



Metro College Success Program

GRADUATION WITH EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE



Metro Academies: Increasing College Graduation through a Redesign of the First Two Years



In the US, the gap in college completion rates between low-income and more affluent students has doubled since 1975. Of the fifty states, California ranks forty-ninth, with nearly the worst graduation gap between underrepresented students and their peers. Major barriers to college success include a lack of academic and social support, the increasing expense of college, and a tortuous transfer process from community colleges to universities.

Metro Academies are ‘schools within schools’ at community colleges and universities, each with a broad career or topic theme. Each academy serves up to 140 students who work as a cohort over four semesters, taking two linked general education courses together each semester. This design gives students a personalized *educational home*, forming close bonds among peers and faculty. Wrap-around services come to the Metro classroom – from academic counseling, to tutoring, to financial aid support. Metro faculty members participate in 45 hours of professional development on engaged learning strategies.



Metro’s socially responsive curriculum was designed to support students to think critically about their own realities, and to learn to speak and write with clarity and power. The curriculum is sequenced for repeated practice of difficult skills such as writing and critical thinking.

Whether students take courses at the community college or university, one hundred percent of Metro core classes satisfy graduation requirements for both an associate’s and a bachelor’s degree. The highly structured curriculum puts students on a clear, fast track to graduation and success, shaving off an average of one year to graduation at university, and two years at the community college. Because Metro sharply reduces attrition, this approach is sustainable, cost efficient, and can be brought to large scale (see citations at <http://metroacademies.org/news/coststudy>).

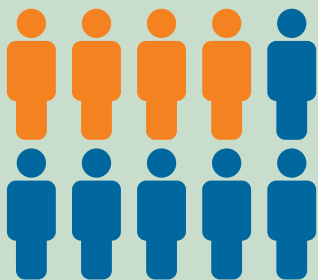
How We've Been Working Isn't Working

California is the nation's largest and most diverse state, with 73% of young people under 18 from communities of color.³ As the state's demographics have shifted, the Golden State's once-vaunted support for public education has plummeted. Now our state now ranks 49th out of the 50 states for dollars invested per K-12 student, and trails the country in class sizes and ratios of students to counselors and librarians. At the college level, California ranks 50th of the 50 states for appropriated dollars per student (see citations at <http://metroacademies.org/news/edjustice>).

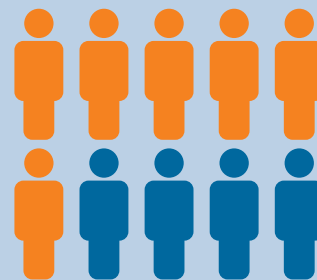
It should not be surprising that in terms of graduation with a bachelor's degree, California ranks forty-ninth, with nearly the worst graduation gap between underrepresented students – African Americans, Latinos, Pacific Islanders, Native Americans and other – and their white peers. For example, among our state's African American and Latino community college students who show a behavioral intent to transfer, only twelve percent and nine percent respectively do so within three years. Variations on the same dismal statistics have been reported year after year for over half a century.

Nationally, three quarters of community college students and over half of four-year students arrive at college under-prepared for college level work. Just when students are making the difficult transition from high school to college, our institutions send them on a solo journey through a series of disconnected three-unit courses, with minimal academic or social support. Predictably, very large numbers of students drop out during the first two years.

In the CSU system, almost four in ten underrepresented students drop out before their junior year.



In the California Community College system, more than six in ten underrepresented students drop out before completing or transferring.



Additionally, too many students waste time, money and educational resources taking courses that count for nothing toward graduation. In order to transfer to university, students must navigate what the Community College Research Center calls “a shapeless river on a dark night.” Indeed the average community college transfer student graduates from the Cal State University system having completed 162 units, when only 120 are required – an excess of three semesters of full-time studies.

