

Insights from the Guided Pathways 2.0 Institute:
“Connecting Students to Programs of Study”
 April 27–29, 2022

INSTITUTE OBJECTIVES:

- Gain tools and insights to shift campus culture to make programmatic onboarding an institution-wide responsibility for administrators, counselors, student services staff, faculty, student ambassadors and more.
- Understand how to implement equitable program onboarding by meeting students where they are early on to help them explore, connect, plan and gain momentum in a field of interest.
- Consider how to equitably onboard all types of students to ensure enrollment in high-opportunity programs reflects California’s diversity.
- Explore strategies to help students address college costs and basic needs in their program selection and entry experience.

Keywords: onboarding, pathways, data, high-opportunity, employers, living wages, racial equity, outcomes, intake surveys



Connecting Students to Their Program of Study and the Greater Campus Community

Each interaction students have on campus is an opportunity to make them feel valued and assured that they have the support and resources to succeed. As students pursue increasingly diverse pathways to and through their education experience, a single point of orientation is not sufficient. Guided by the system’s North Star, the Vision for Success and the framework of Guided Pathways, California Community Colleges can remove barriers and add signposts to the students’ experience in a way that increases their agency to learn and succeed in their lives and careers. That includes attending to students’ support networks, financial stability, and physical and mental health resources alongside their learning journey while supporting their personal and professional aspirations and outside responsibilities.

Colleges doing this well are transitioning from a one-time orientation approach to a **personalized, ongoing approach to connect students to their programs of study and greater campus community.** Everyone on campus has an important role to play in this work.

TO SUPPORT INDIVIDUAL EFFORTS, THIS BRIEF OFFERS ACTION-ORIENTED INSIGHTS AND RESOURCES FOR SPECIFIC STAFF ACROSS THE FOLLOWING THREE AREAS OF FOCUS:

- Help students explore programs, connect to pathways, get inspired, plan and gain momentum toward success.
- Consider students' needs related to health, financial security and social connection as part of their program selection and entry experience.
- Activate the whole campus community to help equitably onboard all types of students into high-opportunity programs.

“College students are rarely going to college to aimlessly take classes and learn for fun; they are almost always trying to earn a degree or certificate that can get them more money and, by extension, a higher quality of life. All the Guided Pathways work I do reflects this.

—Haille Lopez-McDonald

Student Ambassador at East Los Angeles College

What colleges can do

I. Help students build educational plans that incorporate financial and career resources

Audience: Counseling faculty, student support staff

Students enter college with big dreams and goals. Those with an educational plan experience more sustained motivation, cope better in the face of challenges and have higher completion rates.¹ Counselors can build students' confidence and motivation in their first term by exploring academic interests, career plans and the type of support they will need to achieve their goals.² Using that information, counselors can help students identify high-opportunity program paths that align with their interests and goals.

¹ [Research Evidence on Community College Ask-Connect-Inspire-Plan Onboarding Practices,” Community College Research Center](#). This brief defines an educational plan as a full program plan by the end of a student's first term, aligned with their career and academic interests, tailored to each student based on their timeline to completion, electives of interest, and whether they need certain courses to fulfill transfer requirements.

² Ibid

By helping students develop an **educational plan**, counselors can make clear to students the course sequences and timeline to achieve their education goals. In addition, counselors can illuminate how students' pathway choices relate to career opportunities or ask whether the career they envision will pay enough to sustain their families and build prosperity.

In addition, counselors have an opportunity to ensure students are set on the road to financial stability in their education experience. Students benefit when counselors and all staff who work directly with students can point them to **crucial financial resources** (i.e., financial aid, grants/scholarships and public benefits) that cover the full cost of attendance including tuition, books, campus fees and costs related to basic needs (e.g., food, housing, health, technology, child care and legal support). With that support, counselors and other staff can significantly reduce barriers to access, persistence and completion.³

Finally, **academic and career planning information** is critical for first-generation students and other historically excluded groups who may need help accessing social networks to explore opportunities that align with their strengths and interests. For example, students may not know they need an advanced degree in their field to work in their area (e.g., a psychology degree does not equate to being a psychologist). Making students aware of educational and career planning resources early on and often is critical.

ACTIONS COLLEGES CAN TAKE, PARTICULARLY INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCHERS, ADMINISTRATORS, AND FACULTY:

- Ask open-ended questions that foster curiosity and exploration about students' interests and their goals. Rather than ask, "What's your major?" ask "What excites you about your major and going to college?"; "What are your educational and career goals?"; "What do you like to learn about and how do you like to learn?"; "What are your obligations outside of school?"
- Starting in students' first term, help them develop an education plan through their end goal, including funding options, within their first year. Utilizing technology, such as [Starfish](#), could help counselors create a program path and analyze data to make changes in students' program plans.
- Analyze engagement in onboarding activities by students' race, gender, income, age and enrollment to understand which students are participating and where there are opportunities to close equity gaps.

