

## **CT BOARD OF REGENTS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION**

### **RESOLUTION**

concerning

CSCU Community College Areas of Study

January 25, 2019

**RESOLVED:** That the Board of Regents for Higher Education directs the CSCU System Office, through the leadership of the CSCU Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs, to develop, implement, and maintain a set of meta-majors, to be known as Areas of Study, consistent with Guided Pathways practices for the CSCU community college, to be established. The Areas of Study will provide an organizational framework for all academic programs and provide students with clear paths to graduation.

The CSCU Areas of Study are established to support ongoing efforts to improve student success at the CSCU community colleges and in the CSCU system. The Areas of Study will cluster existing degree programs under larger thematic umbrellas into sets of related areas of study. This does not change the overall number of programs offered, but it does simplify the way in which program options are presented to students to afford a more informed decision-making process.

The six CSCU Areas of Study are as follows:

- Social and Behavioral Sciences, Education, and Public Service
- STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math)
- Manufacturing, Industry, and Technical Careers
- Health Careers
- Humanities and Creative Arts
- Business & Hospitality

Programs established for the singly accredited CT community college will exist within one of these six CSCU Areas of Study. Program establishment within a particular Area of Study will be part of the program approval process.

The CSCU System Office, through the leadership of the CSCU Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs, will maintain this system of Areas of Study as well as ensure the consistency of their application and use.

A True Copy:

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Erin A. Fitzgerald, Secretary of the  
CT Board of Regents for Higher Education

**ITEM**

Proposal to establish a limited number of Areas of Study for the singly accredited CT community college. The Areas of Study provide an organizational framework for all academic programs and aid in student decision-making.

**RECOMMENDED MOTION FOR FULL BOARD**

**RESOLVED:** That the Board of Regents for Higher Education directs the CSCU System Office, through the leadership of the CSCU Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs, to develop, implement, and maintain a set of meta-majors, to be known as Areas of Study, consistent with Guided Pathways practices for the future singly accredited CT community college. The Areas of Study will provide an organizational framework for all academic programs and aid in student decision-making.

**BACKGROUND*****What are Meta-Majors?***

Meta-majors are collections of academic degree programs that have related courses and career goals and share common foundational skills (Waugh, 2016). For example, a “health careers” meta-major might include a number of different specific degree programs, such as exercise science, occupational therapy assistant, radiography, respiratory care, surgical technology, nursing, etc. Meta-majors organize existing degree programs into smaller sets of related areas of study. Implementing meta-majors does not change the overall number of programs offered, but it does simplify the way in which program options are presented to students to afford a less anxiety-provoking and more informed decision-making process. For example, instead of trying to select a major from a list of over 100 possible options, students select a broad area of study from among five to eight options. While more options may intuitively seem better, research suggests that too many options results in decision paralysis and impairs effective decision-making (Kahneman, 2011; Schwartz, 2004). The overwhelming number of CT community college students who enroll in General Studies degree programs across the twelve colleges suggests that this may indeed be the case.

***Why Meta-Majors?***

The rationale for meta-majors is convincingly summarized by Waugh (2016):

“We know that the completion statistics for low-income and underprepared students enrolled in certificate and degree programs at community colleges are dismal. A growing body of evidence reveals that a central factor in these low completion rates is the ‘cafeteria’ style approach to college, which provides entering students with a dizzying array of choices and little guidance on navigating those choices. Recent brain science research demonstrates that people feel anxiety and irritation when faced with too many choices and, as a result, are more likely to make poor choices or avoid the situation entirely. A poor decision on which classes to take can cost community college students a significant amount of time and potentially mean the difference

between earning a credential or degree and stopping or dropping out... A key design principle of Guided Pathways is that academic programs of study be structured to provide students with guidance and clear routes to completion. Guided pathways aim to reduce student meandering caused by an overwhelming array of course options, unclear program requirements and a lack of guidance. Meta-majors provide this structure from a student's entry to college all the way through completion.”

Evidence suggests that entering a specific program of study within a year of enrollment is critical to successful completion (Jenkins & Cho, 2012). Meta-majors can thus be particularly beneficial for students who are undecided about their educational and career goals at the time of entry into college, which can be as high as 65% to 70% of all entering students (Albion & Fogarty, 2002). Meta-majors provide an easy-to-understand entry point to the diverse program offerings at our colleges and help students begin to narrow their interests early in their academic journey. Students enter an area of study and complete coursework in this interest area before deciding on a more specific major or program of study. Of course, students who enter the college already having decided on their degree program are still able to choose that major rather than first designating a meta-major.

