

# Guided Pathways to Success

## Boosting College Completion

Navigating the complicated path through college is a difficult task for far too many. All students need step-by-step roadmaps and intrusive guidance to on-time completion — saving time and money — and significantly boosting their success.

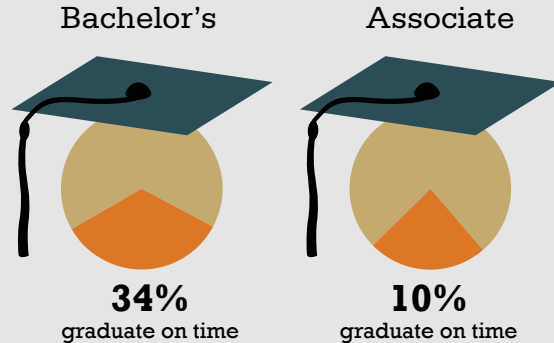
**COMPLETE COLLEGE** AMERICA

**THE PROBLEMS**

# Too Much Time and Money — and Too Few Graduates

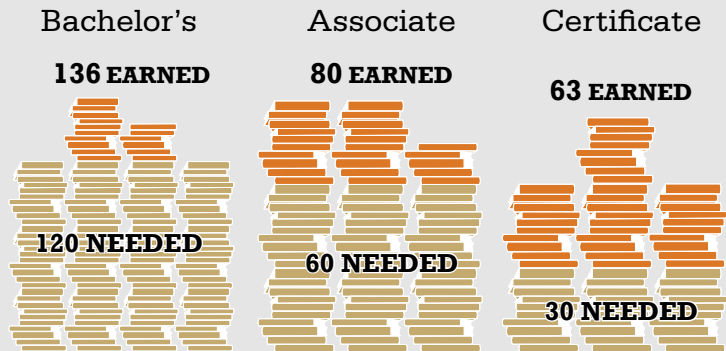
## Too few students ever graduate — even fewer on time.

Nationally, only about half of full-time students pursuing a four-year degree graduate — in six years. Only about 35 percent graduate with bachelor's degrees on time. Not even 25 percent of full-time associate degree candidates graduate in three years — and only about 10 percent do so in two years. The numbers are worse for part-time students.



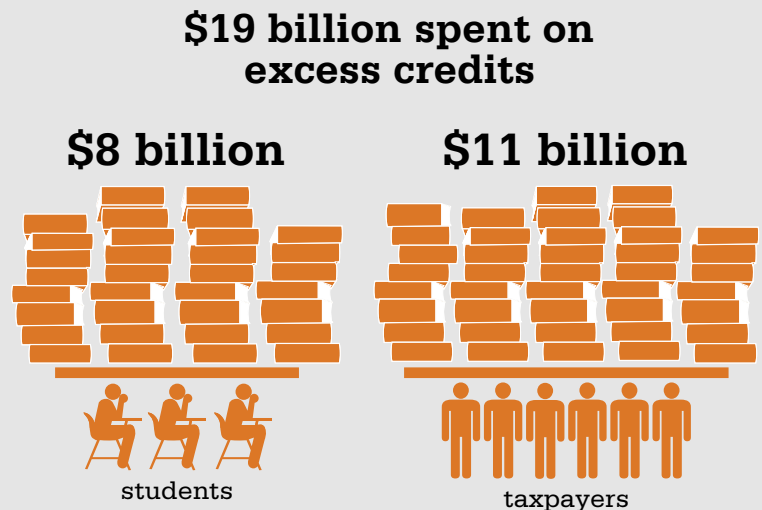
## Students earn unnecessary credits.

The average bachelor's degree graduate in the United States earned more than 136 credits when 120 credits is usually enough. Associate degree holders earned nearly 80 credits instead of the expected 60. Worse, certificate earners graduated with more than double the ordinary number of credits expected: More than 63 credits were achieved instead of the 30 normally needed for programs designed to be accomplished in one year.



## Billions of dollars and millions of hours are wasted on unnecessary courses.

Excess credits are estimated to cost more than \$19 billion each year. Of that amount, nearly \$8 billion is paid by students — and more than \$11 billion is the unnecessary burden of taxpayers who subsidize public higher education.



## **“Credit Creep,” Broken Policies, Uninformed, and Overwhelming Choices**

**POOR CHOICES:** Credits earned that don't count toward degrees often represent unwise choices.

On average, U.S. bachelor's degree graduates earned 12 credits that didn't count toward their majors — **costing themselves and taxpayers nearly \$6 billion a year.** One Florida study determined that changing majors once doesn't add much extra time in college before graduation, but each additional change in major results in an average increase of three to four additional credits needed to graduate.