Action example:

San Jacinto College uses Degree Works tools to help students build and maintain their educational path. For example, a student can indicate to a counselor they cannot go to school full time but eventually want to transfer to University of Houston. The Degree Works tools map out the student's journey, and the student can log in to review their educational path from San Jacinto College to the University of Houston each step of the way.

³ [NCII "Student Financial Stability" resources](#)

- Develop and implement intake surveys to collect information on students' program plans, financial security and basic needs. Monitor student progress, and identify targeted outreach strategies. In addition, colleges can use this information to optimize course offerings to ensure students stay on track with their goals.
- Invest in professional development support for counselors and advisors to hold holistic conversations on academic and career planning, student financial security and nonacademic supports (e.g., mental health counseling, child care and food pantries).
- Appoint counselors specializing in specific student populations, such as a bridge/transition support counselor for adult learners or veterans and a credit for a prior learning specialist.
- Take steps to ensure outreach to local high schools shares information about dual enrollment opportunities for students of color, first-generation students and students from families with low incomes. Consider engaging parents and caregivers as partners in developing dual enrollment students' educational plans.

Action example:

Mt. San Antonio College has developed a [basic needs intake form](#). Crafton Hills College has also developed a [basic needs referral form](#).

RESOURCES⁴:

- [“Research Evidence on Community College Ask-Connect-Inspire-Plan Onboarding Practices,” Community College Research Center](#)
- [“A Foot in the Door: Growth in Participation and Equity in Dual Enrollment in California,” UC Davis Wheelhouse](#)
- [“Credit for Prior Learning Policy Implementation Toolkit,” California Community Colleges](#)
- [“Show Me the Way: The Power of Advising in Community Colleges,” Center for Community College Student Engagement](#)
- Genesee Community College’s “Hi-Five” Questionnaire on slide 18 and 19 of [Setting the Context with the A-C-I-P Framework presentation](#) (log into the Vision Resource Center to see this resource in the Guided Pathways community)
- California Community Colleges [“Basic Needs Center Toolkit”](#) June 2022
- [National Career Development Facilitator training](#)
- [Degree Works tool](#)

⁴ The resources listed in this document are a combination of those introduced by plenary session speakers, concurrent session speakers, and concurrent session participants. They are provided for exploration and learning and are not specifically endorsed by the authors.

RELATED PRESENTATIONS TO VIEW⁵:

- [Setting the Context With the A-C-I-P Framework](#)
- [Ask-Connect-Inspire-Plan in Practice in California](#)
- [Making Student Financial Stability a College Priority in Onboarding & Beyond](#)

Please log into the [Vision Resource Center](#) before clicking presentation links.

II. Spark inspiration in the classroom

Audience: Instructional faculty

Sparking students' interest inside the classroom early in college can promote motivation and persistence and can also ensure that students feel they belong in their intended education path and career. Faculty have an opportunity to **“light the fire” for students’ learning in their first semester**. “Light the fire” courses, like [this one](#) linked in the resources below, build on students’ strengths and knowledge, align with coursework along their program path, provide experiential learning and promote confidence that they can succeed even if setbacks occur along their educational journey. Done well, courses can help dismantle historical patterns of academic and occupation exclusion by revealing new opportunities and paths (see [Institute 1 Brief: Creating Guided Pathways to Prosperity and Equity](#)).

ACTIONS COLLEGES CAN TAKE:

- Ask open-ended questions that foster curiosity and exploration about students' interests and goals. Connect beyond academics, recognize the complexity of all students' lives, and encourage growth mindsets. Faculty and staff can share both bright spots and failures from their lives so students know they can succeed despite setbacks, improve with practice, and understand that the skills and knowledge they need to succeed are learned.



⁵ All institute recordings and materials are available in the Guided Pathways community of the Vision Resource Center.

- Design light the fire courses for each program path based on primary research and information from students, and make sure students take at least one course in their first term with hands-on experience that is relevant to them.
- Help students see themselves in a satisfying career through experiential learning.
- Consider offering tailored **professional development** for instructional faculty to ensure they can direct students to supports (academic, financial, personal) that will help students pursue their passion.

