WHAT IS A MOMENTUM YEAR?

Evidence-based research confirms that college students are most successful when they:

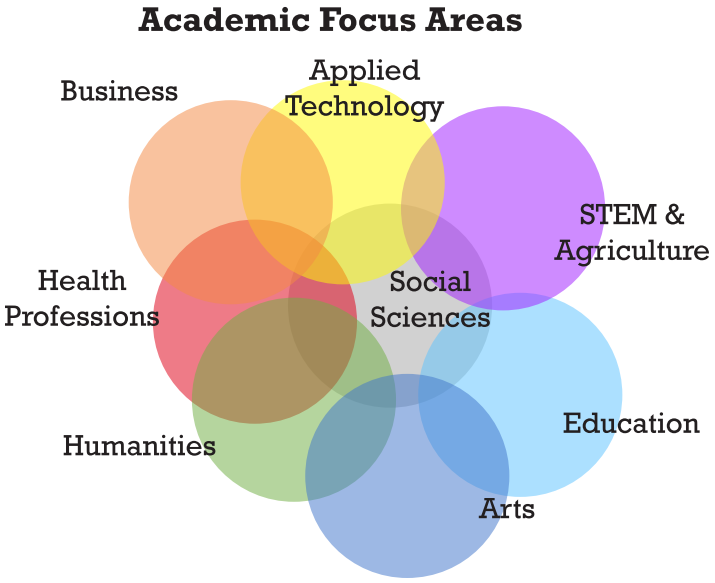
START	ENTER	FOLLOW		
their college careers by **making a purposeful choice** in a focus area or program	with a **productive academic mindset**	**a clearly sequenced program maps** that include:		
		1 core **English** and **math**	**2** **9 credits** in the student's academic focus area	**3** **30 credits** in the first year

Put together, these three elements create a momentum year for students—a starting point that helps students find their path, get on that path, and build velocity in the direction of their goals.

There is considerable logic in this. By helping students make a purposeful choice about what they wish to study, institutions help narrow the thousands of course options to a manageable level and align the work a student undertakes in college with their goals, interests, and expectations. Such an approach does not preclude student exploration—indeed, for many students, the process of discerning the program path will be one of exploration. And for students who are undecided, institutions can assist them to understand how their interests, goals, and dreams intersect with programs of study and future careers.

Academic Focus Areas

Supporting this work are academic focus areas—sometimes referred to as meta-majors—that group programs together so that students groping with uncertainty can pursue course-work from the start that contributes to college completion and also provides exposure to potential majors, helping them refine their post-secondary path. Courses a student pursues in their first year in an academic focus area should count across all programs under the focus area umbrella and offer an informative exposure to the subject field. These courses should be broadly applicable across a wide range of majors within the area, helping students avoid unnecessary credits as they narrow their program choice.



Program Maps

Program maps help structure the choices students must make to reach their academic and personal goals in college, graduating on time and without wasted credits. These maps sequence courses for students by semester, eliminate uncertainty about what courses students should take and when, identify prerequisite and corequisite courses, and highlight key academic and non-academic milestones students should satisfy along the way.

In the first year, program maps should include:

- the completion of core English and the aligned mathematics course (including any required learning support courses),
- nine credit hours (three courses) in a student's selected major or academic focus area,
- and a total of at least 30 credit hours.

While the momentum year addresses the challenges of students making the transition to college, the benefits persist, with students accruing more credits across all student subgroups and preparation levels and demonstrating greater persistence to graduation.[1]

[1]Clive Belfield, Davis Jenkins and Hana Lahr, Momentum: The Academic and Economic Value of a 15-Credit First Semester Course Load for College Students in Tennessee, Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, June 2016.

