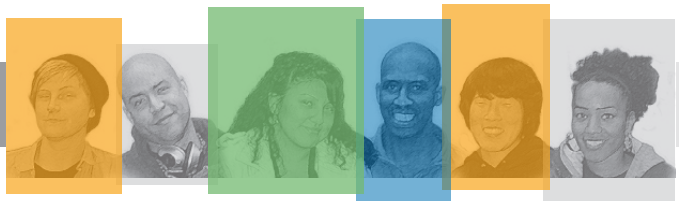

Metro Academies Initiative

College Completion with Excellence and Equity

Metro Academies Lowers Cost per Graduate

at a University and a Community College

Summary

Metro Academies (Metro) is a program founded in 2007 by a long-standing partnership of San Francisco State University (SF State) and City College of San Francisco (City College). It is a redesign of the first two years of college to increase graduation rates—and at the community college, transfer rates. Metro's outreach focuses on high school graduates who are low-income, first-generation and/or underrepresented.

With modest additional costs, Metro has been able to sharply improve student outcomes at this critical time when the data show that very large numbers of students would otherwise drop out. Each Metro is a "school within a school" for up to 140 students. Metro's distinguishing feature is that students are organized in a long duration learning community of two linked classes per semester, cohorted over four semesters, giving them a personalized educational home.

By making a small extra investment on the front end—the first two years of college—institutions can realize large cost reductions on the back end.

Less attrition + timely graduation = cost reduction

Metro students strongly outperform their more advantaged peers in graduation rates and time to degree, despite the fact that most initially place at "double remedial" in English and math. Metro sharply reduces attrition and excess units (http://metroacademies.org/news/outcomes). Once these hidden costs are factored in, it becomes clear that Metro is substantially less expensive per graduate than current practice.

At SF State: Metro requires an additional investment of $470 per year per student for two years—a 4.5% increase—yet reduces overall costs per graduate by $17,879, leveraging each dollar of investment 19 times. Throughout the CSU, the most common time to graduation is now six years. In contrast, for most Metro students, a full year is shaved off, with nearly two thirds of Metro students graduating in five years. Metro students also save on average, one year of tuition and earn an extra year of wages.

At City College: Metro requires an additional investment of $740 per student per year—an 8% increase—yet reduces overall costs by $22,714 per completer (graduation and/or transfer), leveraging each dollar of investment 15 times. At City College, only six percent of the comparison group completes in two years, compared to 34% of Metro students. Metro has an average projected completion time of three years, compared to five years in usual practice—shaving off two years. In addition, Metro students save two years of tuition and earn two extra years of wages.

The Metro Academies Cost Efficiency Study is a project of the Metro Academies Initiative, in cooperation with the Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges and the National Center for Inquiry and Improvement. http://metroacademies.org/news/coststudy

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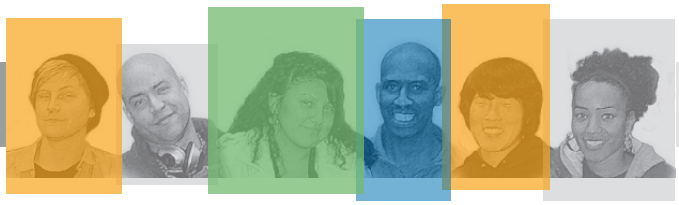


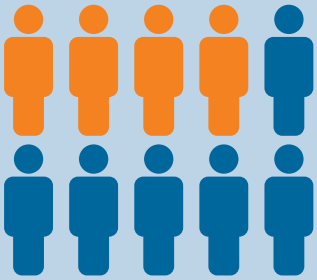
Metro Academies Initiative

College Completion with Excellence and Equity

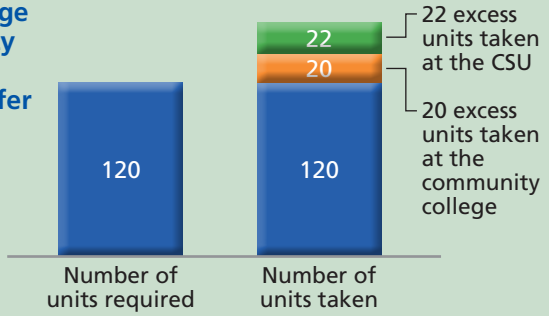
Problems

The research literature shows that there are very substantial hidden costs in current practice: attrition, students taking courses off path, course repetition, and delayed time to degree. "Excess units" is one important reason for delayed completion, especially for community college students. Students may enroll in off-path courses when they have weak access to academic advising, or when the courses they need are not available and they enroll in random courses to maintain their financial aid eligibility. Students also accrue excess units when their community college courses are later not accepted at the California State University, or if they need to retake a course for a passing grade. For the community college system, the Legislative Analyst's Office estimates the cost to California of excess units at $160 million per year.

In the CSU system, almost four in ten under-represented students drop out before their junior year



The average community college to CSU transfer student



Methodology

The technical expert on this study was Dr. Robert Johnstone of the Research and Planning Group and the National Center for Inquiry and Improvement. Dr. Johnstone used the "Pro Forma Model," a method that has been used to analyze the cost efficiency of many educational programs in California Community Colleges since 2005. The Delta Cost Project uses a similar method in its studies of postsecondary financing nationally. Dr. Johnstone identified the annual spending on Metro and non-Metro students and calculated average time to degree for both groups, using program operating budgets from our most mature programs (Metro Health, 2012-13) and institutional data on costs and student outcomes. At SF State, Metro's diverse, low-income students were compared to all first-time first-year students. At City College, Institutional Research developed a comparison group matched on many variables http://metroacademies.org/news/coststudy.

Metro program features and scale-up

In addition to the two-year student learning community, wrap-around student support is based in classes, including tutoring and academic counseling. Each Metro has a broad career or topic theme, engaging students early in relevant, real-world issues. SF State currently operates three Metros in Health, STEM and Child Development, and City College operates its own Metro Academies in Health and Early Childhood Education. Instructors learn high-impact pedagogies in a faculty learning community. With a recent investment from the CSU Chancellor's Office, work is in progress for a permanent expansion to a total of 15 Metros by 2015.

Conclusion

Data on outcomes and cost indicate that the Metro model holds promise to cost efficiently increase college success and degree completion for low-income, first-generation and underrepresented students. By investing a small amount on the front end—the first two years of college—institutions can realize a much larger cost reduction per graduate on the back end. Often during tight budget periods, institutions understandably develop a default stance: "We can't afford any new expense." However, once the current high costs of attrition and excess units are brought into view, the question shifts fundamentally: Can we afford *not* to invest in improving the support we give California's diverse young people, both to reduce costs substantially, and to allow more students to cross the finish line to graduation?

Lead funding for the Metro Academies Cost Efficiency Study provided by the Marcled Foundation and the CSU Chancellor's Office (Compass Project)
http://metroacademies.org/news/coststudy