



College Spark Washington/ State Board for Community and Technical Colleges Guided Pathways Initiative

Lessons Learned

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Washington's Guided Pathways efforts focus on helping more students—especially students of color, low income students, and first generation students—earn credentials to prepare them for entry into higher paying, high demand fields with value in the labor market. In addition to planning, developing, and implementing Guided Pathways essential practices that address issues such as clear pathways, proactive advising, degree math in the first year, and progress monitoring and intervention, Washington's Guided Pathways efforts are strategically and intentionally designed to advance equity and develop system change leadership.

The College Spark Washington//State Board for Community and Technical Colleges Guided Pathways Initiative was launched in 2016, with the selection of a first cohort of five colleges:

- Everett Community College
- Peninsula College
- Pierce College
- South Puget Sound Community College
- South Seattle College

A second cohort of five colleges was added in 2018:

- Clover Park Technical College
- Lower Columbia College
- Renton Technical College
- Spokane Falls Community College
- Tacoma Community College

In addition, Skagit Valley College and Clark College, which participated in the American Association of Community Colleges Pathways Project, have been part of Guided Pathways Initiative retreats.

What follows are some of the lessons learned from these early adopter colleges as they have gone about planning, developing, and now implementing Guided Pathways. They're shared with the goal of helping to inform other colleges' Guided Pathways efforts.

Institutional change

Guided Pathways represents institutional, transformational, systemic change. As a result, Guided Pathways is not only about the “what” of change—essential practices that cover meta-majors, program/degree maps, intake, advising, degree math and college English within one year, etc.—but also the “how.”¹ Key aspects of this include:

- **Visionary, active, engaged, and ongoing leadership.** College leadership needs to be actively supportive of and engaged in Guided Pathways and in an ongoing way. This includes leadership at multiple levels (e.g., presidents, vice presidents, deans and directors, and faculty and staff across the college).

Key points:

- Engage leadership in an active, ongoing way in the Guided Pathways work.
 - Use the college organizational structure (e.g., vice presidents of instruction and student services, deans, directors, etc.) in a strategic, intentional way to reinforce that Guided Pathways is fundamentally about changing the way the whole college does business, not a separate initiative or project. This also facilitates the transition from planning and development to implementation, given that decision makers and implementers have been directly engaged in the work from the outset.
 - Create transition plans so that momentum is not lost during changes in leadership and include explicit commitment to Guided Pathways in search and hiring processes.
- **Broad, deep engagement.** Broad, deep faculty and staff engagement in Guided Pathways is essential, as is cross function, cross department collaboration.

Key points:

- Create venues for broad, deep engagement and cross function, cross department collaboration such as work groups tied to the Guided Pathways essential practices.
 - Provide faculty and staff support (e.g., release time, stipends, etc.).
 - Maintain both broad, deep engagement and cross function, cross department collaboration as the work shifts from planning and development to implementation. There can be a tendency to revert back to old ways of doing business (e.g., silo-ing of the work), which runs contrary to institutional change.
 - Plan for turnover among faculty and staff (e.g., include Guided Pathways in the hiring and onboarding of new faculty staff, provide orientation and training to help new people at all levels become engaged in the work, etc.).
- **Case making.** Making the case for change, tied to mission and core values, is key to institutional change.

Key point:

- Build in case making activities (e.g., regularly tying the Guided Pathways work to mission, using data to show why Guided Pathways is important, etc.) not just at the start, but on an ongoing basis. This can help keep institutional change efforts such as Guided Pathways focused on the big picture and on track –

¹ This section draws on lessons learned about institutional change from Achieving the Dream. See Deena Heg and Bob Watrus, *Lessons Learned from Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count – An Issue Brief on Institutional Change* (2017), available at <http://collegespark.org/grantee-results/achieving-the-dream/>.

especially important with the passage of time, changes in personnel, and shift from planning and development to implementation.

- **Evaluation and learning.** Institutional change is continuous and iterative, and it's essential to build in mechanisms to make sure this happens. This includes evaluation, learning, and continuous improvement.

Key point:

- Provide opportunities for reflection as an ongoing part of Guided Pathways, with such reflection informed by quantitative and qualitative data, as part of evaluation, learning, and continuous improvement.

