



Research Brief

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Impact of Counselor Approved vs. Non-Counselor Approved Educational Plans

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Introduction

Santa Monica College (SMC) is committed to ensuring that students are successful in reaching their educational goals by providing effective student support services, including educational planning services. In the summer of 2014, SMC launched a web-based technology tool called MyEdPlan to assist students in the development of their education plans. The award-winning tool allows students to:

- Create and edit as many education plans on their own
- Plan courses for future terms
- Track progress towards education goals
- Submit education plans for review by a counselor directly from the tool

Beginning in the Summer/Fall 2015 semesters, SMC began requiring all incoming students to complete an abbreviated education plan (1 or 2 term) prior to enrollment in their initial semester and a comprehensive education plan after completing 15 or more degree-applicable units or prior to the end of their third semester¹. Students who fulfill their education plan requirements using MyEdPlan have the option to submit their plans for review by a counselor².

¹ AR 4114 Student Success and Support Program, Article 4c (Counseling, Education Plan Development, and Other Educational Planning Services)

² Students are able to fulfill the education plan requirement via methods that do not involve MyEdPlan (for example, completion of the Counseling 20 course)

The purpose of the current study is to examine the impact of counselor approval of education plans created in MyEdPlan on student outcomes. The results of the study will be used by the Counseling Department to inform practices related to the approval of education plans in the MyEdPlan tool.

Research Questions Examined

First-time freshmen in fall semesters 2015 (N = 5020) and 2016 (N = 5000) were included in the study. Only students who reported a credential goal (transfer, associate degree, and/or certificate) were included in the analyses.

The study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. Are students with counselor-approved education plans in MyEdPlan more likely to persist to the subsequent fall semester than students with non-counselor approved education plans?
2. Do students with counselor-approved education plans in MyEdPlan accumulate more degree-applicable units in their first year than students without non-counselor approved education plans?

First-time Students Completing Education Plan Using MyEdPlan

Tables 1 and 2 describe the percentage of first-time students who completed at least one education plan (abbreviated and/or comprehensive) using the MyEdPlan tool by the end of their initial fall semester and by the end of their initial year (by end of summer term following initial fall semester).

A vast majority of first-time freshmen completed at least one education plan using MyEdPlan by the end of their initial term and year. The rate of education plan completion experienced a small decrease for the Fall 2016 freshmen when compared to the Fall 2015 freshmen.

Table 1. Percentage of First-time Freshmen Completing Education Plan by End of Initial Term

Cohort Year	Cohort Size	Completed Ed Plan in MyEdPlan by End of Initial Term	% Completed Ed Plan in MyEdPlan by End of Initial Term	Average # of Plans Created in MyEdPlan
Fall 2015	5,020	4,904	97.7%	2.20
Fall 2016	5,000	4,528	90.6%	2.27
Total	10,020	9,432	94.1%	2.24

Table 2. Percentage of First-time Freshmen Completing Education Plan by End of Initial Year

Cohort Year	Cohort Size	Completed Ed Plan in MyEdPlan by End of Initial Year	% Completed Ed Plan in MyEdPlan by End of Initial Year	Average # of Plans Created in MyEdPlan
Fall 2015	5,020	4,913	97.9%	2.73
Fall 2016	5,000	4,614	92.3%	2.78
Total	10,020	9,527	95.1%	2.75

On average, first-time students completed 2.24 education plans by the end of their initial fall term. By the end of their first year, first-time freshmen completed an average of 2.75 education plans, an increase of 0.51 plans when compared to the average number of plans completed by the end of the initial term.

Education Plans by Counselor Approval Status

Tables 3 and 4 describe the percentage of first-time freshmen with at least one education plan in MyEdPlan by counselor approval status. Students with at least one plan during the time period (before the end of the initial term; before the end of the initial year) that received approved by a counselor were counted as having a counselor-approved plan, even if they had other plans that had not been approved by a counselor.