The benefits of the meta-major framework extend beyond helping students select a course of study. General education and foundational skill courses can be aligned to the different needs within different meta-majors. For example, math requirements may vary by area of study from those requiring statistics (e.g., Behavioral Sciences) to those needing an algebra or calculus sequence (e.g., STEM). Default pathways within each area of study identify the math, and other general education requirements and recommendations, for students up-front. Because academic programs within an Area of Study share similar courses and foundational skills, meta-majors provide a means to ensure that students register for relevant courses within coherent degree programs. This, in turn, means that students can explore multiple transfer and career options within an area of study while maintaining momentum toward completion and increases the likelihood that students will earn a meaningful credential and/or transfer in a timely fashion.

Meta-majors create cohorts of students with related interests, foster early connections between students and faculty experts within an area of study, and allow co-curricular programming (i.e., experiences and activities outside the classroom that support and reinforce class content) matched to student interests. These are all highly effective ways of increasing student engagement. “The research findings are unequivocal. Student learning, persistence, and attainment in college are strongly associated with student engagement. The more actively engaged students are – with college faculty and staff, with other students, with the subject matter they are studying – the more likely they are to persist in their college studies and to achieve at higher levels.” (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2018)

### ***How were the Areas of Study determined?***

The Guided Pathways Choice Architecture team was established in Spring 2018 and charged with making recommendations concerning a number of academic components of implementing Guided Pathways reforms in the CT community colleges, including identifying possible meta-majors.

The team includes faculty, staff, and administrators from all twelve community colleges, Charter Oak State College, and the CSU’s. Student representatives from SAC also participate in team meetings. Team members represent a wide array of academic disciplines, career programs, governance committees, support services, and functional areas. Past and current team members, including Guided Pathways managers: Rebecca Adams (HCC), Shirley Adams (COSC), Gayle Barrett (MxCC), Kevin Bechard (MCC), Vicki Bozzuto (GCC), Sara (Brinckerhoff) Hanson (MxCC), Mike Buccilli (GCC), Jeff Buskey (ECSU), Jodi Calvert (TRCC), Michelle Coach (ACC), Tamika Davis (TxCC), Joe DeFeo (NVCC), Amy Feest (TxCC), David Ferreira (NCCC), Teresa Foley (ACC), Andre Freeman (CCC), Dan Fuller (GCC), Forrest Helvie (NCC), Debbie Herman (MCC), Mary Ellen Jukowski (TRCC), Amy Kacerik (QVCC), Bev King (NCCC), Laura McCarthy (NCCC), Steve McDowell (SO), Chris Paulin (MCC), Phyllis Perry (SO), Ron Picard (NVCC), Oscar Rivera (SO), Francine Rosselli-Navarra (MCC), Christine Ruggiero (MxCC), Sarah Selke (TRCC), Amanda Sweeney (GCC), Sally Terrell (TxCC), Nora Uricchio (MCC), Emily Verdosci (NVCC, student), Heather Vogt (QVCC, student), and Heidi Zenie (TRCC).

