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Work-in-Progress: Successful Transfer and Retention (STAR) Program at Cal State LA

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This is an abstract submitted for presentation only.

Helping community college students complete their undergraduate education is a national priority and particularly important for students pursuing engineering and engineering technology degrees. Current studies pointed out that only about 25 percent of community college students transfer to a four-year institution, with about one in six completing a bachelor's degree within six years (Jenkins & Fink, 2016). Well-known challenges encountered by pre-transfer students include lack of student support, remedial coursework requirements, navigating the transfer process, and failure to transfer. At four-year institutions, post-transfer challenges often include loss of credits during transfer, post-transfer academic shock, and loss of academic momentum (Xu et al., 2020). For engineering and engineering technology majors, rigid pre-requisite curricular requirements often lead to remarkably high transfer unit losses and increased time to degree due to pre-requisites that have not been met pre-transfer.

Community Colleges in Los Angeles serve many students from low-income families and underserved communities. Therefore, strengthening community college transfer pathways to bachelor's degrees is an important strategy for addressing equity concerns in higher education. In June 2022, with the sponsorship from College Futures Foundation, California State University Los Angeles initiated the Successful Transfer and Retention (STAR) Program in the College of Engineering, Computer Science, and Technology (ECST). The goal of the STAR program is to create new baccalaureate pathways with integrated pre and post-transfer support through peer mentoring to increase transfer student success.

This presentation will introduce the STAR program features and the work-in-progress during the first year with the broader engineering education community. We will show how the STAR program can establish a collaborative support network to enhance student-transfer capacity. In particular, the progress of the following key activities will be presented: 1) development of new guided pathways to prepare transfer students for careers in engineering and engineering technology, with a focus on providing direction for students in career education or technical vocational programs at 2-year schools to obtain BS degrees; 2) development of the STAR peer mentoring program to support pre-transfer student navigation of the pathways; 3) creation of a supportive peer community structure to strengthen the sense of belonging among post-transfer students and to accelerate their degree progress. The presentation will also share what we have learned from our transfer students and community college partners about specific challenges for regional transfer students in the era of the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as ways to cultivate cross-college collaboration.

References:

Jenkins, D., & Fink, J. (2016). Improving baccalaureate transfer outcomes for community college students: New measures of two-and four-year college effectiveness. New York, NY: Columbia University, Teachers College., Community College Research Center, National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, and the Aspen Institute.

Xu, D., Solanki, S., & Harlow, A. (2020). Stepping-Stones or Roadblocks? The Impact of Two-Year College Entry on Baccalaureate Attainment and Labor Market Outcomes. American Enterprise Institute