Chapter 5
Purposeful Course Scheduling:
Increasing Enrollment and Promoting Academic Progression

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ABSTRACT

Almost half of undergraduate students in the United States enroll in community colleges, unfortunately community colleges face a harsh reality of low completion and graduation rates. Delgado Community College in New Orleans is the largest community college in Louisiana serving over 25,000 students annually. There are numerous reasons for the low completion rates for community colleges that include financial, family, academic, scheduling conflicts and lack of resources contribute to the challenge of improving program completion. The West Bank campus of Delgado established an innovative and comprehensive scheduling program designed to significantly increase the number of students enrolled and to increase student progression in specific degree programs. Purposeful course scheduling combines 1) career alignment through academic advising, 2) course sequences and rotation, and 3) blocking time for specific types of courses.

INTRODUCTION

Nationally, six years after starting a pubic 2-year college degree program, 65.6% of students do not complete an academic credential, and of these, 46% are no longer enrolled (Radford, Berkner, Wheeless, & Shepherd, 2010). Many students do not progress through their respective academic program as intended for various reasons. Particularly, the reasons for leaving college without completing include personal reasons (53.4%) and financial issues (30.8%), with other reasons involving academic problems (13%, scheduling problems (8%), and finished classes (3.6%) falling in the lower spectrum (Ross et al., 2012). However, the reasons claimed and accounted for in the lower percentage points are often causes for financial distress and other personal issues, as scheduling and finishing courses makes the college journey elongated. Thus, it can be expected that the types of personal and financial issues that cause students to withdraw from a 2-year program are compounded, if not caused by, the personal and financial lives of the students outside of the classroom.

In addition, according to Ginder, Kelly-Reid, & Mann (2014), less than 12% of students attending a public 2-year institution graduate within 100% of the normal program completion time. As a result, when normally a community would expect skilled graduates on a regular graduation schedule, in reality, after two years, community colleges are now supplying a lower number of graduates into the work force. Part of the issue for students to complete is that they are entering college academically unprepared. In fact, according to Bailey, Jeong, & Cho (2010), the number of students entering academically unprepared amounts to two-thirds of students who are then referred to remedial or developmental education courses designed to improve their performance and readiness for college-level coursework. Of this two-thirds, a large proportion do not successfully complete the series of courses in the developmental requirements and fail to continue to enroll in the college-level program they intended to accomplish because their level of math or English was not deemed academically satisfactory (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010).

Another possible strategic initiative can be shortening the length of time taken to complete a degree may be a solution to low completion rates. Accelerating developmental models of education has been part of the answer to support the long-term success of underprepared students. This allows students to complete remedial coursework in a shorter timeframe while still continuing to enroll in college-level math and English. Jaggars, Hodara, Cho, & Xu (2015) found that students who experienced an accelerated remedial pathway were more likely to successfully complete their college-level program within 3 years, accomplished by rigorous content, faculty development, and student support.

There is certainly an issue with college completion and in order to solve the classroom space issue and budgetary constraints, one possible solution is to increase

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