

Developing Metamajors: Important Dialog, Significant Process Evaluation, and Iterative Work (By Janet Fulks, Julie Bruno, Jeff Burdick and Carrie Roberson)

Guided Pathways is about changing the work, culture, organization, and evaluation of our institutions by shifting from an institutional perspective to a student perspective. In doing so, we recognize that metamajors, if properly constructed, can provide students clarity in reaching their educational goal and colleges can adjust student support, advising and messaging thereby reconceptualizing the journey from enrollment to educational plan completion.

To ensure success, the following questions can assist colleges in setting goals for its metamajor effort:

- What are the barriers a student faces in choosing an appropriate major? (student knowledge, application process, clarity of the major choices)
- Are majors aligned to the job market, and does the student have easy access to understanding that alignment? Does the student have a way to envision and achieve life goals through this major?
- Do students know what it takes to be successful in that major? (Metacognition, skills acquisition, content knowledge and self-evaluation)
- Is the time to completion and the cost of the major clear? And is the time factor realistic? (Are the scheduling and enrollment management pieces in place to ensure velocity as well as success?).

Clarifying programs maps and organizing pathways by metamajors is only the beginning of work that will be iteratively improved for years to come. Do not fall into the trap of thinking “mission accomplished” just because a sorting exercise has begun the process.

Creating metamajors requires that planning and implementation are based on new conversations. Not only is the effort grounded in the self-reflection of faculty and student support professionals within their individual disciplines and departments, but the foundation is broad: the dialogue and reflection involves virtually everyone on campus including classified professionals, student services and instructional faculty, administrators, and students, and institutional researchers. Although this larger conversation may be difficult, it is also one of the most valuable parts of the guided pathways effort where siloes are broken down, thinking and planning become more complex but more integrated How do you begin this difficult dialog?

Here are three useful observations with questions to spark inquiry:

1. Creating metamajors is not the silver bullet that changes everything. It is a process to discuss how to reorganize your college based upon programs and pathways in contrast to courses or departments. It is an opportunity to break down department silos.

- Are you planning program or metamajor meetings across disciplines and across services? Do not forget the counselors, students support professionals, financial aid, etc.
- Are you establishing clear goals for your metamajor work? Will you, for example, begin with employment opportunity data and work backward? Or will you begin with student interests and work forward?
- Have you considered that some disciplines may be split into different metamajors based on the end such as Biology allied health prerequisites versus Biology STEM majors?

2. Do first things first: Jumping into metamajors without preparation is a recipe for frustration.

- Have you cleaned up your curriculum so “phantom” classes have been removed, so co-requisites and pre-requisites are clearly delineated and included in the program paths?
- Are there additional transfer or CTE degrees that you should consider to serve student needs? How do you know the degrees and certificates, or majors, offered by your institution are serving your current students?
- Determine your existing structure: Do your departments represent pathways? Or content areas? (Example: does the Economics department more aligned with Math or with political or social sciences? Is your Computer Studies area aligned with CTE, business or STEM). How will a department relate to two or more metamajors?
- Review your existing majors. Not all majors represent a transfer major as defined in the content or discipline area. (Examples: A major in English, history, philosophy, or math could actually be earned by a student seeking a single subject credential and the student is actually an education major.)

3. Metamajors are educational pathways, but they change the way the entire college does business. How does the metamajor plan relate to your administrative, support, physical, organizational, and fiscal structures?

- Will the college consider a structural reorganization to support or align with the metamajors? Will there be an effect on college governance, either with

collegial consultation with the academic senate or in participatory governance with all constituency groups?

- Will counselors become case managers, embedded in metamajor areas, or will they take on some other new aspect of this important guidance role?
- Will instructional faculty become more invested in advising on specific majors and careers and if so, how will their advising be integrated with the counseling information on transfer and general education?
- Will there be an effect on job descriptions so that contracts need to be adjusted?
- Will classroom utilization change?
- How will budgetary decisions support programs or metamajors instead of a content area or discipline?
- How will enrollment management change? And how will it be accomplished in this new environment?
- How will scheduling incorporate student education plans?

The development of metamajors is not just a re-sorting of programs, it is much more complex and more rewarding. The effort is iterative: new opportunities will introduce new complexities so that the work remains continuous and dynamic. Even individuals who have been engaged in the effort for years continue to discover new questions and new methods of implementation.

Ultimately, creating metamajors is an effort to break down the historical structures that were built on convenience for the institution (such as separating student services and instruction into separate silos) and refocus on the needs of students.

You may not be able to answer all these considerations now – but do not enter the metamajor discussion without an understanding of the implications. If you have not already reviewed the existing metamajor webinar from ASCCC (<https://asccc.org/file/guided-pathwaysmetawhat-nov-7pptx>) and determined guidelines for that process (<https://asccc.org/file/guidelines-or-principles-developing-metamajors-final-redesigned-handoutdocx-1>) please start there. And then go into this process realizing it is long term, impactful, and not a one and done activity.

Need help? Call on the GPTF team. They wear capes and arrive on your college campus to help you realize your own vision. ☺