

Insights from the Guided Pathways 2.0 Institute:

“Guided Pathways to what? For whom?”

November 17–19, 2021

INSTITUTE OBJECTIVES:

- ◆ Outline equity-focused practices that help students explore, choose, plan, and complete high-opportunity programs of study
- ◆ Understand the importance of data in identifying equitable representation (by race, income, gender, and age) among enrollees and completers of high-opportunity programs
- ◆ Consider ways to ensure that community college credentials lead to family-supporting careers or transfer to baccalaureate programs.

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



Creating Guided Pathways to Prosperity and Equity

All college students want well-paying jobs once they graduate. However, deep inequities persist in terms of which students access and pursue high-opportunity programs of study – those that enable students to secure a family-supporting career directly after completion or transfer with junior standing in a major field of interest. White students continue to have more access to a wider range of programs, from STEM to Arts, Social Sciences to Humanities, Health to Business. In contrast, students of color are under-represented in many of the same high-opportunity pathways. This has clear implications for post-graduate success and reinforces racial stereotypes of which students belong in which program. There are many factors, both systemic and social, that contribute to these

outcomes, and they all shape students’ academic choices and opportunities for long-term success. These opportunity disparities make it difficult for minoritized and historically excluded students to receive support needed to successfully navigate the education journey they may want. This perpetuates and reinforces patterns of occupational exclusion and economic inequity for students of color. Guided Pathways offers colleges an opportunity to address these challenges by building an “infrastructure of opportunity” through student-centered and equity-focused redesign. Colleges have an opportunity to equitably support students’ exploration and pursuit of high-opportunity pathways (both short-term and long-term) that lead to fruitful careers and living wages.

TO ACHIEVE THE OBJECTIVES OF THIS INSTITUTE, THE PRESENTATIONS WERE DESIGNED TO EXPLORE:

- ◆ Equity-focused practices that help students explore and choose high-opportunity programs of study
- ◆ How data can be used to understand which programs of study may be underutilized by student type
- ◆ How to ensure that community college credentials lead to family-supporting careers or transfer to baccalaureate programs

“Colleges should understand the community context of who’s getting employed, who is not getting employed, who is underemployed. What are the wage levels?...When we think of this conversation about equity, it’s important that we not just evaluate it based on inputs. It’s really students’ progression beyond our door, beyond our seats. And what is the impact that their time with us has on their quality of life.

—Dr. Falecia D. Williams

in the presentation “Equity as the Why for Guided Pathways at Scale”

What colleges can do

I. Dig into the data to understand student enrollment patterns

To become more equitable, student-centered institutions, colleges must examine enrollment, retention, and completion patterns by race, gender, income, age, and other identities. Faculty should be supported to collect and analyze **course-specific data** to understand how their students are learning

and progressing. Data will help facilitate conversations about whether students are equitably represented in high-opportunity programs and what supports students may need to achieve their academic and professional goals.

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

- ◆ Establish processes to regularly review enrollment, persistence and completion patterns by race, gender, income, and age to understand which programs (both short-term and long-term) students are entering.

- ◆ Establish an institution-wide culture of data collection that encourages ownership by faculty members. Normalize the examination of individual and program-level data. Incorporate data collection into staff evaluation and hiring practices.
- ◆ Invest in long-term, dedicated professional development for staff on using data to understand racial equity gaps. Use these opportunities to create conversations on campus by having participants share learnings with their peers.
- ◆ Increase transparency by sharing data collected across the institution and with the wider community. Seek out partners in the community to engage in the process and help hold the institution accountable.
- ◆ Review local labor market data to ensure alignment between metamajors pathways offered and opportunities in the workforce.

RESOURCES¹:

- ◆ [Critical Race Theory in Education: A Scholar's Journey, Gloria Ladson Billings](#)
- ◆ [The Meritocracy Myth, Stephen J. McNamee](#)
- ◆ [Santa Monica College's faculty-led data coaching program](#) with an equity emphasis, led by Hannah Lawler (IR) and the director of their center for teaching and learning
- ◆ [Bakersfield College's data coaching program](#) embedded in metamajors/success teams

RELATED PRESENTATIONS TO VIEW²:

- ◆ Evolution of Guided Pathways
- ◆ Equity as the Why for Guided Pathways at Scale
- ◆ The Imagine-Connect-Practice Framework

II. Map metamajor pathways to jobs with living wages

To give students the best possible shot at success, colleges should begin at the end: Where do current pathways lead students? Mapping is essential for colleges to understand whether and how their programs are leading students to occupations that offer livable starting salaries and opportunities for career growth.

¹ 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.

² All institute recordings and materials are available in the Guided Pathways community of the Vision Resource Center.

Program maps that incorporate career data give colleges the information they need to identify successful programs to invest in and grow, or programs that may need to be altered or discontinued if they are not guiding students to well-paying jobs. Program maps that incorporate career data also give students the information they need to make choices that will lead to prosperity and equity.

ACTIONS COLLEGES CAN TAKE:

- ◆ Collect data on the starting salaries and career trajectories for occupations in your local community. Create program maps that extend beyond the institution to understand how programs are guiding students to specific jobs and the wages they can expect to earn as they progress in their careers. Examine this data through a racial equity lens to understand how students of color are impacted.
- ◆ Lead difficult conversations about programs that do not lead to a living wage and the implications for equity and economic upward mobility. Update standards for program review to incorporate the expectation that programs should provide a guided pathway to a livable wage and opportunities for career growth.
- ◆ Encourage students to pursue credentials and complete programs that lead to high-paying occupations with growth potential in your local area.

