Strengthening Career Pathways by Embedding Evaluations into Routines of Practice

APPAM-Abt Institutional Member Forum on Career Pathways

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Rebecca A. Maynard
University Trustee Chair Professor Emeritus

This presentation draws on work done in collaboration with David Fein, Phomdaen Souvanna and Azim Shivji from Abt Associates; Rebecca Baelen from the University of Pennsylvania; and Garrett Warfield and Jessica Britt from Year Up. The work was supported in part through grants from the Institute of Education Sciences, the Social Innovation Fund/GreenLight Fund, and the WT Grant Foundation.
Context

Case Examples of Embedded Studies

1. MDRC’s work with community colleges to develop & test Opening Doors
2. Carnegie Corporation’s development & refinement of an alternative to traditional developmental math-- Advanced Statway
3. Page & Castleman’s work with a community-based college support group on a FAFSA Nudge Experiment
4. Abt/UPenn/Year Up partnership to promote academic success & retention in a lower-cost version of Year Up’s flagship career pathways program—the Professional Training Corps
Common Challenges for Career Pathways Programs & Students

**Program Concerns**
- Recruitment goals
- Retention targets
- Developmental education needs
- Course completion
- Skills mastery
- Skills alignment with employer needs

**Student Concerns**
- Application & enrollment processes
- Financial needs & sources of support
- Social emotional supports
- Academic supports
- Transportation
- Job opportunities & access
Focus of Case 1: Opening Doors

Program Concerns
- Recruitment goals
- Retention targets
- Developmental education needs
- Course completion
- Skills mastery
- Skills alignment with employer needs

Student Concerns
- Application & enrollment processes
- Financial needs & sources of support
- Social emotional supports
- Academic supports
- Transportation
- Job opportunities & access
Focus of Case 2: Carnegie-Statway

**Program Concerns**
- Recruitment goals
- Retention targets
- Developmental education needs
- Course completion
- Skills mastery
- Skills alignment with employer needs

**Student Concerns**
- Application & enrollment processes
- Financial needs & sources of support
- Social emotional supports
- Academic supports
- Transportation
- Job opportunities & access
Focus of Case 3: FAFSA Nudge

Program Concerns
- Recruitment goals
- Retention targets
- Developmental education needs
- Course completion
- Skills mastery
- Skills alignment with employer needs

Student Concerns
- Application & enrollment processes
- Financial needs & sources of support
- Social emotional supports
- Academic supports
- Transportation
- Job opportunities & access
Focus of Case 4: Year Up-PTC

Program Concerns
- Recruitment goals
- Retention targets
- Developmental education needs
- Course completion
- Skills mastery
- Skills alignment with employer needs

Student Concerns
- Application & enrollment processes
- Financial needs & sources of support
- Social emotional supports
- Academic supports
- Transportation
- Job opportunities & access
Case 1: Testing Existing “Improvements”

- Improvement strategy
  - Learning communities
- College-developed strategy
  - Unknown impacts
- MDRC-college partnership for testing (2005-8)
  - Randomized controlled trial (n~1,500 students)
- Positive impacts
  - Academic performance & persistence
  - Fade-out post-program
Case 2: Formal PDSAs & QED Evaluation

- **Improvement strategy**
  - New dev-ed math curriculum
- **Co-constructed by colleges & researchers**
  - Multiple PDSA cycles
- **Evaluation limited** ([Norman et al. 2019](#))
  - Comparative outcomes during development
  - Recent PSM evaluation for 6 of 19 colleges that have used Statway in 2012-13
- **Positive Impacts**
  - Positive impact estimates
  - Unknown selection
  - Not available during development

How was Statway developed and designed?

Statway was developed through a collaborative development process that included both community college and university faculty and was developed using a strong pedagogical research base. Researchers, practitioners, and the major mathematics professional societies worked together to establish the learning outcomes and design principles that guide student work. Statway was developed and continues to be improved by community colleges for community colleges.

**References**

2. The Mathematical Association of America (MAA), American Statistical Association (ASA), and American Mathematical Association of Two-Year Colleges (AMATYC), all provided letters of support and endorsement for the Statway learning objectives.
Case 3: RPP-Designed FAFSA Nudge Experiment

- **Improvement strategy**
  - Information campaign to promote FAFSA re-application
  - Targeted on college students

- **Co-constructed by uAspire & researchers**
  - Text message design processes used in studies with high school students
  - Randomized controlled trial (n~ 1,000 HS students) (Castleman & Page 2014)

- **Positive Impacts**
  - Large persistence benefits into sophomore year for CC students

While educators and policy makers have invested substantial resources to support high school seniors and their families to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), considerably less attention has been devoted to helping students re-file their FAFSA each year they are in college. Yet, students need to renew the FAFSA annually to maintain their financial aid; among freshmen Pell Grant recipients in good academic standing, a substantial share does not successfully re-file their FAFSA. In this paper we investigate, through a randomized controlled trial design, the impact of a low-touch intervention in which we sent college freshmen a series of personalized text message reminders related to FAFSA re-filing. The messages (1) provided information about where to obtain help with financial aid; (2) reminded students about important aid-related deadlines and requirements; and (3) offered assistance on financial-aid related processes. The intervention cost approximately $5 per student served. The intervention produced large and positive effects among freshmen at community colleges. Specifically, text recipients at community colleges were nearly 12 percentage points more likely to persist into the fall of their sophomore year of college compared to community college freshmen who did not receive this outreach, and were almost 14 percentage points more likely to remain continuously enrolled through the spring of sophomore year. By contrast, the intervention did not improve sophomore year persistence among freshmen at four-year institutions, among whom the rate of persistence was already high.

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University of Virginia  
University of Pittsburgh

Updated December 2014
Improving L&D Completion: Experimenting with Alternative Strategies for Monitoring & Supporting Academics in the PTC

Post-read for Year Up Staff Conversation
June 25, 2018
Rebecca A. Maynard,* Rebecca N. Baleden,* David Fein,**Azim Shivi, and Phomdaen Souvanna**
*University of Pennsylvania; **Abt Associates

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Case 4: Improvement Science with a Twist

- Improvement strategy
  - Academic monitoring & supports
- Co-constructed by Year Up & Abt-UPenn researchers
  - Researcher-facilitated PDSA cycles
  - Differentiated based on local opportunities & needs
  - RCT- ~300 participants in 3 programs
- Positive Impacts
  - Modest impacts in cycle 1
  - Good-sized impacts in cycle 2 & pooled
Case 4 Blended Approach: IS, DBIR & RCT

- Identify “pain points” for the partnership model
- Develop promising improvement strategies
- Evaluate & refine
  1. Professional judgments
  2. Monitoring & evaluation (M&E)
  3. Case studies
  4. Impact evaluation (RCTs)
**The “Twist”: DBIR, IS & Embedded RCTs**

**Intervention Development:** Prioritize “pain points,” establish common goals, but tailored strategies to local conditions & preferences

**Implementation & Testing:** Typical oversight & intervention by management
- Low stakes, low burden, refinement at natural intervals, convincing evidence

**Measures of Success:**
- Reliance on authentic performance markers
- Low-cost, accessible, complete

**Reporting & Action:**
- Quick turnaround of findings
- Familiar format for reporting (PPT)
- Sharing of assembled tools & exhibits
- No operational recommendations from the researchers