

Mapping Programs & Meta-Majors

Mt. San Antonio College

Their Approach

Mt. San Antonio College approached designing and implementing meta-majors as an iterative process with the goal of easing students' struggles in finding and choosing a major. Instructional and counseling faculty started the process, ensuring that program maps accounted for the curricular needs of students in a particular major and reflected the courses and course pairings that work well for students. Mt. SAC is now revising their meta-majors after testing them for a year.

What They Did

They started with a collegewide summit where faculty, staff, and administrators learned about the difficulty that Mt. SAC students have making educational and career decisions early in their college experience. The summit energized the participants to streamline students' decision-making process. First, counseling and instructional faculty sorted all of Mt. SAC's degrees and certificates into eight meta-major buckets. The following summer, students in college success classes were asked to do the sort again—with the requirements that they produce eight buckets and name them. Then, administrators were asked to review the students' sorting and approve or revise the names of the buckets. Guided Pathways leaders made some adjustments to the students' sort, based on what the counseling and instructional faculty learned and discussed in their earlier sorting process. After using the eight meta-majors for a year, faculty leaders felt there was some misalignment. They're now making minor changes to align the meta-majors with Holland Codes and career skills assessments and to support strong connections to careers.

What They Learned

Be flexible! The college's flexibility has fostered open and honest dialogue among students, faculty, staff, and administrators, which has enabled everyone to continue to learn. The team found that meta-majors must be re-assessed regularly and that engaging counseling faculty deeply in all of the work brought the extra benefit of immediate feedback on students' experiences with the new meta-majors. The team also realized that they want to know more about how to support undecided students. To follow up, they are asking undecided students this year how they make decisions about majors and career paths, and how the college is supporting them.

Mt. San Antonio College

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Mapping Programs & Meta-Majors Skyline College

Their approach...

Based on a core belief that Skyline College's meta-majors need to be livable, breathable, and flexible, the college's design team started by creating design principles for all their Guided Pathways work that align with the findings and values in Skyline's Comprehensive Diversity Framework. They then developed design principles that framed their discussions and led their development of meta-majors: Focus on student perspectives and perceptions; efficiency for students; commonality of community contribution and intellectual pursuit; shared ways of knowing; inclusion and equity; and keep an open mind.

What they did...

The first logical action seemed to be to sort Skyline's degree and certificate offerings into meta-major buckets, but when faculty and staff gathered to do this, the design team realized that there was still uncertainty and anxiety around how it would help students reach their goals. Grounding their process in the brutal facts – many students were graduating with 80 units after attempting 100 units and needing only 60 – led the design team to reassess and to move forward with program mapping instead. Instructional and counseling faculty collaborated to develop two-year and three-year maps for students pursuing programs and certificates in each discipline. Analyzing the maps with data visualization software revealed overlaps for students and surfaced four main clusters of courses. These clusters became Skyline's meta-majors. Next, the design team sought feedback from students in local K-12 school districts and from Skyline students, faculty, and staff.

What they learned...

The design team at Skyline College learned deftness in flexibility. Starting with the meta-major sort, while useful in easing faculty anxiety around the future of their courses, did not move meta-major planning forward as expected. Meta-majors are intended to make the college-going experience as fluid as possible for students so they can explore and change their minds, but Skyline found it needed to map its programs first so students can be sure they are making progress toward a certificate, degree, or transfer as they explore a meta-major. Mapping the programs and allowing the meta-majors to emerge out of the shared course-taking patterns made this possible. In the process of mapping, the team learned that course schedules or the sheer number of prerequisites could make it impossible for students to complete a program in two years – an issue the design team will continue to work with the college to evaluate.

Skyline College

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