

Santa Barbara Institutions come together to Change the Educational Paradigm



Focus on Freshman general session.

As students approach graduation and they and their parents contemplate their next step, they have three very important decisions to make. Up until recently, for those going on to college or another post-secondary training opportunity, they usually make the choices in the following order.

First they chose a college to attend. Then once they get on campus they eventually settle on the major they “hopefully” will graduate with. Then, perhaps, if they are lucky enough to have the guidance necessary, before they graduate from an institution of higher learning they chose their career path.

But far too many wander within the educational maze. Without clear direction, it’s no wonder that according to a recent study by Harvard University only 56% of students entering 4-year degrees graduate in six years and only 29% of students entering two-year programs complete in 3-years.

According to a recent report from the California Community College’s Student Success Task Force, chaired by Dr. Peter MacDougall of Santa Barbara, “Research from the Institute for High Education Leadership and Policy, students who enter a program of study (major) in their first year (of college) were twice as likely to complete a certificate, degree or transfer as student who entered a program after their first year.”

For the last five years, Santa Barbara institutions and leaders have been busy turning the outdated college, major, career paradigm around to support this reality. When students first chose a preliminary career path, prior to high school graduation, they are

able to choose the major or program of study that will most expediently get them through school and into the job market. That choice of major will dictate which college or post-secondary training makes the most sense for them.

Building on the success of the Freshman Transition Initiative from George Washington University, in early 2009, the Dual Enrollment Department of Santa Barbara City College approached the Carpinteria and Santa Barbara Unified School Districts with the concept of a new dual enrollment freshman transition course that provided the structure to help students develop a vision and a plan for a productive future. Local educators reasoned that if entering high school students were given an experience with the rigor of college work, in a course that took them through a process that culminated in a quantitative and meaningful 10-year plan, students would have a vision and plan that would take them beyond high school and college and into the workforce.

If, during the process, they discovered a variety of career tracks that matched their aptitudes, values and lifestyle goals, the benefits of a life of their own choosing would keep them motivated to stay the course and graduate, not only from high school but from college or post-secondary training.

Using the award-winning Career Choices curriculum created by social entrepreneur Mindy Bingham of Santa Barbara, they developed a 3-unit Freshman Transition Dual Enrollment course that since its inception has granted college credit to thousands of local students.

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Carpinteria High Schools Erin Hansen and Amy Stackler inviting Focus on Freshmen attendees to a site visit at Carpinteria High School.

Today all the area high schools offer this life-changing course and a 10-year career and education plan is a graduation requirement. Realizing that this planning process needed to continue throughout high school, local schools are piloting new follow-up units integrated into academic courses in the 10th, 11th and 12th grade. Students will continue expanding their career and educational options, learn how to choose and apply to a college or a post-secondary program that is a fit both vocationally and financially, and they'll create a skills-based education plan so they graduate prepared to enter the workforce in a career that matches their education level.

This total school program has become known as the Get Focused...Stay Focused! Initiative. Supported by a variety of Santa Barbara institutions, including Partners in Education, the Santa Barbara Foundation and the University of California

Evaluation Center housed at UCSB, this is another example of how local educators are making educational history. The Get Focused...Stay Focused! program is now being adopted by schools across California and the nation. At the recent Focus on Freshman conference in Los Angeles, more than 400 educators from around the country came together to learn about these pioneering strategies.

The 9th grade Dual Enrollment Freshman Transition course (DEFT) embodies all that has been shown to improve student success: Rigorous standards-based coursework (college level), taught by highly effective teachers, using data-driven decision-making (the online 10-year plan), challenging ALL students to be career and college ready (beginning in the freshman year so students can spend the rest of high school preparing for their transition into adulthood).

Studies show, time and again, that guidance, whether it takes place in the home or in school is key to student success. Yet, for the most part, the high student/counselor ratio in high schools and colleges, doesn't allow for much in-depth support.

As students head back to school, you'll want to become part of this effort to support their initial forays into career and life planning. You can do this in a variety of ways. You can volunteer through Partners in Education to speak to high school classes about your career. Start discussions at home about career opportunities. Offer to have a student shadow you at work for a day. And because the 10-year Plan is a high school graduation requirement, you'll want to ask your children and those young adults you employ to see a copy of this informative document.

For more information, visit: www.getfocusedstayfocused.org

A promotional poster for a dinosaur show at the Santa Barbara Zoo. The background is a photograph of a large blue and brown dinosaur with its mouth open, showing sharp teeth and a purple tongue. Two young boys are in the foreground: one on the left wearing a green shirt and glasses, and one on the right wearing a blue shirt. They are holding a large metal tray filled with dinosaur-shaped nuggets. The text "CHOMP! CHOMP!" is written in large, bold, black letters across the top, with "Dinosaurs are Picky Eaters" underneath. On the left side, there is a yellow vertical banner with a brown dinosaur head silhouette and the text "New live show at the Zoo, starring Duncan and Lily!". Below that, it says "The Zoo's dinosaurs are sponsored by the Duncan Family." At the bottom left is the Santa Barbara Zoo logo, which features a giraffe and a palm tree. At the bottom center, the contact information is listed: "(805) 962-5339 • Just off Cabrillo Blvd. at East Beach • sbzoo.org". A small vertical credit "Tony Luna" is visible on the left side of the photo.