

CSUN: Data to Findings to Action

Credit Momentum at CSUN

Research literature: Credit momentum

Then Director of Student Success Innovations, Kristy Michaud, read research articles about “credit momentum”, the positive effects of taking 15 or more units in the first semester and, together with the Office of Institutional Research, sought to examine credit momentum effects among CSUN students (Attewell & Monaghan, 2016; Belfield, Jenkins, & Lahr, 2016).

Analysis with CSUN data -- YES it's true for CSUN students too

The analysis with CSUN data indicated that the same credit momentum effects could be found with our students. Importantly, this was true for all demographic groups (by race, Pell status, first generation status) and incoming HS GPAs were nearly identical for credit momentum and non-credit momentum students.

Sharing with campus: Brief reports and email campaign

Two easy-to-read brief reports were shared with the campus via IR's Inside Counts platform to share the importance of credit momentum for student success

<https://www.csun.edu/institutional-research/inside-counts>

Small movements: Sharing the message of “15 to finish”

Matador Momentum: 15 to Finish, Think 30

CSUN had a grant from APLU to reimagine our first year experience. One of their efforts was a collaboration with University Marketing and Communication that featured the tag lines, “15 to Finish” and “Think 30.” Both slogans were prominently featured on our websites, yard signs, and in conversation with students.

Advising meeting: Concerns from the advising community

Twice a year Undergraduate Studies hosts what's called the “community advising meeting” which is designed to bring together our very decentralized advising community. In Spring of 2017, Janet Oh (Senior Director, IR) and Kirsty Michaud came and presented the credit momentum findings. After that presentation, Elizabeth Adams (AVP, Undergraduate Studies) asked the advising community to try to put more first-time freshmen into 15 units for the Fall 2018 semester. The resulting discussion was rather contentious, with many advisors citing their own experiences as evidence that CSUN students were different from the national data

and that the data presented from CSUN students was not representative of the student body as a whole. The arguments were impassioned. The number of students enrolled in 15 units in Fall 2018 moved up slightly, but was still well under 50% which was cited as a goal.

Big movement, big changes: Structural changes that support credit momentum

The Hub

In the 2017-2018 Academic Year, the campus engaged in a conversation about our advising model. There was conversation among members of the Provost's Council and it was agreed to move to a centralized advising system for freshmen. The departure of Provost Yi Li at the end of that academic year put that plan on hold. In the 2018-2019 academic year, Interim Provost Stella Theodoulou decided to move forward with the plan. In late spring and early summer of 2019, CSUN opened the Matador Advising Hub ("the Hub"), with 15 advisors from all over the campus. The Hub did all of the advising for incoming first time freshmen (except EOP students and student athletes). The team worked together, under the leadership of Elizabeth Adams and Fariba Farzan, Director of the Hub, to advise 4200 students from mid-June through the end of summer.

Matador Academic Challenge

One key effort in the Hub's advising was a pilot experience called the Matador Academic Challenge. Entering FTF students who enrolled in 15-17 units were allowed to drop one class up to week 11. Under this pilot, students could drop one class (up to 4 units including a lab) by filling out a web form and indicating why they were struggling with the class. The Challenge paralleled other public systems' drop policies. Students in the UC system can drop through the end of the quarter; SUNY and CUNY students can drop through the end of the semester.

Credit momentum takes off: The Fall 2019 FTF cohort

Largely due to the implementation of centralized advising in the Hub, the campus saw a 54% increase in the proportion of full-time FTF enrolled in 15 or more units: from 39% among the Fall 2018 FTF to 61% among the Fall 2019 FTF. Increases were seen in all groups: by race, Pell status, and first generation status. Importantly, Fall outcomes indicate that students taking 15 or more units saw positive outcomes across the board: higher rates of completion of attempted units, higher first-term GPAs, and lower rates of probation. Again, these benefits were seen across all demographic groups. IR is now getting ready to launch a third credit momentum report, focusing on the results among the Fall 2019 cohort, to share these results with the campus.