

# GUIDED PATHWAYS TO STUDENT SUCCESS

*“Most American college students do not graduate on time — costing them, their parents, and taxpayers billions. Using Guided Pathways to Student Success, students make ‘packaged deal’ choices of majors, not random courses. They are then required to proceed on highly structured degree maps, guaranteed for on-time completion.” — Complete College America*

## Direct routes for students

Congratulations! You're going to college! What do you plan to study? That's the question many new college students dread.



Most students know they are good at certain things, like writing, math, or working with their hands. They might even know what type of work they want to pursue — high-tech, business or health care, for example.

Dive a little deeper and the focus gets fuzzy because, within each of those broad areas, there are dozens of career options that require different levels of education.

A student interested in health care could earn a one-year certificate and become a pharmacy technician, or she could earn a two-year or four-year degree and become a nurse. The student might also go to medical school to become a doctor.

Community and technical colleges offer virtually all levels of certificates and degrees — including degrees that transfer to universities.

It's no wonder so many students become overwhelmed or take unnecessary credits as they try to decide what to study.

The Guided Pathways approach untangles the journey. Students are less likely to meander or drop out, and are more likely to graduate on time and with the skills employers need.

## What is Guided Pathways?

Guided Pathways is a research-based approach that simplifies choices for students. Courses are grouped together to form clear paths through college and into careers, whether students enter those careers directly after graduation or transfer to a university for more study in their chosen fields.

Students get intensive, targeted advising to choose their paths, stay on those paths, learn what they need to know, and graduate.

A growing number of community and technical colleges across the nation are launching guided pathways. Results from colleges in Florida and New York show that the sooner students enter a program of study, the more likely they are to graduate.<sup>1</sup>

## Guided Pathways in Washington

The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges is promoting guided pathways across the entire college system to increase completion rates.

Six pilot colleges are leading the way with funding from College Spark Washington or the national American Association of Community Colleges Pathways Institute: Everett, Peninsula, Pierce, Skagit Valley, South Puget Sound, and South Seattle. In 2018, College Spark Washington will choose five more colleges for funding.

## Creating simple, clear paths

Traditionally, college students navigate a maze of courses described in a thick course catalog or dense web pages. Guided Pathways takes the opposite approach: Courses are organized into clear routes for students.

Colleges start by sorting professional-technical and transfer programs into broad interest areas or “pathways.” Example pathways:

- Business
- Healthcare & Wellness
- Arts, Humanities & Communications
- Education
- Social Behavioral Science & Public Service
- STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math)
- Computer & Information Technology

## Giving students early signals

Students enter a pathway right away and are surrounded by instructors, advisors and support staff with expertise in the various careers within those paths.

These experts work together to design and sequence courses in a way that introduces students to critical concepts and requirements right away. This way, students can discover what they like or don’t like early in their course sequences, rather than changing their minds late and paying for extra classes.

A student who discovers he dislikes math, for example, could still stay within the STEM path but change to a field of study that requires less math. A student who has to prick his finger in an early science class might discover he’s too squeamish to become a nurse, and might consider radiology instead.

## Honing in on a credential

As students continue along their pathways, they gather the knowledge and credits to enter specific certificate or degree programs; the broad pathways they started on branch into different credentials of varying lengths.

A student might pick a certificate or two-year degree that leads directly into the workforce, or a two-year degree that transfers to a university. The student could also enroll in an applied baccalaureate degree at the community or technical college.

Each certificate or degree is designed with the end in mind. Instructors work with employers and universities to identify what skills and knowledge students need to succeed in their chosen careers and then design the programs accordingly.

## Program maps

After choosing which certificate or degree to earn, each student gets a “program map.” The map shows which courses to take, and in what sequence. Certain courses may be flagged as “critical milestones” with recommended or required GPAs.

Students can still take different courses, but the map is a default plan that keeps them on task. Colleges create annual class schedules so students can plan ahead.

## Helping students stay on a path

Creating clear pathways is just part of the process. Helping students enter, and stay on, those pathways is equally important. Colleges provide student-success classes, intensive advising, support services, and quick intervention to keep students on-track. Data, apps, and electronic tools help students, faculty and advisors monitor progress.

Guided pathways are like concourses in an airport; they send students in a general direction based on their interests. Students then go to the departure gate — the degree or certificate they want to achieve — and lift off. With a clear sense of purpose, fewer lost credits and less time to a degree, the students take flight.

### ELEMENTS OF GUIDED PATHWAYS

**Clear pathways:** With guidance from advisors and career counselors, students choose pathways that lead quickly toward degrees or certificates.



**Program and degree maps:** Faculty map out curriculum and learning outcomes for entire programs. The programs connect to careers. They launch students directly into a career with a certificate or two-year degree, or into a university where the students learn more about their chosen fields.

**Eliminate or accelerate remediation:** Colleges implement strategies that dramatically increase the rate at which students complete college-level English and math in their first year of enrollment.

**Enhanced intake and advising practices:** Colleges redesign intake, orientation, placement and advising to help entering students choose a path and enroll in a program of study as quickly as possible. This includes required advising on a regular basis, the tracking of student progress, and early alert systems that notify faculty and staff when students falter.