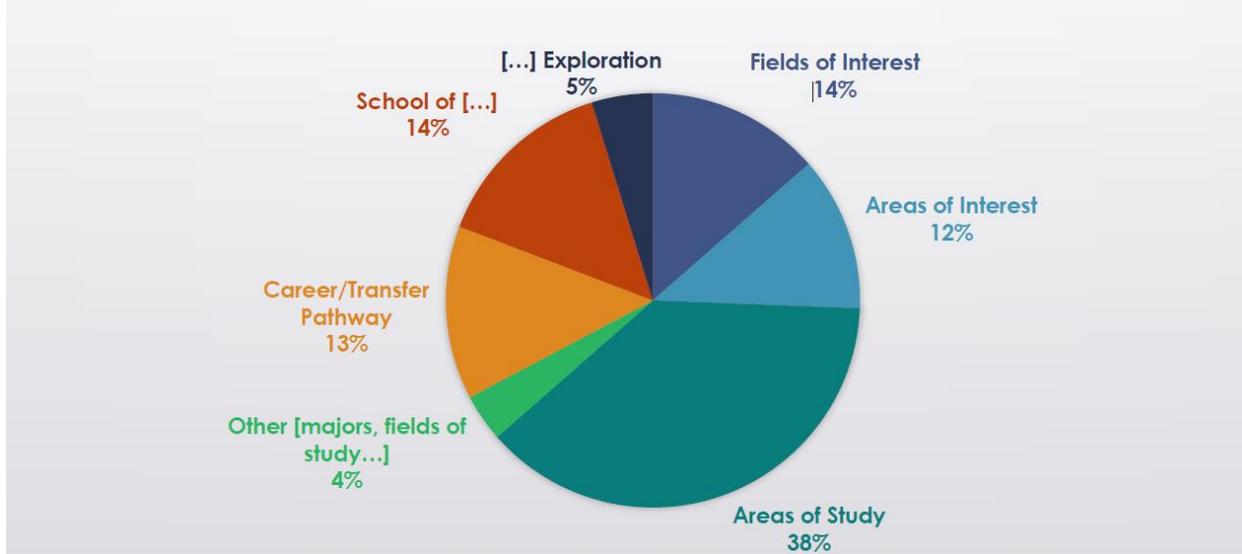
Based on a review of meta-majors implemented at Guided Pathways colleges across the country, the team brainstormed a list of possible meta-majors. Team members brought this list back to their campuses for feedback and the list was refined through discussion of this feedback. The team recommends the following six Areas of Study (note: the icons below are for illustrative purposes only).

Social & Behavioral Sciences, Education, & Public Service	
STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, & Math)	
Manufacturing, Industry, & Technical Careers	
Health Careers	
Humanities & Creative Arts	
Business & Hospitality	

### *From Meta-Majors to Areas of Study.*

Feedback from students, faculty, and staff indicated that the term “meta-major” is not intuitively appealing or understandable. In the Spring of 2018, faculty and staff members from the Guided Pathways Choice Architecture team surveyed students to determine their preferred term for the meta-major construct. The survey included the following alternatives to the term meta-major: (1) areas of study, (2) areas of interest, (3) fields of interest, (4) transfer and career pathways, (5) school of [health, business, science, etc.], (6) [health, business, science, etc.] exploration, and (7) a write-in option. As evident in the figure below, “Areas of Study” emerged as the preferred option.

### Student Survey: Preferred term for “meta-major” (Spring 2018; n=726 students @ 5 CT Community Colleges)



### *Mapping Degree Programs into Areas of Study.*

The placement of specific academic programs within each Area of Study involves both theoretical judgments of “best fit” (e.g., an accounting program intuitively appears to fit best within a “Business” Area of Study whereas a music program appears best suited in the “Humanities and Creative Arts” Area of Study) as well as empirical validation that the proposed programs within an Area of Study have some overlap in course-work and career trajectories. Ideally, programs within a single Area of Study should have a similar first semester sequence of courses that includes at least one introductory level content course within that interest area as well as English and math courses aligned to the Area of Study. Mapping programs to Areas of Study is an iterative process that requires collaboration between program faculty and academic administrators. Facilitation and oversight of the process will initially be provided by Guided Pathways leadership and the Choice Architecture team. Following consolidation, changes to the

Areas of Study or programs within an Area of Study will adhere to governance processes established through the consolidation process.

### *Areas of Study as part of Guided Pathways reforms*

Consistent with the revised CSCU Students First initiative approved by the Board of Regents on June 18, 2018, implementing Areas of Study is just one in a series of Guided Pathways initiatives designed to improve student success and increase student retention and completion. Guided Pathways design principles recommend that students select an academic and career pathway as early as possible. The Areas of Study are just one way in which Guided Pathways reforms will aid students in this early decision making. A newly re-imagined onboarding process offers the students a streamlined approach to entering the community college system. This on-boarding process will support student career exploration and decision making through the use of interest inventories which, upon completion, will suggest meta-majors for further career exploration. In addition, the newly developed College and Career Success course has been intentionally designed to create a space where students can engage in meaningful career exploration and planning. With faculty guidance, the student will create a comprehensive academic plan and will learn how to evaluate their plan and modify as needed. The College and Career Success course is a vehicle that helps students choose a path and provides the tools students need to stay on a path.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

It is the recommendation of the System's Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic and Students Affairs that the Board of Regents give favorable consideration to the establishment of the proposed Areas of Study.

### References

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