RESOURCES:

- [“Rethinking Entry to College” With Light the Fire for Learning Course](#)
- [Student Experiences in a Light the Fire Course Design](#)
- [Los Angeles Trade and Technical College’s Pathways to Academic, Career and Transfer Success \(PACTS\)](#)
- [Institute 1 Brief: “Creating Guided Pathways to Prosperity and Equity”](#)
(log into the Vision Resource Center to see this resource in the Guided Pathways community)

RELATED PRESENTATIONS TO VIEW:

- [Setting the Context With the A-C-I-P Framework](#)
- [Ask-Connect-Inspire-Plan in Practice in California](#)
- [Building Structures to Connect Students to Programs and Careers — A Whole College Responsibility](#)

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Action example:

Modesto College offers a career exploration course for students to learn about themselves, using different assessments such as “True Colors” and Myers-Briggs, and students then write an article about their passion.

Action example:

At San Jacinto College in Texas, nursing students get hands-on learning experience. Some students realize nursing may not be the career for them, and then staff help steer them onto a path that is more well-suited to their interests.



III. Create networks of support

Audience: Administrators, student support staff, counseling and instructional faculty

Among the most important facets to ensuring students feel confident they can succeed is to connect them to **supportive social networks** that make campuses welcoming and inclusive, provide inspiration and support students along their educational journeys. Colleges, especially college leadership, can foster these connections in the campus community by shifting structures to make it a responsibility of the whole campus to foster **interactions with students that are more transformational than transactional**.

Access to a supportive network can help students sustain motivation when balancing competing demands and know whom to go to when challenges arise. These networks are also important bridges to jobs needed throughout the students' journey.

ACTIONS COLLEGES CAN TAKE, PARTICULARLY CLASSIFIED

STAFF AND FACULTY:

- Create “metamajor interest centers.” Offer tours based on metamajors at students’ own community college so they know where their classes will be and where they can receive support throughout their journey such as a tutoring center. As an example, Diablo Valley College has created metamajor interest centers in its student centers, where it offers workshops and networking opportunities with professionals in students’ fields of interest.
- Create space for career services staff to join advisory boards for instructional areas to create connections between the classroom and local industry.
- Build connections with local universities to inform curriculum planning and development. Share university application deadlines with students, and offer sponsored tours to nearby universities.
- Do asset mapping to identify the array of cultural programs, basic needs programs and institutional programs/funding that can support students’ academic and nonacademic needs. Train faculty, staff and student ambassadors to identify students who may need financial and/or basic needs support, and direct them to supports and services.
- Build community and state partnerships to connect students to resources outside the campus (e.g., CalFresh, MediCal and transportation vouchers)
- Develop peer networks by designing program-specific student ambassador models in which students share with other students information on the program and resources for basic needs.

Action example:

Cerritos College created the “[Falcon’s Nest](#),” a fully staffed department with a social worker, program facilitator, dean, CalFresh case manager and resources to provide high-touch services to students (e.g., basic needs, mental and physical health, financial literacy resources and family support). Students can also receive free food and clothing with respect and dignity.

- Utilize regional economic data to understand whether there are other jobs high in demand that the college could help offer programs to incentivize students to a program that is high demand and leads to a high wage.
- Investigate and disaggregate student data through an equity lens to identify whether specific groups of students (students of color, first-generation students, dual-enrollment students, etc.) are clustering into particular learning paths that lead to less lucrative careers.

RESOURCES:

- [East Los Angeles College Student Ambassador Program](#)
- [East Los Angeles College “Leveraging Orientation and Student Success Courses to Connect Students to Programs and Careers” handout](#)
- [East Los Angeles College Career and Academic Planning](#)
- [Diablo Valley College 7 New Interest Centers](#)

RELATED PRESENTATIONS TO VIEW:

- [Aligning Academic Affairs, Student Affairs and Workforce within CCCC](#)
- [Beyond Equity at Community Colleges: Bringing Theory Into Practice for Justice and Liberation](#)
- [Making Student Financial Stability a College Priority in Onboarding & Beyond](#)
- [Setting the Context With the A-C-I-P Framework](#)
- [Building Structures to Connect Students to Programs and Careers — A Whole College Responsibility](#)

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Conclusion

At our best, California community colleges are bastions of opportunity. To better deliver on this promise in more equitable ways, colleges have an opportunity to reimagine the onboarding experience from a one-time orientation model to a personalized, ongoing approach throughout students' journeys. Evidence-based strategies include asking students about their interests, motivations and needs; connecting them to resources within and outside the college to increase financial stability and health; enrolling them early in courses that light their fire and spark inspiration; and helping them plan a path to meaningful careers and family-sustaining wages. With those actions, Guided Pathways is the vehicle for colleges to realize the *Vision for Success* and transform student experiences by honoring their needs, intersectional identities and unique paths to economic mobility.

