

# UCI School of Education

Simplifying Institutional Pathways for Success Lab

## Overview

Cross-enrollment is facilitated enrollment in a course at a four-year college, while simultaneously enrolled full time in a community college, without formal admission to the four-year school and at the same unit price as a community college course. To promote transfer between community colleges and state universities, California enacted legislation in 1994 to allow students enrolled in any of the three systems of public higher education to cross-enroll at a college in another system without formal admission and at no additional cost (Senate Bill 1914). The cross-enrollment policy was intended to make colleges “more learner centered than institution centered,” and to expand opportunities for transfer (CA Senate Bill 1914). By allowing students to cross-enroll, the policy intended to make courses accessible to all students and to incentivize institutions to collaborate and share resources (California Postsecondary Education Commission, 2003).

Despite the apparent benefits, cross-enrollment uptake has been low. With the limited data available, the Commission estimated that 1,222 community college students participated in the program in the five-year period from 1998-2002. To put this number in context, in the 2002 academic year alone, California’s Community College System enrolled more than 2.5 million students (California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office Data Mart). Since the 2003 report, there has been no systematic attempt to collect statewide data on cross-enrollment. Locally available data suggest that the uptake has not changed substantially since statewide data were available. At UC Irvine, for example, about 150 students cross-enrolled during the period from Fall 2013 to Fall 2019, despite average annual enrollments of more than 150,000 students across the four nearest community colleges.<sup>1</sup>

The NSF funded project, *Improving the Transition of Community College Students into University STEM Programs Through Cross-Enrollment*, a project led by researchers at The University of California, Irvine, Saddleback College, Irvine Valley College, and Orange Coast College, explores cross-enrollment use and seeks to promote the uptake of the cross-enrollment pathway through a two-phase process. Phase 1 examined students’ awareness and knowledge of cross-enrollment policies and procedures to develop a better understanding of what students perceive as the benefits and barriers to cross-enrollment using focus group interviews and surveys. Phase 2 entails a two-pronged intervention providing information and financial support aimed at increasing students’ uptake of cross-enrollment. This study will be the first to rigorously examine the effects of cross-enrollment on community college students’ probability of transferring to a four-year college.

## Phase 1 Key Findings

- We found that students have low awareness of cross-enrollment policies and believe there to be several potential financial and academic costs associated with enrollment at the nearby UC Campus.
- Administrative and financial barriers are the two most important considerations when choosing a course.

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<sup>1</sup> Reported enrollment excludes Coastline College as a very high portion of enrollments are fully online due to partnerships with the Department of Defense.

- Student who were unaware of the policy said they would have been interested had they learned of it earlier.
- Students stressed the need to negotiate perceptions of institutional prestige and expectations, how key college personnel viewed their abilities, and internalized self-efficacy.
- Students had mixed beliefs about cross-enrollment would be beneficial or harmful to their academic careers.
- Workplace organizational structures, inconsistent professional development, and competing institutional priorities (i.e., increasing local student enrollment) affect counselors' willingness and ability to promote cross-enrollment.
- Counselors' perceptions of the ideal cross-enrollment student were often not based on the official cross-enrollment eligibility criteria but rather a priori beliefs, values, and biases which influenced which students they would or would not recommend cross-enrollment to.

## Phase 2

Based on the findings from our focus groups and survey we designed a two-pronged intervention to support cross-enrollment between area community colleges and UCI.

- We conducted a pilot intervention in Spring 2022 and a full intervention in Summer and Fall 2022.
- Based on findings from the pilot, in the full intervention we randomly selected 3,000 students at each partner campus, further randomly dividing the sample into treatment and control groups. The treatment group consisted of a total of 4,500 randomly selected students across the three partner colleges (1,500 per school).
- Students who consent to join the intervention are then forwarded to our informational website, a key part of the intervention. In addition to the information provided by the website, students in the treatment group who choose to cross-enroll in a class at UC Irvine in Fall Quarter 2022, or Winter or Spring Quarter 2023, will receive financial support to fully cover fees associated with enrollment and to subsidize textbook and parking costs up to \$400.
- This intervention is ongoing.
- At the start of Fall Quarter (9/23), 17.1% of students in the treatment group had consented to be part of the study. Of these, just under 40 students began the enrollment process by starting an application with the division of continuing education, and 14 students had successfully enrolled (as of 9/26/22; enrollment for the fall quarter ends on 9/30/22).