Table 3. Percentage of First-time Freshmen with Plans (by End of Initial Term) by Counselor Approval Status

Cohort Year	Completed Ed Plan in MyEdPlan by End of Initial Term	At Least One Ed Plan was Counselor Approved	% At Least One Ed Plan was Counselor Approved
Fall 2015	4,904	3,723	75.9%
Fall 2016	4,528	3,836	84.7%
Total	9,432	7,559	80.1%

Table 4. Percentage of First-time Freshmen with Plans (by End of Initial Year) by Counselor Approval Status

Cohort Year	Completed Ed Plan in MyEdPlan by End of Initial Year	At Least One Ed Plan was Counselor Approved	% At Least One Ed Plan was Counselor Approved
Fall 2015	4,913	3,878	78.9%
Fall 2016	4,614	3,953	85.7%
Total	9,527	7,831	82.2%

Over three-quarters of first-time freshmen with education plans in the initial term or initial year had at least one education plan that was approved by a counselor. The rate of counselor-approved education plans was higher for the most recent cohort, Fall 2016, when compared to the Fall 2015 rates.

Table 5 describes the percentage of students with a counselor-approved plan (by end of initial year) by student demographic group (ethnicity/race, gender, part-time/full-time status).

Table 5. Percentage of First-time Freshmen with Plans (by End of Initial Year) by Counselor Approval Status and Demographic Group

Demographic Group		Completed Ed Plan in MyEdPlan by End of Initial Year	At Least One Ed Plan was Counselor Approved	% At Least One Ed Plan was Counselor Approved
Gender	Female	4,830	3,984	82.5%
	Male	4,697	3,847	81.9%
Ethnicity/Race	Asian/PI	1,355	1,170	86.3%
	Black	913	740	81.1%
	Hispanic	4,512	3,756	83.2%
	White	1,998	1,534	76.8%
Unit Load	Full-time (12+)	5,828	5,052	86.7%
	Part-time	3,699	2,779	75.1%

There were no large differences in the counselor approval plan rates between male and female students. White students had the lowest counselor approval plan rates (76.8%) when compared to the other ethnicity/race groups. Students who were enrolled part-time in their initial fall semester (fewer than 12 credit units enrolled) had lower counselor approval plan rates (75.1%) than full-time students (86.7%).

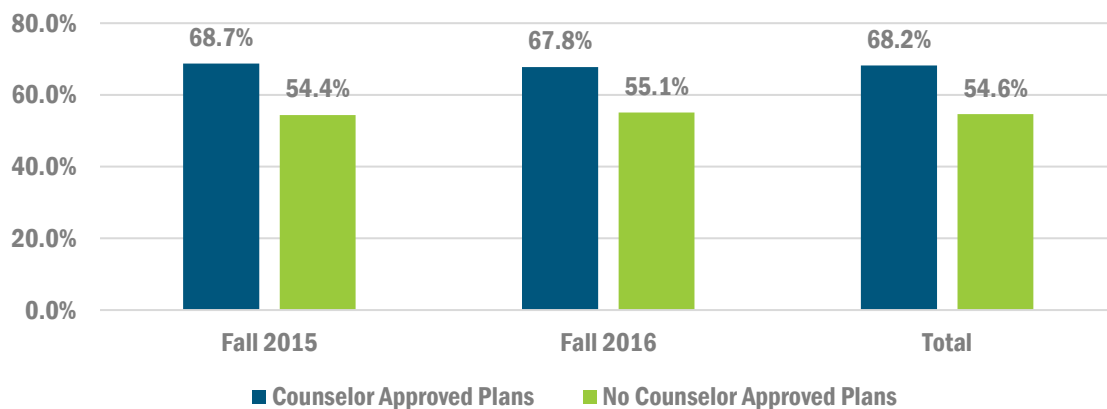
Analyses and Findings

PERSISTENCE

Are students with counselor-approved education plans in MyEdPlan more likely to persist to the subsequent fall semester than students with non-counselor approved education plans?