**UNAVAILABLE COURSES:** When needed courses aren't offered, students get stuck in costly holding patterns.

Money and time are wasted when students can't get the courses they need when they need them. **Instead of staying on track for on-time graduation, they “swirl” in place — too often gaining excess credits in unnecessary courses to maintain financial aid eligibility.**

**EXCESS CREDITS:** Withdrawals and no-credit repeats are very costly.

Nearly 10 percent of grades earned by U.S. undergraduates are coded “W” (withdrawal) or “R” (no-credit repeat) — the largest drivers of excess credit hours. On average, bachelor's degree students graduate with 13 credit hours coded as withdrawals or no-credit repeats and associate degree holders graduate with nearly 7 of these types of credit hours, **costing an estimated \$6.5 billion annually — that doesn't include those who drop out.** Withdrawals and no-credit repeats also reduce course availability for other students, lengthening their time to degree as well.

**LOST TRANSFERS:** Broken transfer policies undermine student progress.

More than 60 percent of bachelor's degree recipients in 2007–08 had attempted to transfer some of their credits between institutions. Of those, 45 percent said that some or none of their prior credits were accepted by their new schools. **Assuming that each of these graduates had two courses that failed to transfer, the estimated costs to students and taxpayers would be about \$600 million each year.** That doesn't count the costs of the failed transfers of those who ultimately drop out, which can be a key driver of student failure.

**UNNECESSARY CREDITS:** Too many programs require too many credits, wasting time and money.

Even though states and colleges have made progress in recent years, too many institutions still require more than 120 credits for a bachelor's degree, more than 60 credits for an associate degree, and more than 30 credits for certificates. The result: Too few full-time students can graduate on time. Money is lost, too: **Just three more credits on average for bachelor's degrees in the United States cost our country and its students an extra \$1.5 billion a year.**

## ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS

# Guided Pathways to Success (GPS)

### ✓ WHOLE PROGRAMS OF STUDY

Students choose coherent programs, not random, individual courses.

Students make the “big choices” of academic majors or programs — and all the other choices of necessary credits and course sequences are laid out for them. **In this way, a clear path to on-time completion is prepared for them, semester by semester, all the way to graduation day.**

### ✓ INFORMED CHOICE

Choice becomes more informed, deliberate, and simpler.

Colleges utilize a range of information such as past academic performance in high school to provide recommendations to students about programs of study that match their skills and interests. With this information, students can make more fully informed decisions among a set of initial broad academic pathways that ultimately lead to specific academic programs. For example, first year students would choose a “meta-major” in a broad area such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM); health care; business; liberal arts; or social science. As students progress, the pathways narrow into more specific majors such as chemistry, accounting, psychology, nursing, etc. **Simply put, no student will receive the designation “unclassified.” All students are on degree pathways with the expectation of graduating on time.** Exploration outside one’s major is still allowed and enabled as intentional investigation, replacing aimless wandering of the college course catalog.

### ✓ NO WASTED CREDITS

All courses count toward degrees.

It is impossible for students to choose courses that don’t count toward a degree because course options are limited to those within their chosen program of study. **Students no longer are allowed to choose courses “cafeteria style” with no consideration for whether they lead to a credential.**

### ✓ DEFAULT PATHWAYS

Students remain on their chosen path unless given approval to change.

Students can still change their pathway or major but not without permission. A student is considered to be on a chosen GPS pathway until his or her academic advisor allows for a change to another pathway. **Students stay on track for graduation — and fully understand the time and money consequences of making a change.**

### ✓ INTRUSIVE, ON-TIME ADVISING

Academic advising is intrusive, just in time, efficient, and cost effective.

Colleges can more effectively monitor student progress toward completion through a more structured student support system built around guided pathways. Innovations in technology allow student support to be targeted and customized to meet the needs of individual students. Early warning systems make it easy for institutions to track student performance in required courses and target interventions when and where they are most needed. For example, systems can automatically place a student on administrative hold and require a meeting with an advisor if a key milestone course in the student’s major is not completed on schedule. **Academic advisors can focus their attention almost exclusively on students most in need of services instead of spreading themselves over burdensome caseloads of all students.**

### ✓ 15 TO FINISH

All degree pathways are built for on-time graduation.

