

Early Momentum Metrics: Why they Matter for College Improvement

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OVERVIEW

There is a longstanding need to develop a means for providing more rapid and predictive metrics of student success and completion at the community college. Traditionally, decision-making insight has been primarily driven by long-term indicators of student success, such as, overall increases in equity in completion rates and post-graduation job placement (Jenkins & Bailey, 2017). In their report, "[Early Momentum Metrics: Why They Matter for College Improvement](#)", Jenkins and Bailey (2017) highlight findings showing that Early Momentum Metrics (i.e., Credit, Gateway and Program Momentum) are a useful method for gathering near-term statistics to predict long-term student success.

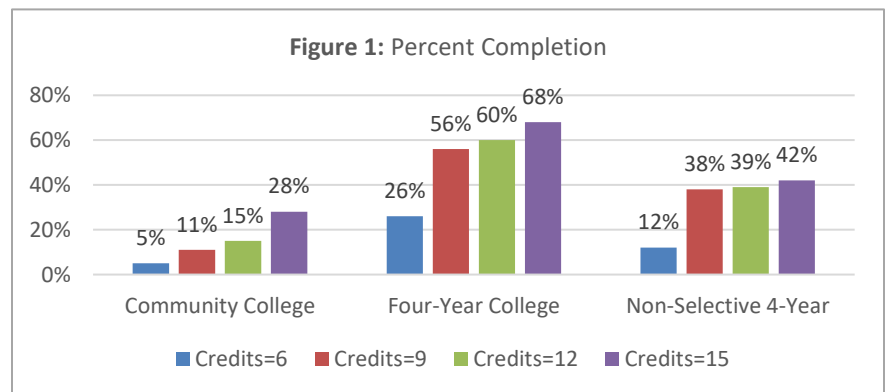
RESULTS

Gateway Momentum

- **Definition:** completing transfer-level or degree relevant courses within the first year of college.
- **Finding 1:** successfully completing college-level English and math courses more than doubles the probability of earning a community college credential or graduating in any given term (Bailey & Jenkins, 2007).
- **Finding 2:** 48 percent of students who passed a gateway course in their first year graduated within six years compared to 18 percent of students who didn't pass gateway courses in their first year (Trisitan & Denley, 2016).

Credit Momentum

- **Definition:** Number of credits a student takes during their first semester and first year of college.
- **Finding 1:** Taking at least 15 semester units in the 1st semester is associated with higher completion rates than taking 12 or fewer semester units in the 1st semester (*adapted from Atwell & Monaghan, 2016*).
- **Finding 2:** Results remain true regardless of institution type (see figure 1).



Program Momentum

- **Definition:** taking program-relevant courses within the first year of college
- **Finding 1:** Early completion of degree specific courses improves 6-year credential completion (Trisitan & Denley, 2016).
- **Finding 2:** Completing 9+ program-specific semester credits in the 1st year is associated with greater likelihood of completing a credential or transferring (Cho, 2014).

DISCUSSION:

Early Momentum Metrics are associated with improvements in long-term student success, highlight the benefits of focusing on "time to completion" early in college, and allow for a quicker assessment of the effects of college reforms. More research is needed to better understand unknowns like, whether these metrics predict the effectiveness of student success initiatives, if the results differ across important demographics, and how to translate early momentum into success in subsequent years.