Overall, 65.5% of students who completed an education plan in MyEdPlan by the end of their initial term persisted and reenrolled in the subsequent fall term. However, students with counselor-approved education plans persisted at higher rates (68.2%) than those without counselor approved plans (54.6%), and the difference is statistically significant³. *Students with counselor-approved education plans in the initial term are 1.79 times more likely to persist than those without counselor-approved plans.*

Figure 6. Fall-to-Fall Persistence Rate by Counselor Approval Status (Ed Plans by End of Initial Term)

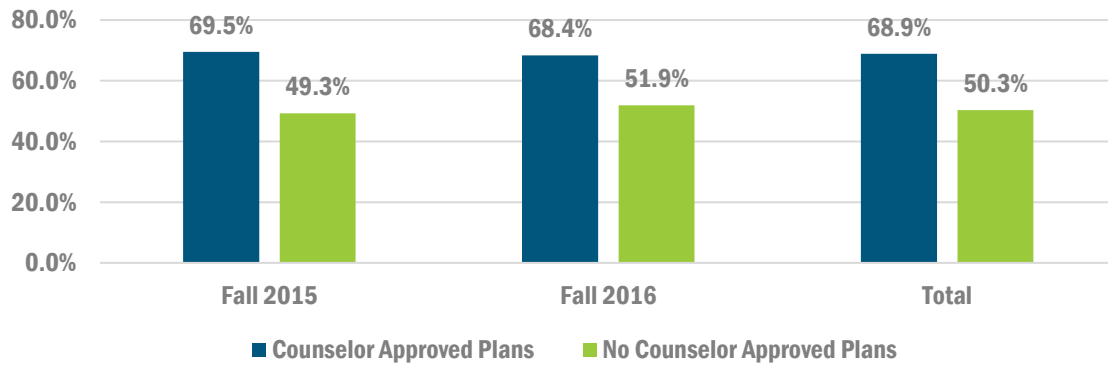


The pattern is similar for persistence rates by counselor approval status for education plans completed by the end of the first year: students with counselor-approved education plans persisted at higher rates (68.9%) than those without (50.3%), and the difference is statistically significant⁴. *Students with counselor-approved education plans in the initial year are 2.20 times more likely to persist than those without counselor-approved plans.*

³ $\chi^2(1, N = 9432) = 123.247, p < .001$

⁴ $\chi^2(1, N = 9527) = 214.274, p < .001$

Figure 7. Fall-to-Fall Persistence Rate by Counselor Approval Status (Ed Plans by End of Initial Year)

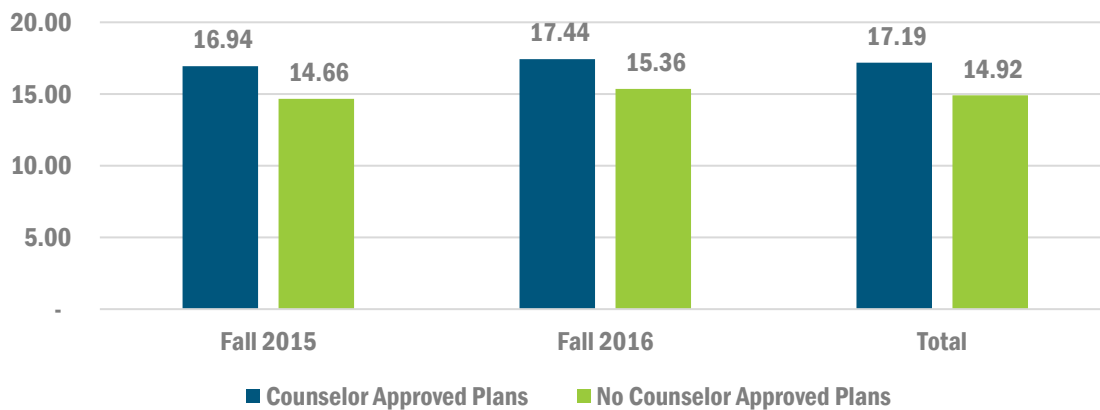


DEGREE APPLICABLE UNITS EARNED

Do students with counselor-approved education plans in MyEdPlan accumulate more degree-applicable units in their initial year than students without non-counselor approved education plans?