RESOURCES:

- ◆ [WestEd's Opportunity Map Builder](#)
- ◆ [“Guided Pathways: Designing Metamajors to Reduce Equity Gaps,” WestEd](#)
- ◆ [“Unpacking Program Enrollments and Completions With Equity in Mind,” Community College Research Center](#)
- ◆ [SalarySurfer](#)
- ◆ Centers of Excellence (by region, for example see San Diego-Imperial's [here](#))

RELATED PRESENTATIONS TO VIEW:

- ◆ Evolution of Guided Pathways
- ◆ Equity as the Why for Guided Pathways at Scale



III. Help students explore, set them on a path, and equip them to succeed

Guiding students onto a pathway to success means going beyond traditional onboarding and asking deeper questions to understand their interests and aspirations from the outset.

Colleges can use **intake surveys** to gather this data, which will help students explore their options, inform program-level onboarding and create a pathway for each student—tailored to the individual with equity in mind. Students report that they want to see a clear path to their end goals, as well as opportunities to connect with faculty and peers in their program of study.

The next step is to provide hands-on, inspiring learning opportunities for all students that can ignite their interest and deepen their commitment to completing their education and pursuing a career. Colleges should build **work-based learning** (WBL) into every program of study to give students a window to the future and equip them with the specific, real-world skills they need to succeed in their chosen field. This can range from embedding WBL in classroom instruction to paid internships and apprenticeships, but they must be designed and evaluated with an equity lens to address barriers that have traditionally excluded students of color from these kinds of opportunities.

ACTIONS COLLEGES CAN TAKE, PARTICULARLY CLASSIFIED STAFF AND FACULTY:

- ◆ Use intake surveys to understand students' interests, aspirations, and challenges, and tailor full plans (from entry to completion) for each student, with an equity lens for racially diverse students.
- ◆ Design onboarding and orientation processes that are specific to metamajors, using faculty liaisons and peer mentors to help establish connections and a sense of belonging for new students.
- ◆ Create opportunities for hands-on experience and real world skill-building in every program through work-based learning in and outside the classroom. Build these opportunities with equity in mind, and use feedback loops and data to ensure they are effective and accessible to all students.

RESOURCES:

- ◆ [“Ask-Connect-Inspire-Plan: How to Reimagine Onboarding into a Program of Study,” Hana Lahr and Davis Jenkins, Community College Research Center](#)
- ◆ [“The Workforce Playbook: A Community College Guide to Delivering Excellent Career and Technical Education,” Aspen Institute](#)
- ◆ [California Community Colleges MyPath Career Coach](#)
- ◆ [Badgr Pro credentialing and pathway platform – available on Canvas and EMSI](#)

RELATED PRESENTATIONS TO VIEW:

- ◆ Overview of the Ask-Connect-Inspire-Plan Framework for Rethinking Student Onboarding
- ◆ Highlighting Aspen’s Work-Based Learning Research

IV. Foster equitable partnerships with industry

Partnerships between community colleges and employers can be a win-win: **creating a racially diverse and skilled talent pipeline** for industry and opening career opportunities that pay a living wage for students of color. These partnerships should serve as an infrastructure of opportunity, centered on equity and bolstered by trust on both sides.

A **feedback loop between colleges and employers** enables each partner to keep improving their local workforce development pipeline together. With a strong partnership in place, companies can vouch for local talent and bring other companies in to create a more vibrant local economy and alumni can talk to students about their experiences with companies—driving career exploration, equitable opportunities, and economic mobility for more students of color.

ACTIONS COLLEGES CAN TAKE, PARTICULARLY ADMINISTRATORS AND FACULTY:

- ◆ Have honest talks with employers to understand workforce requirements and how they view your institution. Design curricula and pathways that equip students with the technical skills to get those jobs and prepare them to fully participate and learn on the job. If companies are not offering internships or jobs to students with Associate’s Degrees, ask them “Why not?”
- ◆ Start with equity and share the story of disaggregated equity data with your partners. Look at graduation rates, what graduates earn, the kinds of jobs they get, and if that is consistent with what students attended college to achieve. Ask that businesses look at their own data and make sure they are committed to equity.
- ◆ Focus on long-term relationships with employers dedicated to offering a living wage and promotion-ready jobs as a minimum starting point. Ensure there is advancement and training that leads to greater wages and more career opportunities. Look at employers in your area and connect employers to pathways.
- ◆ Create a feedback loop. For partners, provide a single point of contact who can hand off a database to faculty, staff, and administrators. For colleges, alumni can serve as mentors to students as well as share how they felt prepared for a job and how they did not. Colleges can act similarly to a human resources consultant, sharing insights with employers about how to support talent, culture, and effective teams.

- ◆ Foster a regionalized approach to pathways implementation – community college as the intermediary that brings together K-12, four-year universities, employers, workforce agencies, and community-based organizations.

RESOURCES:

- ◆ [WestEd's Opportunity Map Builder](#)
- ◆ [EMSI's Skillibi](#)

RELATED PRESENTATIONS TO VIEW:

- ◆ Equity as the Why for Guided Pathways at Scale
- ◆ Employer Connections and Feedback Loops to College Programs
- ◆ So What Are You Building Anyway?

Conclusion

California community colleges play an integral role in equitably supporting students' exploration and pursuit of high-opportunity pathways that lead to fruitful careers and living wages. This requires diligence in examining: what are your pathways leading to, and who is benefitting from them? By regularly examining data through an equity lens, mapping high-opportunity programs, onboarding and supporting students to succeed, and fostering partnership with industry, California community colleges can better prioritize equity in Guided Pathways work and become the best possible version of our system for future generations of students.

