

Degree Pathways, Meta-majors, and Block Scheduling Working Group Recommendations

Whereas, Wright State University is proud to offer its students a high-quality degree at an affordable price, and to the extent to which it is possible, Wright State University's students are well served by measures that will decrease the amount of time to complete their degree requirements;

Whereas, Wright State University's six-year graduation rate remains consistently around 40%, it is important to establish deliberate degree pathways, meta-majors, and block scheduling in order to make it easier for students to schedule classes and be able to change to related majors, as needed, so as to improve student degree completion and completion rates. For further explanation supporting the need for such goals see the associated document, Background on meta-majors and guided pathways¹; now, therefore be it

Recommended, that in order to: 1) make it easier for students to change majors without adding to their time to degree completion, and 2) make it easier for students to schedule courses that will count toward their degrees, the Faculty Senate Undergraduate Student Success Committee should create an implementation team that will develop necessary reports and tools to bridge the many data systems and data sets across campus in order to address the proposed recommendations for student success;

Whereas, meta-majors have generalized schedules with common courses in their freshman year. For example, programs in Biology, Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, Earth and Environmental Sciences, and Neuroscience have similar course requirements throughout the freshman year. Thus, these programs could encompass a meta major (possibly Life Sciences or another related area in the Sciences), allowing students who are in one of the programs to change their degree to another related Life Sciences program without having to necessarily extend their time to degree completion due to the related nature of the early degree requirements; and let it further be

Recommended, that meta-majors be developed in which programs with common first year pre-requisite courses and careers be aligned such that students can easily and knowledgeably switch between related degree programs as would be necessitated by desire or demand. Meta-majors could encompass several areas, such as Education, Engineering, Life Sciences, or Health; let it also be

Whereas, block scheduling for Freshman Biology majors has been preliminarily successful and an exemplar more broadly for Life Sciences scheduling across multiple programs in the Freshman year, including: Biology, Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, Earth and Environmental Sciences, and Neuroscience; let it be

Recommended, that block scheduling be developed across the Freshman year such that cohorts of students, ideally across meta-majors, are taking a pre-established set of courses that are required across a set of programs to aid in easily understandable course requirements for registration and can be readily transferred between like programs;

Whereas, today's college students balance many demanding roles, including student, employee, care giver, head of household, and, according to The Condition of Education 2019 report, 81 percent of part-time students were employed, while 43 percent of full-time students were employed. In order to meet student demand that aligns with their availability from work and other obligations, let it further be

Recommended, that WSU consider offering a greater variety of non-traditional schedules (ex. Summer, evening, and weekend) and/or modes of delivery (ex. Fully online) to accommodate more students in not only completing courses but making progress towards completing their degrees.

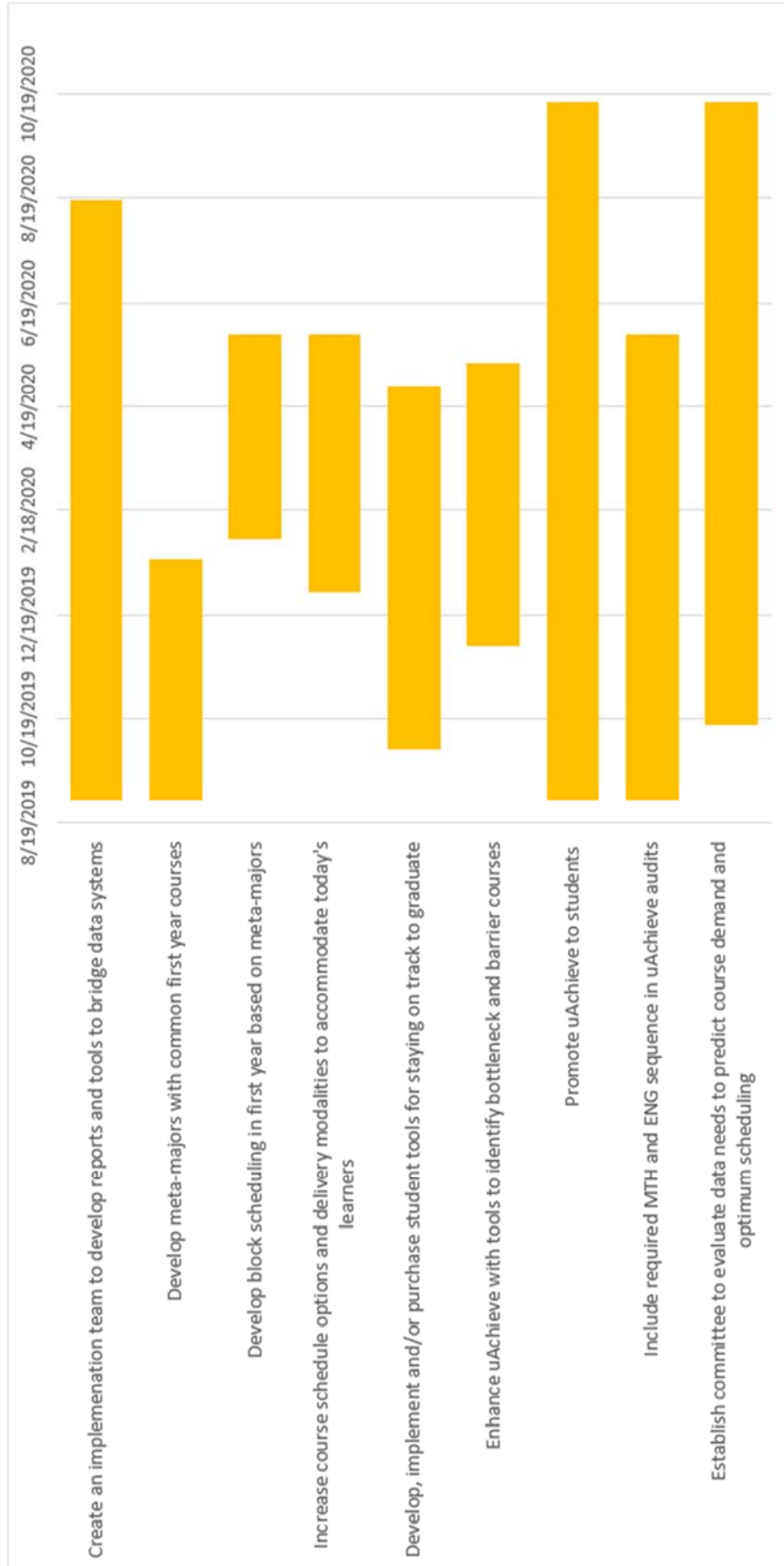
Recommended, that tools be developed, implemented, and/or purchased in order to aid in students getting back on track, staying on track, or changing track, as well as to aid departments in making necessary and timely changes to course schedules. Ultimately, these tools should allow for course schedule planning and course registration to become easier and more efficient. Therefore, let it further be

