

Ideas from and triggered by David Jenkins CCRC paper “Get with the Program,” April 2011

- First-time college students entering (successfully) a program of study with their first year completed a degree, or a certificate, or transferred at a rate 2 to 3 times higher than those entering a program after the first year (note this excludes those not entering at all). Completions are 14% higher for entering in the first year compared to entering in the second year. Entering a program is defined as passing at least 9 credit hours in the program.
- But while 75% of students attempted to enter a program only 56% did so. This partly reflects the difficulty of successfully completing gatekeeper courses such as Accounting 101, Biology 101, and, of course, Math 101 and English 101.
- The youngest, those just out of high school, showed the largest gap between attempting to enter and successfully entering.
- There was virtually no difference in attempts to enter a program between those at college level and those 1-level below in at least one basic skill and not much difference in successful entry. The largest gap between attempted entry and successful entry was for those two or more levels below.
- Need to monitor/track/support students in coherent programs of study, similar to USD preceptorship but by faculty and staff within the program. Need for program faculty to take responsibility for individual student success and program completion.
- Get rid of below college basic skills all together. Those that are way below (such as a good percentage in Foothill’s Math My Way) may be, in practical terms, beyond our help. Even if they were to pass below-college BS classes, they don’t get very far beyond that. Improving the success rates of the less-worse-underprepared would more than make up for the enrollment loss.
- Program faculty need to actively recruit students into their programs.
- Because the problem of improving success rates and program completion is systemic, we need to abandon the approach of “best practices” whereby discrete practices are piloted then never scaled. We need a “best process” approach whereby processes and pathways are redesigned to strengthen pathways to program entry and completion.
- Entering a program of study is a key intermediate milestone. Need to track this.
- What if you combine the Math Emporium idea with integrating below college (or even college level) basic skills into programs of study.
- How about reducing the number of programs but increasing the flexibility of what is learned by a focus on knowledge and skills that are “transferable” to a variety of specific fields of study.
- How about giving the most exciting course in a program first? That is, a course that shows (in lay person’s terms) the beauty, wonder, and usefulness of the field or discipline (Is this what introductory courses are supposed to do now?).
- Reframe professional development “as an activity that supports the collective involvement of the faculty and staff in the redesign process rather than an activity that mainly supports professional growth of faculty and staff as individuals.”
- Colleges need to review every aspect of their processes and redesign them to improve program completion from connection, to entry, to progress, and to completion.

Ideas generated by reading CCRC brief (April 2011) on non-academic support:

- An inexpensive activity to help students clarify their goals and to identify steps for achieving them might be to have students in every class once a semester write a one-minute paper on their goals and how they will achieve them.
- To provide students with college know how (i.e., how to navigate the system, how to behave in the college culture), produce a series of short YouTube videos and post links on the college website in several highly visible places; Show them in ordinary classes from time to time (no counselor or teacher prep required).
- Evaluate how the bureaucracy looks and works from the student point of view (that is, the student who has virtually no cultural knowledge of college and college systems); make it less scary and more transparent.
- Give students a whole lot fewer choices (this idea triggered by conversation with a colleague); they have no idea how to evaluate them nor what the long term consequences of each option may be; for example, everyone is on the IGETC program whether transferring or not.
- Caring is personal. Only a human being can care. A college, an institution, cannot and does not care (CBS does not care, though Katie Couric might). Hence, structure must empower people to care since a caring environment is related to persistence in the face of challenges. Caring is expressed in helping students deal with specific challenges and problems such as getting financial aid.
- Make college feasible for people who have demands of work and family as well as classwork. Do the National University thing. Provide day care, financial aid, transportation services, a welcoming face, and an advocate, someone who believes in you.
- Efforts to implement non-academic supports should not be conceived of as “interventions.” That implies the student and/or her condition needs to be fixed. We must understand how students perceive or will perceive a support activity or process. Some students may not know they could benefit from a support service and some may regard the use of support services as an indication that they “do not belong in college.”
- Make non-academic supports intrusive so that students are forced to encounter them.
- How can we structure things so that cohorts of students (who come to know one another) or faculty-student relationships that span multiple semesters are created just in the normal course of college going, especially in the first year?

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