frame. Only 13% of those entering the college with a major in a health program completed in the 3-year time frame. At School B, 2.7% of students earned a credential in their original health major in 3 years, while 21% completed another credential within the health pathway in 3 years.



At School C, students admitted into 4 selective admissions programs were reviewed. For students admitted to these programs in 2014, the 3-year completion rate was 57%. The completion rate for those admitted in 2015 increased to 70%. For those admitted in 2016, the completion rate was 60%. This school did not count students until they entered their program of interest, demonstrating that when students are connected to their program, completion rates increase exponentially.



## **PROPOSED CHANGES/REFORMS TO BE ADOPTED**

Students may not be the ideal candidate for their chosen program or may not fully understand their chosen program's expectations. College staff should provide alternate options to the student who is unlikely to be accepted into his/her chosen program. These solutions will include, but not be limited to, programs designed to provide information healthcare majors and alternative career options, helping students to develop health profession soft skills, implementing a healthcare first-year experience course, and creating an alternative healthcare degree for students who do not enter selective admission programs.

### **Existing Challenges**

Some of the challenges experienced in a pathway type program are limited program capacity, student readiness, admission standards, accreditation limitations, or staffing restrictions. Holzer & Xu (2021) allude to the fact that some students may not be academically ready for selective admission programs, which is the case for some community colleges in Ohio. According to Holzer & Xu (2021), student readiness is a concern for program administrators, which can be addressed by providing information to students earlier in the admissions process. A pre-enrollment event may serve as the conduit to students and who are considering healthcare majors.

Brower, et al. (2021) discuss alternatives to helping students prepare for college by offering a student life skill (SLS), or first-year experience (FYE) type course. One possible solution for addressing this concern is to offer a first-year experience healthcare course during the first semester which will be geared towards educating healthcare seeking students on industry nuances.

### **Addressing the Challenges**

To mitigate the challenges related to selective admission programs, the following characteristics or structures can be used. First, the development pre-admission career sessions that will function to educate future students on the requirements and standards of admission to a chosen program. Next, a freshman seminar-type course can be designed that is geared towards assisting healthcare students to discover their desired degree, profession, and possible alternative degree (Brower et al., 2021). Lastly, an alternative degree program can be created to serve as a catch-all type degree option, but relative to staying aligned with the healthcare industry.

## **Proposed Changes Timeline**

The goal is to offer a phased-in timeline that would happen over a one-year period. To complete these changes, the following steps must occur. First, a committee must be assembled that will consist of faculty, admissions, advising, and curriculum management personnel. This committee will be educated on the proposed initiative and would be the key players in its success. This would occur during the Summer 2022 semester.

Next, a course would be designed, requiring the committee to work with faculty to provide input on course components. Staff and faculty would design and submit the healthcare major designed as a viable option for students to select if they do not get accepted into their first-choice health related major. This would occur during the Fall 2022 semester.

Once the committee and course options are established, recruitment of students can occur. This recruitment would also serve to inform incoming healthcare students and pre-enrollment high school students using required program informational sessions. This would occur in the Spring 2023 semester.

After students complete information sessions, they would be eligible to enroll in the first year experience course that is dedicated to healthcare selective admission programs. This course would be considered a bridge-type program that would prepare the student for program acceptance. Students would complete this course in the Summer of 2023. The last step of the process is for the student to be accepted into the program of his/her choice and begin that program in the Fall of 2023.

## **Improvement of Student Success**

Some of the student success improvements include increasing student perceptions about his/her chosen major, assisting students with the decision to select the correct major, provide students with the information to select a secondary healthcare major that aligns with their career aspirations if they do not get selected into their first-choice major, and higher rates of success pertaining to major and course selection.

As an option, a cultural shift may be necessary in the interest of student success, instead of expediency. The shift is in the mentality of college personnel who are against the unknown, undecided, or changing major students. This shift is important because students need to be inspired regardless of a predetermined timeline for graduation and encourage students who have challenges getting accepted in selective admission programs, to choose a secondary career which aligns with their dreams of being in the healthcare field. For example, advisors and faculty should endorse students if they desire to change their field of study.

## **IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES**

Change is often perceived as a negative connotation, so although these changes are designed to enhance the student's experience and change of success, there will likely be pushback. Implementing the overall plan may be a difficult task due to challenges, but it is certainly not impossible. The correct committee members, the key players of the initiative, is the most essential piece of the improved guided healthcare pathway puzzle.

### **Resistance to Change**

Program faculty may show some apprehension to the change in curriculum structure due to the addition of the first-year experience healthcare course. Yilmaz and Kilicoglu (2013) concluded that change is often seen negatively in the education realm due to faculty being placed in an area outside the normal comfort zone, the unknown of the future and lack of information regarding the change to be implemented. To ease the faculty anxiety related to this change, the committee must fully prepare the faculty by explaining the rationality behind the change and how the change will come to fruition.

### **Student Interest and Commitment**

Another challenge related to the implementation of the additional course or degree option is lack of student interest and/or commitment. The added expense of a supplementary course may be a deterrent for students. Students may view the course requirement as unnecessary, resulting in lack of commitment to learning and understanding the presented information. If a student has already selected a program, he/she may not wish to participate in a course that provides information regarding all allied health programs. To increase student participation and interest, advisors and program directors should explain the importance of the course and encourage students to be fully present in the course to obtain imperative program expectations and coursework.

### **Difficult Conversations**

Occasionally, students who are interested in allied health programs may not be ideal candidates. Most selective admission healthcare programs have limited capacity due to accreditation standards and clinical experience availability. To select students, program use a ranking scale based on select criteria, such as grades, GPA, and standardized testing scores (Ingrassia, 2016). When a student does not fare well in these categories, the advisor and student may need to engage in difficult conversations regarding likelihood of program acceptance. The advisor should offer alternate options such as a more suitable program or the newly developed healthcare major.

## **Resources and Training**

Additional course and degree options will require further resources and faculty training. Resources such as faculty, classrooms, equipment, textbooks, and more will be necessary to accommodate the new healthcare first-year experience course and the healthcare degree option. The college administration will be required to offer financial and physical support for this to occur. Additionally, faculty must be trained and provided the necessary items and supplies to make the courses possible.

## **CONCLUSION**

Davis, Lahr & Mazzariello (2021) state “Students benefit from taking courses early on in a field or topic of interest so they can determine for themselves: “Am I really interested in this field?” and “Am I good at it?” Positioning a First Year Experience Course with contextualized health careers content in the first semester will provide that touchstone to their field of interest, and other similar fields that they may become interested in. Connecting them early allows them to learn more about the educational pathway they wish to enter so that they can make crucial decisions before potentially being caught in the swirl that occurs when students are not prepared or do not meet selective admission criteria.

Research on retention indicates that students benefit from connecting with faculty, and peers in their area of interest early in the college experience (Tinto, 2012). An added benefit of contextualizing health career information in the First Year Experience Course is that the students will meet faculty from the health programs and other students who also wish to enter health careers in their very first semester. Building knowledge of health careers and connecting students to others with similar interests would provide crucial tools for success for those entering the community college with the intent of completing any degree, but especially those that are selective and in high demand.

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