Recommended, that uAchieve be enhanced with the Student Planning add-on to make use of more advanced reporting tools to identify bottleneck and gateway courses that pose barriers to student progress. Such tools could incorporate other majors or minors that students would be well aligned to transition to or incorporate based upon the courses they have completed, thus, facilitating reduced time for students to complete their degrees as well as the overall number of students who complete their degrees. Along these lines, it is also recommended that promotion of uAchieve to students be enhanced, especially features related to Schedule Planning and "What If" audits. As well, it is recommended that prerequisite courses for a student's required MTH and ENG sequence be shown in uAchieve in order to give students a more complete understanding of where they are in the MTH and ENG course pathway; and let it further be

Recommended, that a committee be established to evaluate data needs to predict course demand and optimum scheduling. The findings of the committee will be used to develop reports and/or purchase software to take advantage of predictive scheduling, allowing for a more accurate offering of courses based upon student need and demand. Solutions may be achieved through expanded use of current or enhanced uAchieve data and products, through development of internal reports, or through additional schedule software products such as Ad Astra's Platinum Analytics. It is recommended that the approach that is most effective, efficient, intuitive to use, etc. be explored and implemented. In hope, this would allow for tools that would aid in coordinating class times across a given college, if not the entire

university, so as to minimize overlap across courses that are commonly taken in the same term. As well, these tools should allow for predictive data regarding incoming math and English placement levels that will provide help in planning appropriate courses and schedules to meet the incoming student need.

Proposed Timeline of Recommendations



Background on Meta-Majors and Guided Pathways

Guided pathways provide an opportunity to scale some of the successful efforts Wright State has implemented and vastly improve outcomes for students. The groundwork for such is being laid through a number of institutional initiatives including co-requisite remediation, math pathways, block scheduling, proactive advising through integrated technology, and career clusters. When implemented strategically, guided pathways can eliminate institutional barriers to student success by providing students with clear road maps to earning their degree and pursuing a career.

The initial work on guided pathways is most often attributed to the Community College Research Center with the work of Thomas Baily, Shanna Smith Jaggars, and Davis Jenkins. And four-year universities like Georgia State University, Arizona State, and New Mexico State have developed successful models of meta-majors building on that research. The research, in essence, states that today's university student is overwhelmed by too many choices, while they balance competing roles (part-time work with full-time school) and have difficulty completing degree requirements without effective guidance.

New students entering Georgia State are required to enroll in one of seven meta majors. Based on their meta major, they are given a choice of a few block schedules which have the relevant courses for their pathway (based on college-readiness or remediation needs). As a result students become a part of a cohort that helps build community and has a positive impact on persistence and retention. Tim Renick, Vice Provost for Student Success at Georgia State, reports a 30% reduction in students changing majors since implementing meta majors.

Complete College America (CCA) describe six areas that help build intentional guided pathways:

1. Informed choice and meta majors: Students select among a set of initial broad clusters of majors. As students progress, the meta majors narrow into more specific areas of study.
2. Math aligned to majors: Math courses and sequences must be relevant and aligned to majors.
3. Academic maps: Students choose coherent programs of study, not random individual courses.
4. Default pathways: The academic map is the default schedule. Exploration outside a student's major is allowable, but reduces aimless wandering.
5. Critical path courses: Marker courses that are critical and must be completed in a sequence are monitored for helping keep students on track.
6. Intrusive, proactive academic advising: integrated technology (like our student success management system, RAPS) provide for targeted outreach campaigns, tracking of student engagement in academic support, and gathering early alerts and progress reports on students.

More recently, Complete College America published a paper called "College, On Purpose: A guide to implementing the Purpose First strategy – the missing link between career choice, guided pathways, and first-year momentum." Their Purpose First strategy builds on the early work of CCA around guided pathways and recommends "restructuring the onboarding process to ensure students identify their interests, explore possible careers and understand important job market data that could impact their financial futures." Wright State has recently centralized and enhance career services where professional staff are co-located with advising staff in seven Student Success Suites located across campus. This

strategy brings together both educational and career planning such that it provides a clearer and more coherent pathway to graduation and post-graduation activity.