Title of SEM Project: Entry Through Completion
College/District: Bakersfield College / Kern Community College District
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FAST FACTS
Fall 2019 Headcount: 26,056
Fall 2019 FTES: 8,573.62
Fall 2018 FTEF: 929.7
Location: Bakersfield, CA
Structure: Multi-college district

BACKGROUND & PURPOSE
Bakersfield College’s Entry Through Completion project is characterized by four key components:

1. Through student counseling and guidance, emphasize the importance of transfer-level English and math completion by the end of the first year.
2. Strategically identify bottlenecks that hinder timely student completion (courses and system/policy barriers)
3. Development of a robust late-start course schedule as a strategy to improve student access and completion.
4. Implementation of a predictive analytics and scheduling software to support strategic enrollment management planning.

The impetus for this project was to improve completion rates among students, while simultaneously reducing unit attainment among completers. While the Entry Through Completion project is intentionally designed to benefit all students, it is anticipated that student groups with historically low completion rates are expected to benefit the most from project outcomes.

PROCESS & PROCEDURES
BC’s Entry Through Completion project was spearheaded by ten institutional leaders, including faculty, counselors, and administrators. Each team member volunteered their services to fulfill their responsibilities to this project. Eight team members were assigned to one of four ‘subteams’, each focused on a specific component of the project (i.e., English & Math completion, removing bottlenecks, developing a late-start semester, and implementing a data-analytics system to guide enrollment management efforts). One member from BC’s Office of Institutional Effectiveness was assigned to support each of the four subteams with the fulfillment of research and data requests. And one member was assigned to serve as project lead and provided administrative support to each team member and the project as a whole.

With the exception of purchasing an institutional license and other services from Ad Astra for the implementation of a predictive analytics tool, this project did not rely on any institutional funding, other than professional development funds for team members to attend IEPI-SEM conferences. Three of our four goals were intentionally selected for their ‘high-impact, low-cost’ effects in enrollment management with the intent of implementing and sustaining these best practices on a long-term basis.
The intent of BC’s Entry Through Completion project was to develop four enrollment management strategies, and investigate their impact to determine feasibility for long-term institutional integration and sustainability. By continuing to enhance an institutional ‘culture of completion’ and norming our best practices, we will continue our efforts beyond the IEPI-SEM project to emphasize the importance of students completing transfer-level English and Math courses in their first year; the College will continue to identify and address bottlenecks and barriers that hinder timely student completion; BC will continue to implement a late-start semester; and our plan is to fully implement a predictive analytics tool to inform our course scheduling practices during the 2020-21 academic year.

As a result of our goal to reduce ‘bottlenecks’ for students, team members collaborated with BC’s Office of Institutional Effectiveness to develop program-specific data analyses to quantify and identify course bottlenecks. These analyses provide useful guidance to Deans and Department Chairs to schedule courses in a manner that reduces bottlenecks for students, thereby expediting program completion.

OUTCOMES & EFFECTIVENESS
The expected outcomes of Bakersfield College’s ‘Entry Through Completion’ project are to shorten students’ journey to graduation through achieving the stated goals of our IEPI-SEM project stated above. Bakersfield College will also utilize our Guided Pathways momentum points as additional metrics to operationalize the progress and effectiveness of our IEPI-SEM project, including:

- Increasing the number and percentage of first-time students who attempt 15+ units by the end of the first term
- Increasing the number and percentage of first-time students who complete transfer-level English and math in the first year
- Increasing the number and percentage of first-time students who attempt 30+ units by the end of the first year
- Decreasing excess unit accumulation at time of completion
- Increasing the number and percentage of students completing an Associate’s Degree for Transfer
- Reducing the overall time to completion

Currently, the BC IEPI-SEM team is awaiting to receive end-of-year data from our Office of Institutional Research. These metrics will provide additional information to determine the effectiveness of goals 1, 2 and 3. Early reporting of Fall 2019 related to these indicators above show an increase in students attempting 15 units in their first semester are showing positive growth for seven (7) of BC’s nine (9) guided pathways. The ongoing effectiveness of our efforts will continue to be evaluated through an assessment of graduation rates, decreased time for program completion, and student attainment of BC Guided Pathway momentum points.

BENEFITS
BC embraced the IEPI-SEM project to augment our progress as a guided pathways institution with an emphasis given to enhancing our academic advising and course scheduling practices. As a result of these efforts, Bakersfield College students should anticipate graduating in a timelier manner with a lower accumulation of units. These efforts will also result in saving students money from enrolling in courses
unnecessary for graduation while accelerating their entry into the workforce to begin earning livable wages sooner than previously anticipated. Ultimately, students benefit from our collaborative enrollment management efforts, including efforts from Deans and Faculty Chairs to implement data-driven course scheduling methods, as well as Counseling staff to effectively advise students to complete their respective programs in a timely manner with a lower unit attainment upon completion.

LESSONS LEARNED
While the goals identified in our application initially seemed feasible, the team experienced a period of ineffectiveness at the onset of this project, mainly due to ‘paralysis by analysis.’ Two issues surfaced that resulted in our lack of early progress:

1. The team experienced difficulty in the process of limiting the scope of project. The more we discussed new and excited ideas, the bigger our project grew. We quickly realized the need for self-discipline to focus on just a few ideas to implement. For example, our team recognized that developing a comprehensive late-start schedule would require significantly more time, resources, and broader faculty engagement than our IEPI-SEM project afforded. Instead, we focused on implementing fewer changes within the team’s sphere of control. In essence, we intentionally limited ourselves to piloting, and demonstrating the effectiveness of, an enrollment management ‘best practice’ that can be scaled by the institution at a later date.

2. Related to the first issue, the team quickly understood the need to define and operationalize realistic ‘success metrics’ for each of our four goals. Establish a clear ‘finish line’ provided necessary structure for each subteam to quantifiably assess their progress toward completion.

3. Every member of the team equally contributed to each of the four goals at the start of the project. However, this approach proved to be ineffective...the proverbial ‘too many chefs in the kitchen.’ Our team realized the need for reorganization and defining roles for each member. Members were paired and assigned to lead only one goal. An institutional researcher was assigned to each of the four teams for data provision, and one member served as the project lead to support each of the subteams. This reorganization quickly resulted in positive momentum and vision for all team members.

4. Many team members identified that our project was too large for us to complete in only one year. The provision of additional time was requested on several occasions throughout the project. However, the team also understood that our intent is to continue and scale the goals of our project beyond the official ending date of our IEPI-SEM project.

NEXT STEPS
Our SEM team identified the need to initiate scaling up the work of this project through presenting our findings to various BC leaders, governance committees, our Guided Pathways committee, and the campus community at large.

Beginning in the 2020-21 academic year, the Kern Community College District will implement Ad Astra as a predictive analytics tool to inform course scheduling process. Best practices learned from achieving the goals will be discussed with college leadership, including the Executive Team, the Enrollment Management Committee, Deans, and Department Chairs for institutional scaling.