Effects* of Taking at least 30 Credits in 1st Year on Six-Year Outcomes

TBR Institutions, FTEIC Fall 2008 Cohort

	Community College Students	University Students
Additional credits earned	22	27
Probability of degree attainment	18pp (25% vs. 43%)	19pp (38% vs. 57%)
Tuition and fees per degree	-20%	-20%
Expenditures per degree	-14%	-23%
Tuition and fees avg.	+$1,740	+$4,890

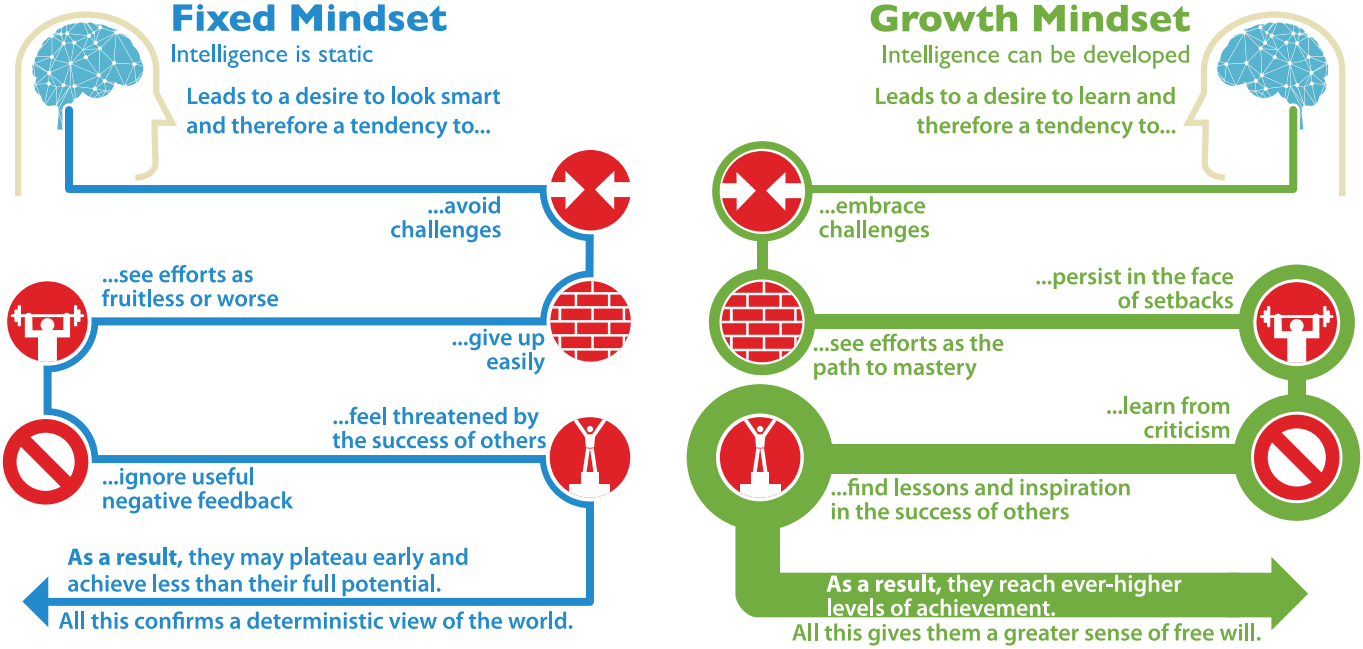
*Adjusted results, controlling for student characteristics

Source: Belfield, Jenkins, Lahr, 2016.

Academic Mindset

Finally, supporting students in college to reach their full potential demands promotion of a growth mindset around academics, supporting students' resilience in the face of setbacks. A mounting body of evidence supports the benefits of small interventions that encourage students to view intelligence as malleable, helping them build resilience in the face of setbacks and avoid becoming demotivated and disengaged with their academic pursuits. [2]

[2]Yeager, D. S., & Dweck, C. S. (2012). Mindsets that promote resilience: When students believe that personal characteristics can be developed. Educational Psychologist, 47, 302–314.



Based on Nigel Holmes' illustration of research by Carol Dweck; brain created by Harryarts - Freepik.com