There are multiple roots of this problem, including: (1) inconsistent transfer agreements between the community colleges and CSUs (now starting to be addressed through SB 1440); (2) insufficient academic counseling, tutoring and other support; and (3) budget cutbacks, resulting in much higher costs to students, and bottlenecks in access to needed courses. Many students then enroll in random off-path courses to maintain their financial aid eligibility. At a system level, the Community College Chancellor's Office estimates that this problem of ‘excess units’ costs the state approximately 160 million dollars each year – enough to serve 40,000 additional community college students and 14,000 CSU students annually.

It is clear that postsecondary education needs both public reinvestment, and a system redesign.



Metro Academies: A System Redesign

As the demographics of California and other states are shifting fundamentally to a more diverse population, our institutions must also change fundamentally, if they are to respond to the educational needs of the rising generation. More than eight out of ten undergraduate college students attend public colleges and universities, including the overwhelming majority of students of color. To tackle these issues, San Francisco State University and City College of San Francisco launched the Metro College Success Program. With a commitment toward education equity, we set out to sharply improve both deep learning, and timely graduation with associate and/or bachelor's degrees.

Based on the educational research literature, Metro relies on five broad strategies:

- **Redeploy existing resources to create optimal conditions for learning** – e.g. expand long-duration student learning communities and writing-intensive courses;
- **Strengthen classroom engagement** through interactive learning and relevant curriculum, engaging students' own realities and voice. The heart of education is in the classroom, so it is essential to foster deep change in this location. For example, Metro health students learn to make graphs by tapping real public health data bases about their own neighborhoods, and then writing letters to the editor about what they discover;
- **Rather than sending students out to remote campus services, integrate these services into courses**, the place where busy commuter students are already rooted in the institution;
- **Invest in faculty professional development** with a 45-hour faculty learning community focused on 'high impact educational practices.' At present, post-secondary education is the only segment of our education system in which instructors are never taught to teach;
- **Foster an institutional culture focused on student success.** Metro builds in faculty/staff planning time and sets up data feedback loops to continually improve the quality of the program. Faculty, counselors and staff gain the advantages of teamwork to steadily build the institution's capacity for supporting student success.

Metro works across many departments and units – it all adds up to a system re-design.



Schools Within Schools

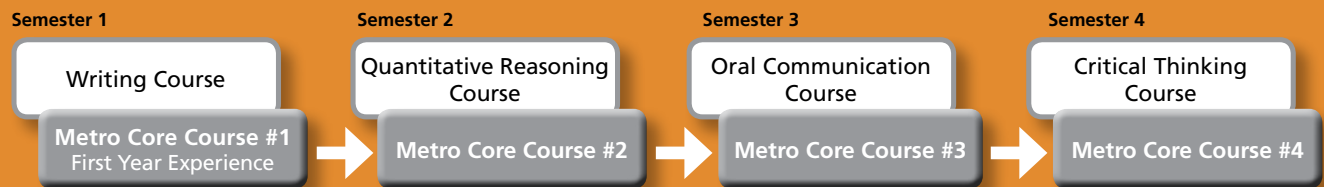
Each Metro Academy reconfigures the first two years of college to create a 'school within a school' for up to 140 students. A cohort of students co-enrolls in two linked general education classes each semester over four semesters. Outreach focuses on high schools and youth agencies that serve students who are first-generation, low-income and/or underrepresented. A community college or university can host any number of academies. Each has a broad career or topic theme, such as Health, Science, Ethnic Studies, Engineering or Liberal and Creative Arts.

Metro College Success Program

Wrap-around Student Services

- Academic counseling
- Tutoring
- Financial aid advising
- Early intervention
- Personalized connections with other campus services

General Education Course Pathway (Example)



Metro also supports students with academic counseling and course planning for the remainder of their schedules taking 12+ units.