Equity

Washington has made equity central to Guided Pathways. Cohort I and II colleges' approaches to infusing equity into Guided Pathways have included:

- Equity definition and/or framework. Everett has developed an equity framework—which explicates five dimensions of equity: aspiration, access, achievement, economic progress, and engagement—to guide all of its Guided Pathways work. It's providing faculty and staff training on the equity framework and engaging the community and its partners such as local schools in this work. (Everett's equity framework can be found at <https://www.everettcc.edu/administration/president/5-dimensions-equity>.) Pierce has adopted the Achieving the Dream definition of equity, with its focus on structural, institutional barriers to equity.
- Use of quantitative and qualitative data. Colleges are examining student outcome data, disaggregated by student demographics, including race/ethnicity, to identify their equity gaps. This includes faculty looking at their program and course level data with an equity lens. Peninsula is developing a data framework that looks at multiple risk factors to help target interventions. Pierce is augmenting its analysis of institutional data with student focus groups to develop interventions focused on the needs and interests of specific student groups and interests.
- Staff/leadership/capacity. Most of the colleges now have equity, diversity, and inclusion staff at high levels of leadership who are engaged in the Guided Pathways work.
- Engagement. Colleges are engaging faculty and staff in this work through data analysis, including analysis of disaggregated program and course level data as part of the curriculum and program review process; and training.
- Practices. Colleges are also developing practices such as:
 - Advising that supports the aspirational dimension of equity
 - Advisors, ed planners, and/or navigators focusing specifically on equity, diversity, and inclusion
 - Affinity groups to help build a sense of belonging, community, and identity
 - Teaching and learning strategies (e.g., inclusive pedagogy, universal design, and active learning)
 - Systematic review of practices for their impact on student groups

Although this work has come a long way since the beginning of Guided Pathways here, when the initial model did not explicitly reference equity work, it's important to note that the practices described here are not yet being applied comprehensively throughout colleges or proven to effectively close equity gaps. This speaks to the need to track results of the work.

Guided Pathways essential practices

Faculty and staff engagement: Engage faculty and staff in developing, implementing, and refining each Guided Pathways element; this includes cross department, cross function teams.

Key points:

- Create venues that promote broad, deep engagement. Broad engagement includes all college meetings and in-service that incorporate Guided Pathways; and deep engagement, work groups tied to the Guided Pathways essential practices.
- Provide release time, stipends, etc. to support and sustain engagement.
- Expand faculty and staff engagement on an ongoing basis. This is one way to spread transformational change – people who participate in the work are more likely to have genuine buy in on implementing it. It's also a way to provide some relief to those who've been very involved in the work.
- Engage faculty in ways that go beyond specific discipline/content area knowledge and their own departments and connect them to institutional change efforts and the broader college community (e.g., engaging them in Guided Pathways redesign efforts across the college, including faculty—and staff—in data analysis, connecting what goes on in the classroom to student engagement, retention, and completion; etc.).

Meta-majors and programs of study: Design programs of study, clustered into meta-majors, to guide and prepare students to enter employment and/or further education; and define learning outcomes for each program of study to inform default course sequences aligned with degree completion and transfer requirements.

Most Cohort I and II colleges have created six to eight meta-majors, with the most common ones being:

- Arts, humanities and communication
- Business
- Education and social sciences
- Health care
- Industry technologies, manufacturing, and skilled trades
- Science, technology, engineering, and math

Among the colleges, there are many variations within these broad categories. There are also college specific meta-majors (e.g., aerospace and aviation, culinary arts, people and communities, etc.).

Most colleges now list their meta-majors on their websites; identify related programs of study, degrees, and certificates; and have information on employment and further education.

Exploratory sequence for each meta-major: Design a default exploratory sequence for each meta-major to give students who select a meta-major upon enrollment, but have not determined their program of study, a taste of the field.

Cohort I and II colleges are taking a comprehensive approach to exploration, including:

- Online tools and resources (e.g., Career Coach, WOIS, O*NET, EAB Navigate, and Hobsons Starfish)

- Entry advising, including one-on-one conversations about college/career goals
- College success course, including career exploration
- Program maps with meta-major exploratory course, content course, and/or common core courses early on
- Math and English courses taken early on contextualized to pathways

Here, a critical shift is from making career exploration available to students, if they choose to pursue it—for example, career counseling and career workshops—to providing it to all students at multiple points and in a variety of ways.

Upfront career exploration is critical, given that Guided Pathways essential practices call for students to choose a meta-major upon enrollment and enter a program of study within no more than two quarters. This is an issue with major equity implications.

Key point:

- Build in exploration at multiple points (e.g., prior to entry, at entry, during first and second quarters, etc.) and in a variety of ways (e.g., online tools, one-on-one advising, program maps, courses, etc.).

Program/degree maps: Clearly map out each program of study for students to provide a coherent pathway from college entry through completion or transfer; this includes establishing default course sequences for each program. Default course schedules are designed to lead to on-time completion, but students can customize their plans by working with an advisor or faculty member.

All Cohort I colleges now have their first iteration of program maps. Colleges have taken different approaches to mapping. For example, Pierce created over 100 program specific maps and South Puget Sound created around 30 pathway maps with contextualization. Some notable features of colleges' maps include:

- A structure organized around phases or course sequences rather than quarters, which makes them of use to part time students
- Math, English, and meta-major or program content courses early on. Some also include a college success course early on
- Highlighting of student actions and key college resources

Much of the initial mapping focused on academic transfer programs, due at least in part to the fact that professional-technical programs already had maps. However, there is work to be done on the professional-technical side as well (e.g., incorporation of general education requirements early on, further education/transfer options, etc.).

