

Mapping Programs and 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.

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