Faculty Development

- Faculty community to help transform teaching practices
- High-impact practices and real-world content
- Ongoing support
- 45-hour commitment

Everything Counts: A Universal General Education Pathway

Every Metro pathway class – regardless of whether it is taken at the community college or university – fulfills general education requirements that count for graduation with both an associate's and a bachelor's degree – for all 289 majors in the Cal State University (CSU) system. At the community college, Metro is a *general education transfer program* leading to guaranteed admission to the CSU. Instead of 'wandering through the curriculum,' Metro students have a clear fast track to graduation.

Metro Academies: Extraordinary Results

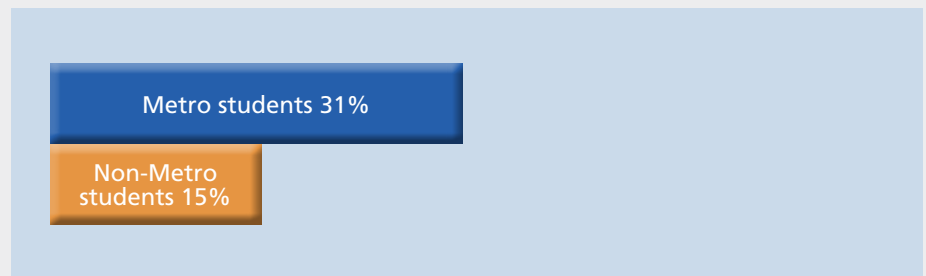


Nine Metro Academies are already in progress in the Bay Area, and several more are scheduled to launch in the coming year. A multi-method evaluation is under way, and institutional data show very encouraging results.

At SF State: Improved persistence and timely graduation

Metro students – overwhelmingly first-generation, low-income, and/or under-represented – have consistently outperformed their more advantaged peers in persistence. Despite the fact that eight out of ten Metro students place at a pre-college level, they are on average 25 percent more likely than non-Metro students to persist to their senior year and graduate with a bachelor’s degree within five years. And when looking at historically underrepresented students in our most mature academy, Metro students are more than twice as likely to graduate in four years as similar non-Metro students:

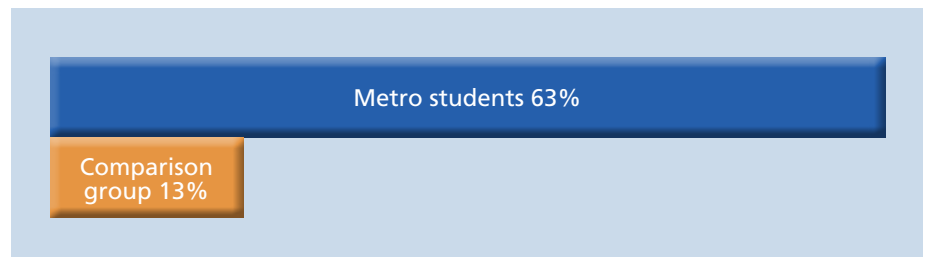
Historically underrepresented freshman, graduated in four years



At City College of SF: Improved persistence and timely completion

Metro students have much better outcomes on persistence and completion than comparison groups matched on many variables by Institutional Research: placement level, income, race/ethnicity, transfer units completed, ESL status, subject enrollment, and sought counseling in their first semester (a proxy for high motivation). Most Metro students place one to two years below college-level English and math. Despite this disadvantage, after three years, an average of 63% of Metro students have completed (graduated, transferred or both), compared to 13% of the comparison group. On average Metro students shave two years off time to completing an associate’s degree or transfer – from five years down to three years.

