

DESIGNING FOR COMPLETION:

The practice and progress of the Completion by Design initiative
Spring 2011 through Summer 2013

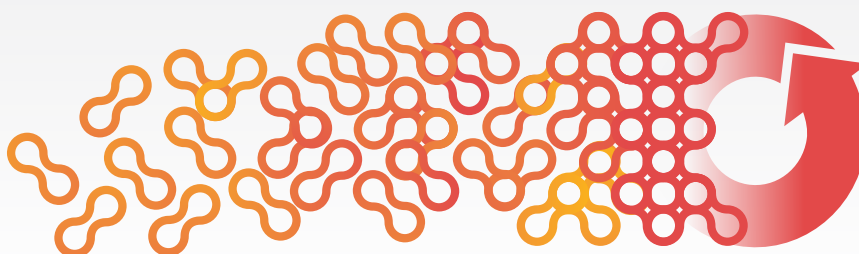


STUDENT SUCCESS STARTS WITH HOLISTIC DESIGN

Colleges and universities around the country are working tirelessly to ensure student success in the classroom and beyond. Although many colleges have implemented innovative programs to target specific cohorts, at-scale improvements in college completion rates are still rare.

The Completion by Design (CBD) initiative takes a new approach. CBD helps community colleges boost completion rates for most students, by focusing on comprehensive institutional transformation at scale. Groups of community colleges in three states—Florida, North Carolina, and Ohio—are engaged in a systematic process of inquiry and design. Their collective efforts are aimed at making systemic changes in policies, programs, and practices that strengthen pathways to completion for most students on their campuses.

Traditional approach to reform vs. Completion by Design



CHALLENGE

Isolated efforts have not significantly increased student completion

SOLUTION

A systemic approach fundamentally transforms the student experience to increase completion

CBD contributes to the college completion movement in two ways:

- CBD helps colleges design connected solutions across students' entire educational experiences—from the day they first step on campus to the day they earn their degree or credential.
- CBD creates conditions that allow for this holistic approach by directly addressing a spectrum of organizational, cultural and administrative factors that can make or break a serious effort to reform.

WHAT CBD COLLEGES HAVE BEEN DOING

The first phase of the initiative was a one-year planning period during which participating community colleges received a set of frameworks, a series of design principles, support in change management, and a nuanced look at their completion data—along with the time and space to reflect on and glean insights from these resources. In the latter part of the year, the colleges designed at-scale strategies to keep students on the progression pathway by reducing the points where they lose momentum and catalyzing the points where they gain momentum.



Starting in the fall of 2013, CBD colleges are moving into the second year of implementing their plans. While colleges in each state have unique strategies, they also share some key focus areas:

- Redesigning academic pathways with increased structure
- Implementing intentional advising approaches when new students arrive and continuing throughout their pathway
- Integrating student support structures with instruction
- Refining approaches that help students succeed in transfer-level math and English courses

EARLY IMPLEMENTATION OFFERS EMERGING LESSONS

With the planning phase complete and implementation underway, CBD colleges are exactly where they should be—poised for continued learning and improvement. Some common themes emerged from these early efforts:

- **Campus engagement and communication should be flexible and thoughtful.**
Because this work touches every aspect of the institution, all of the colleges have focused on engaging and informing a wide range of people to strengthen and sustain the work. A key challenge has been calibrating the right level of inclusivity at each stage so that leadership, faculty, and staff are well positioned to support and implement identified strategies.
- **A completion agenda is both a driver and umbrella for systemic cultural change.**
CBD colleges are taking steps to ensure that this work affects the core functions of their colleges and that the vocabulary and habits of faculty and staff reflect a focus on student success. The colleges are aligning other initiatives and work under the umbrella of student completion and are embedding a completion orientation into all ongoing meetings and other organizational processes.
- **Investing in large-scale professional development and training is paramount.**
All of the CBD colleges are implementing new completion approaches and providing more student services at a larger scale. With this ambition comes the need for professional development that empowers large numbers of faculty and staff to implement new practices with fidelity.
- **Alignment and learning across institutions is a critical lever for improvement.**
Learning from peers is a key component of the CBD work. Especially where participating campuses are distinct institutions and geographically dispersed, tactics such as statewide-wide retreats and regular calls between the campus leaders for implementation have fostered continued dialogue and shared learning.
- **Policy innovation and institutional change must be aligned for maximum impact.**
To clear the way for reform, colleges need to make changes in institutional policies that can accelerate their work, and closely collaborate with state policy partners to identify appropriate state policy responses. The better that state higher education systems and legislative leaders understand the approach and the progress of CBD, the more likely the state policy environment will support the CBD approach to institutional change and its implementation at scale.

CONNECT AND LEARN WITH COMPLETION BY DESIGN COLLEGES

The full report, *Designing for Completion: The practice and progress of Completion by Design*, provides an overview of the Completion by Design (CBD) approach and gives a snapshot of the progress CBD colleges have made since the initiative began in 2011. It is an opportunity to share emerging lessons and open a dialogue with other community college leaders and practitioners engaged in completion-focused institutional transformation. **Read the full report at completionbydesign.org.**

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