

PASS

Promoting At-Promise Student Success

USC Rossier
Pullias Center for
Higher Education

ADVANCING MAJOR AND CAREER SUCCESS FOR AT-PROMISE STUDENT SUCCESS

AUGUST 2021

This brief, intended for a higher education practitioner audience, focuses on why and how institutions can streamline and connect campus and community resources to advance students' major and career self-efficacy in alignment with student success goals. By focusing on students' individual developmental needs, TSLC staff provided an ecology of tailored support as students selected a major and advanced their understanding of how it connected to the skills needed in their future careers.

TOPIC/ISSUE

For at-promise students, rising college costs further escalate the need to complete their degree in a timely manner. Thus, focusing on major and career self-efficacy (MCSE) is one way that higher education institutions can strategically support at-promise students as they align their personal, academic, and professional goals. Studies have shown that greater confidence in one's abilities related to their career helps foster motivation and satisfaction with their major as well as greater career exploration and persistence. This study builds on prior work, showing how programs and practitioners can enhance at-promise students' major and career success.

DEFINITIONS

Major and Career Self-Efficacy (MCSE): The extent to which a student believes they are capable of successfully identifying and pursuing a suitable major and career path given their interests, skills, and experiences.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ➔ **Staff are key to at-promise students' sensemaking of their major and career experiences.** As part of the major and career ecology, we learned that CCTP staff advisors were crucial in facilitating at-promise students' sense-making of their experiences across multiple major and career ecology contexts, which in turn shaped students' MCSE. Going beyond traditional, singular career interventions (e.g., career fair, career activities), staff focused on curating a developmentally appropriate set of major and career experiences to boost MCSE' among at-promise students (e.g. job shadowing, informational interviews).
- ➔ **Staff utilize developmental assessments to understand the structural challenges at-promise students face, the assets they bring, as well as their major and career developmental status.** We found that the programs' support of at-promise students' major and career self-efficacy was a central feature of the CCTP that contributed both quantitatively and qualitatively to students' success (Kezar et al., 2019).² We determined two broad major and career developmental statuses among program participants: exploring and established, whereby "exploring" described students who may have considered their major and career, but not in any depth and "established" described students who had a clear idea of their major and its relationship to their career, often informed by early pre-college

KEY TAKEAWAYS (CONT.)

experiences. Our quasi-experimental research indicates statistically significantly higher MCSE levels for students who participated in the CCTP when compared to a control group of students.³

➔ **Staff take coordinated approaches that bridge across departments to meet the individualized and developmental needs of students.** The CCTP and its staff curated a major and career ecology informed by multiple, coordinated major and career-related activities and experiences.⁴ Rather than only suggest everyone attend career fairs and create generic resumes, the CCTP staff assessed where students were developmentally and provided individualized advice regarding meeting with certain professionals at a career fair or tailoring their resumes for their field of interest. Our study suggests that advancing major and career self-efficacy should not be left to siloed departments, like career or academic services, but should facilitate coordinated efforts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Conduct student intakes early and share information. Conduct student advising meetings for at-promise students early in their college transition that help determine the assets and skills students will contribute to campus as well as the resources and supports they may need academically, socially, and financially pertaining to their major and career trajectory. Once students have determined a major/career pathway of interest, create communication systems that connect them directly to the related department(s). Use systems, like data management tools, that allow for system-wide information sharing across departments and offices, such as academic affairs, career services, and major/academic departments.

2. Create tailored campus programming and consider planning multiple, smaller events rather than annual, large events (e.g., career fairs, networking events). This allows for more

targeted, individualized opportunities that recognize the various developmental stages that students experience along the major and career pathway. Such an approach also fosters greater major and career-specific learning and networking opportunities that give students confidence in their decision-making.

3. Work in partnership with colleagues across campus and throughout the local community. Students benefit from connections to national and out-of-state internships and volunteer experiences, but should also consider impacting the campus and regional community. In addition to partnering with campus departments, staff and faculty can facilitate a community audit that asks nearby residents what challenges they are facing and what opportunities they are looking for. Work in partnership with nonprofits, businesses, and public agencies to create shadowing, volunteer, and internship pathways that meet local needs to foster civic engagement and empower at-promise students.

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE PRACTICE

- What are the assets (e.g. knowledge, skill sets, practices, etc.) that your at-promise students bring with them to your college campus based on their home and familial communities related to their potential major and career pathways of interest?
- What are the potential gaps and areas of growth that your at-promise students may require support and resources related to in order to advance their major and career pathways of interest?

- How can your institutional agents and systems assess and share data regarding students' assets, areas of growth, as well as their major and career developmental stage(s)?
- How can the supports and resources at your institution and across the local community help broaden students' confidence in who they are while facilitating skill development and connections that advance opportunities for major and career success?

STUDY OVERVIEW

We studied the Thompson Scholars Learning Communities (TSLC), a set of programs providing low-income students, many of whom are also first-generation college students and racially minoritized students (whom we refer to as at-promise students) with a comprehensive array of academic, personal, and social support services. Students participate in two years of structured programming, and receive a generous scholarship that covers the cost of tuition and fees in the University of Nebraska system located at three very different types of campuses—a metropolitan college, a rural regional campus, and a research one institution. Our mixed methods study explored whether, how, and why the programs develop key psychosocial outcomes critical for college student success such as sense of belonging and academic self-efficacy. Qualitative data was gathered through longitudinal interviews with TSLC students, staff, instructors, and stakeholders, as well as through program observations and documents. Quantitative data was gathered through longitudinal surveys of students, including TSLC participants and students with similar characteristics who did not participate in TSLC, as well as administrative records.

This brief is based on findings by the research team members of the Promoting At-Promise Student Success (PASS) project and was prepared by Liane Hypolite. Authors listed on the suggested citation contributed to the development of the ideas presented in this brief, and are listed alphabetically following the primary author(s) who drafted the brief. For more information about the PASS project please visit the project website: PASS.Pullias.USC.edu. The complete list of team members/co-authors can be found on the About page.

Recommend Citation:

Hypolite, L.I., Kitchen, J., & Kezar, A. (2021). *Advancing major and career success for at-promise student success* [Brief]. USC Pullias Center for Higher Education.

Notes

¹ Kitchen, J., Kezar, A., Hypolite, L. (accepted). At-promise college student major and career self-efficacy (MCSE) ecology model. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*.

² Kezar, A., Hypolite, L., & Kitchen, J. A. (2019). Career self-efficacy: A mixed-methods study of an underexplored research area for first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented college students in a comprehensive college transition program. *The American Behavioral Scientist*, 64(3), 298–324.

³ Hypolite, L., Kitchen, J., Kezar, A. (under review). Developing major and career self-efficacy among at-promise students: Impacts of a comprehensive college transition program.

⁴ Kitchen, J., Kezar, A., Hypolite, L. (accepted). At-promise college student major and career self-efficacy (MCSE) ecology model. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*.