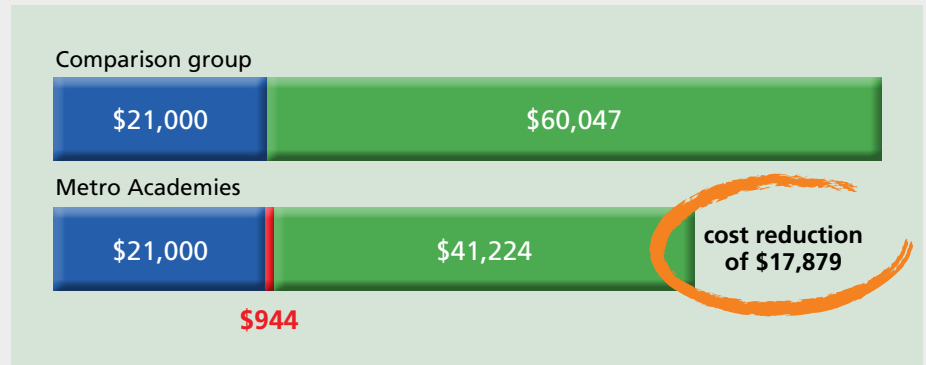
Completed in three years



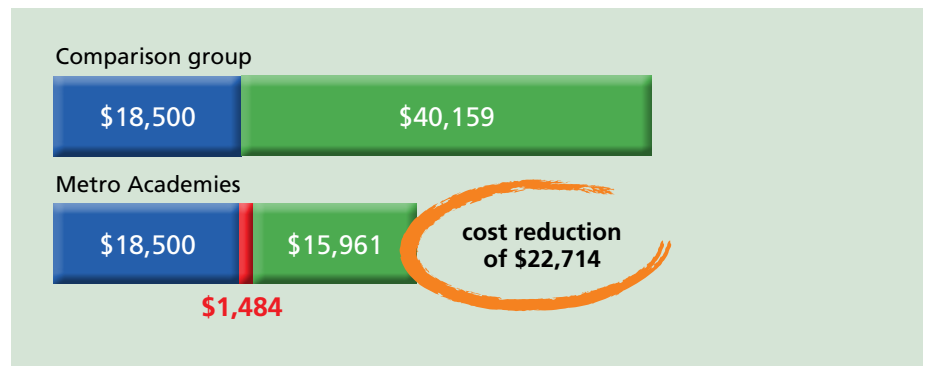
Metro Academies: Scalable and Sustainable

The Metro program can go to large scale because it is a more efficient reconfiguration of general education courses and services that are already in the base budget. Metro sharply reduces the hidden costs of attrition and excess units. A cost-efficiency study found that the program involved modest incremental up-front costs for start-up, coordination, counseling and tutoring, but these are outweighed by far more efficient degree completion (Johnstone and Legion, RP Group and National Center for Inquiry and Improvement, 2013; <http://metroacademies.org/cost-efficiency>). By making a small extra investment on the front end – the first two years of college – institutions can realize a large cost reduction on the back end.

Cost per graduate at SF State



Cost per completer at City College



■ Spending in years 1 & 2
 ■ Extra cost of Metro in years 1 & 2
 ■ Spending in years 3 on to graduation

California is home to one out of eight of all college students in the US, so that innovation in California has the potential for national impact. In 2010, the CSU's statewide Board of Trustees designated Metro Academies as one of six system-wide priorities. In 2013-14, as the state budget rebounded, the CSU Chancellor's Office and the US Department of Education invested in giving Metro the capacity to permanently serve 60 percent of incoming low-income students at SF State, or one quarter of the freshman class.

A high-quality college education does not need to be a scarce commodity. Metro Academies is providing a vibrant example of what is possible.



Metro College Success Program

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Funded by (since 2007):

CSU Chancellor's Office, U.S. Department of Education (Strengthening Institutions Program and Fund for the Improvement of Post Secondary Education), Marclad Foundation, James Irvine Foundation, Mimi and Peter Haas Fund, Meisin Foundation, and our home institutions: San Francisco State University and City College of San Francisco

For more information, please visit www.metroacademies.org or email info@metroacademies.org, or call 415 405 2616. Video about Metro Academies: <http://bit.ly/seemetro>

The Metro College Success Program is a project of a long-standing partnership between San Francisco State University and City College of San Francisco since 1992. The partnership has carried out many successful projects with the strong support of our home institutions, and some 33 million dollars of external support from 31 funders.