It's impossible to graduate on schedule unless each semester requires at least 15 credit hours of study or 30 credit hours over an entire year, including summers. **Given that time is the enemy of college completion, all GPS pathways are designed with the credits necessary each semester to stay on track for on-time graduation.**

### ✓ CLEAR PROGRESS TO GUARANTEED COURSES

Students receive real-time feedback.

Just like GPS in your car, students on a guided pathway know their location along their chosen pathway in real time. They can see the progress made to date and a clear path of courses before them that lead to on-time graduation. **No longer must students worry if required courses will be available: The pathway guarantees courses within their program will be there when they need them.**

### ✓ MILESTONE COURSES

Milestone courses signal student success.

Degree pathways contain critical milestone courses that must be completed each semester to certify students are on track. **Not only do these courses provide realistic assessments of student progress; milestones give students early signals about their prospects for success in a given field of study.** This eliminates the problem of students' putting off challenging courses until the consequences of changing majors become too damaging and costly.

### ✓ BLOCK SCHEDULES

Highly structured schedules add even more student success.

Proven approaches at institutions across the country have demonstrated that structured program pathways are even more effective when delivered within highly structured schedules. **Block schedules (e.g., 8:00 a.m. to noon, five days a week) add much needed predictability to busy lives, especially for working students.** Informal student cohorts that result from this approach are another added benefit, providing valuable student peer supports.

### ✓ END-TO-END DESIGN

Students are more motivated to fulfill their career goals.

GPS programs are built with the end goal in mind. Starting with the student's desired career outcome, colleges construct a sequence of relevant courses that leads students, semester by semester, to their chosen goal. Students understand from their first day on campus where their chosen pathway will take them. **Aimless wandering is replaced with highly motivating and intentional routes to careers and more learning.**

### ✓ WORKFORCE CONNECTION

States and students win as GPS creates academic maps to high-demand jobs.

Structured programs enable states to strategically align their institutions to current and projected economic development needs. **New program pathways are tailored to produce graduates to fill high-demand careers, facilitating better cooperation with the state's business sector.** **Students enter programs of study with a clear sense of the job opportunities that await them, boosting motivation for graduation.** GPS degrees also provide opportunities for students to persist in highly valuable career paths such as STEM and health care by exposing students to the full array of occupational choices in a given field, instead of simply "washing out" promising students in their early semesters.

# GPS: THE RESULTS



## **Florida State University (FSU): degree maps combine with other strategies to increase graduation, close attainment gaps**

- ➔ Since starting degree maps, FSU has cut the number of students graduating with excess credits in half.
- ➔ In 10 years, FSU's graduation rate for all students has increased 12%, to 74%. More significantly, the graduation rate for African Americans has increased to 77%, for first-generation Pell students to 72%, and for Hispanic students to more than 70%.



## **Arizona State University: eAdvisor system boosting retention and success**

- ➔ First-time, full-time freshman retention rates have climbed to 84%.
- ➔ 91% of all students are deemed to be "on track" in their programs, up from just 22% three years before.



## **Georgia State University: Degree maps and intrusive advising have boosted graduation rates by more than 20 percentage points in the last 10 years**

- ➔ Pell students (52.5%), African American (57.4%), and Hispanic students (66.4%) now graduate at higher rates than the overall student body.
- ➔ More bachelor's degrees conferred to African Americans than any other U.S. university.



## **The City University of New York (CUNY): ASAP program has doubled graduation rates for associate degrees**

- ➔ The CUNY Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) initiative has produced a graduation rate three times higher than the national average for urban community colleges. 55% of its fall 2007 cohort earned associate degrees in three years.
- ➔ ASAP students are grouped in cohorts based on a limited set of majors and attend courses during consolidated morning, afternoon, or evening schedules to enable them to better balance school, jobs, and family responsibilities.



## **Tennessee Technology Centers: more than 75% of students graduate on time, job placements higher than 80%**

- ➔ Utilizing highly structured, block scheduled programs, the Tennessee Technology Centers have consistently graduated their students at three times or higher than the rate of their peers — even though their student population is slightly poorer and older.
- ➔ The certificate programs available at the centers are very valuable for their graduates with job placement rates of 80% or higher.

## **COMPLETE COLLEGE AMERICA**

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Established in 2009, Complete College America is a national nonprofit with a single mission: to work with states to significantly increase the number of Americans with quality career certificates or college degrees and to close attainment gaps for traditionally underrepresented populations.