The Community College Gen Ed Core:
A Scattered Menu or Structured Pathway to Four-Year Transfer and Degree Attainment?

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Basics of the Gen Ed Core

• Nationally, about 70% of degree or transfer-seeking community college students enter with an Associate of Arts (AA) or Associate of Science (AS) in mind
• Often referred to as gen ed or transfer degrees
• Students often major in liberal arts and sciences, humanities, or academic non-applied STEM fields
• These students need to complete a gen ed core curriculum, which is designed for transfer into the four-year college
Sample

• We are looking at two institutions from two different states

• In College A, state requires a 42-credit core
  – Core credits are transferrable, but no guarantee of junior standing for students who complete core and associate degree

• In College B, state requires a 36-credit core
  – Junior standing is guaranteed for students who complete core and associate degree
Sample

- We look at students who are enrolling in any college for the first time
  - Only look at students who took dev ed or college-level courses, or majored in Liberal Arts & Sciences
- Start with the 2005-06 cohort, and track students’ course enrollments through 2009-10 academic year
- Track students to their four-year college using National Student Clearinghouse data
- College A: 3,459 students
- College B: 7,869 students
Descriptive Basics

• In College A:
  – 27% earned 0 credits in the core
  – 12% completed the core in full

• In College B:
  – 25% earned 0 credits in the core
  – 29% completed the core in full
Outcomes by Core Credit Completion: College A

- 0 credits (N=945)
- 1-9 credits (N=821)
- 10-19 credits (N=507)
- 20-29 credits (N=326)
- 30-41 credits (N=462)
- Completed core (N=398)

Legend:
- Not enrolled at any college
- Still enrolled at college
- Transferred to 4-year, no awards
- No award at college, transferred, earned BA
- Earned award at college, transferred, earned BA
- Earned award at college, transferred to 4-year
- Earned award at college, no transfer
Outcomes by Core Credit Completion: College B

- Not enrolled at any college
- Still enrolled at college
- Transferred to 4-year, no awards
- No award at college, transferred, earned BA
- Earned award at college, transferred, earned BA
- Earned award at college, transferred to 4-year
- Earned award at college, no transfer

0 credits (N=1,932)
1 - 9 credits (N=1,310)
10 - 19 credits (N=955)
20 - 29 credits (N=760)
30 - 35 credits (N=610)
Completed core (N=2,302)
Outcomes by Core Credit Completion

• In general, small number of students complete the core in its entirety
• Most students who earn a significant number of core credits but don’t complete it in full are still enrolled in Year 5 or have transferred to a four-year college
• Students who complete the core in full have significantly better outcomes within five years, at both the CC and the four-year college
Core Credit Completion by Subject: College A

- Social & Behav Sci (3): 50%
- College Success (3): 48%
- English Composition (6): 46%
- Speech (3): 41%
- Visual & Perf Arts (3): 33%
- Humanities (3): 30%
- U.S. History (6): 29%
- Mathematics (3): 28%
- Govt/Poli Sci (6): 27%
- Science (6): 18%
Core Credit Completion by Subject: College B

- Social & Behav Sci, A (3): 61%
- Req. GE Elective (3): 60%
- Humanities, A (3): 57%
- Oral Communications (3): 47%
- Social & Behav Sci, B (3): 45%
- Communications (6): 45%
- Life Science (3): 43%
- Humanities, B (3): 43%
- Physical Science (3): 38%
- Math (6): 32%
Core Credit Completion by Subject

• In both colleges, social and behavioral sciences has the highest completion rate
• Math and sciences have the lowest completion rate
• These may be relatively large completion rates by subject, but when these are taken as a whole, we end up with low “entire core” completion rates
• Students are also completing credits in excess of their requirements in social and behavior sciences
  — About a quarter in each college earn too many credits in this subject area
Closing Points

• In both colleges, full core completion for students is hard to come by

• Core completers have much higher award outcomes than those students who have accumulated a significant number of core credits

• Social and behavioral science has the highest rate of completion among core subjects
  – Students are actually exceeding their requirements here
For more information

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