On average, students who created counselor-approved education plans in MyEdPlan (initial term) completed 17.19 degree-applicable units (with grade of D or better) by the end of their first year (end of summer following initial fall term), 2.27 more units than those without counselor-approved education plans during the same period ($M = 14.92$). The difference is statistically significant⁵.

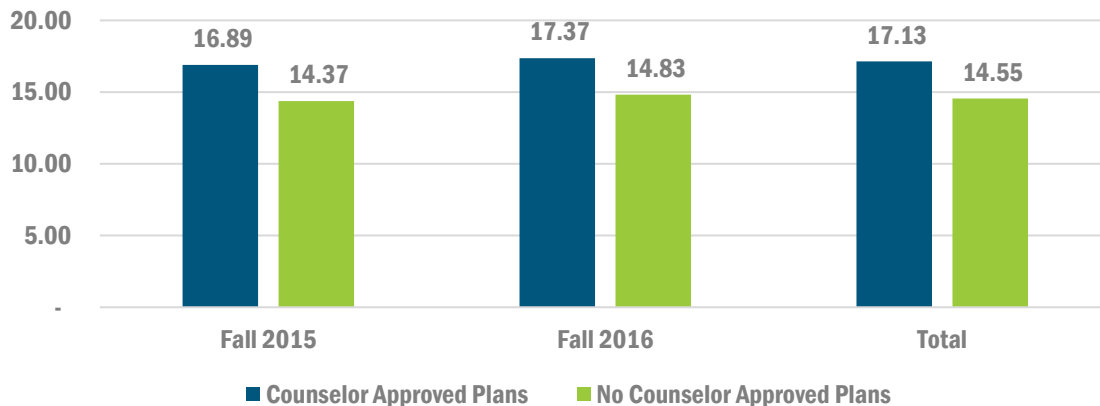
Figure 8. Average Degree-Applicable Units Earned by Counselor Approval Status (Ed Plans by End of Initial Term)



⁵ $t(7962) = 7.464, p < .001$

The pattern is similar when examining average degree-applicable units earned by counselor approval status for education plans completed by the end of the initial year. On average, students with counselor-approved education plans completed 17.13 degree-applicable units by the end of their first year, 2.58 more units than those without counselor-approved plans during the same period ($M = 14.55$)⁶.

Figure 9. Average Degree-Applicable Units Earned by Counselor Approval Status (Ed Plans by End of Initial Year)



Summary

The data from the study reveal the following findings:

- Over nine in ten first-time freshmen (with credential goals) in Fall 2015 and 2016 completed at least one education plan using the MyEdPlan tool by the end of their initial term and/or by the end of their first year.
- On average, first-time freshmen completed 2.24 and 2.75 education plans in MyEdPlan by the end of their initial term and year, respectively.
- Approximately 80% first-time students with an education plan in MyEdPlan had at least one of their plans approved by a counselor.
- Disproportionately fewer White (76.8%) and part-time enrolled students (75.1%) with an education plan in MyEdPlan had at least one plan approved by a counselor when compared to other groups.
- First-time freshmen with counselor-approved plans in MyEdPlan persisted to the subsequent fall semesters at higher rates than those with non-counselor approved plans (68.2% vs. 54.6% for initial term plans; 68.9% vs. 50.3% for initial year plans).

⁶ $t(8036) = 8.052, p < .001$

- In fact, students with counselor-approved plans in the initial term and year are 1.79 and 2.2 times more likely, respectively, to persist than those without counselor-approved plans.
- On average, students with counselor-approved education plans in the initial term and year completed 2.27 and 2.58 more degree-applicable units, respectively, in the first year than those without counselor-approved plans.