Most colleges have come to recognize that mapping is an iterative process, with revisions needed based on feedback, changes in the programs themselves, etc. At the end of their third year, Cohort I colleges were just starting to use their program maps in advising students. Cohort II colleges are in the middle of mapping their programs.

Key points:

- Create time and space for faculty, along with student services staff to do the program/degree mapping work, beyond regular division or department meetings (e.g., a day set aside for Guided Pathways work or all college meetings)

- Start with program learning outcomes, which need to inform the program maps and default course sequences.
- Develop tools and supports to help with the mapping process (e.g., templates, training, workshops, guiding principles, program and course level data, etc.).
- Provide faculty stipends and/or release time.
- Ensure cross discipline conversations in the mapping of programs. This includes involving math and English faculty to ensure maps include the right math and English for the program.
- Think through the use of the program maps and engage those who will actually use the maps in advising students in the process. This can help smooth the transition from development of the program maps to their systematic use in creating ed plans for students.

Technology: Have in place technology to support full Guided Pathways implementation (e.g., advising, program monitoring, intervention, and scheduling).

Cohort I and II colleges are making progress in implementing technology to support Guided Pathways (e.g., Hobsons Starfish, EAB, and Civitas), with most of the Cohort I colleges having implemented at least some intake and advising related functions. This has required a commitment of resources for database development, coding, and training. One issue: the connection between colleges' third party software and ctcLink.

Intake and advising: Help all new credential seeking students explore career/college options, choose a meta-major upon enrollment, and enter a program of study within no more than two quarters, and create an ed plan based on program/degree maps. Also, provide mandatory and intrusive advising to facilitate entry into a program of study within two quarters, and track and support student progress through completion or transfer.

Key features of Guided Pathways intake and advising models, based on the work of Cohort I colleges, include:

- Online information, tools, and resources, including career exploration tools
- Entry advising, with ed planners/advisors assigned to pathways
- College success course
- Faculty mentors
- Support teams made up of ed planners/advisors, faculty mentors, and other students services staff
- Technology supports (scheduling, appointments, communication among support teams, progress monitoring, early alerts, etc.)

Some colleges have added ed planning/advising capacity.

Issues/challenges have included:

- Faculty's role in advising. At several colleges, there's been the need to better define faculty's role in advising. Often, this focuses on mentoring, helping students with career, area or program of study, and

transfer related matters. This has required faculty discussions and contract negotiations. Contracts previously made reference to faculty's advising role, but it was not well defined.

- Support teams. Most colleges are developing student support teams or networks, with each student assigned a team made up of an ed planner/advisor, faculty mentor, financial aid/workforce funding program staff, and others. Often, the support teams have a technology backbone, where students can see who all is a part of their network and network members can communicate with one another.

This team approach contrasts with what had been, for the most part, a handoff from ed planners/advisors to faculty mentors. As such, it represents a culture shift and requires training and team building.

- Advising after entry. Most colleges have figured out what advising consists of through entry, but after that, it's still a work in progress.

Key points:

- Map the student experience – current and ideal.
- Examine existing intake and advising practices.
- Conduct student focus groups and surveys to inform the work.
- Develop an intake and advising model that ensures all students get the advising and support they need and when they need it.

Degree math and college level English within one year: Ensure that the majority of students earn degree math (the math required for their program of study) and college level English credit within one year of enrollment, with one key strategy being corequisite college level courses that integrate precollege instruction.

Prior to the start of Guided Pathways, Cohort I and II colleges had undertaken a number of math reforms; however, the portion of students earning degree math within one year of enrollment still fell well short of a majority. All Cohort I and some Cohort II colleges are now looking to corequisite math as a way to meet the expectation of this Guided Pathways essential practice. Some are working to implement it at scale quickly; and others are looking to pilot it. College Spark is supporting this work not only as part of Guided Pathways, but through its Community Grants program.

College level English is typically less of a focus because colleges' completion rates tend to be higher than in math, but this doesn't mean that this should be seen as solved or that colleges are not working on it. Some are still working out what models are best. A couple of colleges are working on contextualizing both math and English by pathway.

Gatekeeper courses: Identify key gatekeeper courses for each program of study—in addition to math and English—and determine the level of student performance that is predictive of student success in completing that specific program, with this information being used to develop supports to increase success in these courses as well as by advisors when helping students select and/or transition between programs of study.

So far, Cohort I and II colleges' work on this essential practice has focused on identifying their gatekeeper courses. This has included analyzing course data (e.g., course taking and course pass patterns by student demographics, course pairs with low completion rates, etc.).

Next, they'll develop specific plans to increase student success and close equity gaps in gatekeeper courses (e.g., changes in student services such as advising, support services, and course scheduling; and in instruction such as professional development on teaching and learning strategies shown to improve student success and close equity gaps).

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