

CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Guided Pathways

Collecting Student Voices for Guided Pathways Inquiry and Design

Why Do It, How It Works, and What It Looks Like in Action

IEPI Guided Pathways
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Introduction

California's community colleges are embarking on a remarkable journey, embracing the guided pathways (GP) movement to ensure dramatically more students realize their educational and employment goals. Making our institutions more student-centered is fundamental to this institutional transformation, described by GP pioneers as "making the college ready for students, rather than making students ready for college." How do we effectively achieve this shift? Let's ask the experts—students themselves.

Students have vital perspectives on and experiences with our institutions that can offer valuable motivation for this change and help shape our redesign. As dozens of California community colleges join the GP movement and others continue reforms already underway, institutions all across the state are planning and initiating the re-engineering of key systems, processes, and approaches. Many colleges have expressed that while they want to include students in making the case for GP on their campuses and informing their redesign, they are uncertain about who to involve, when to do it, and how it is practically done.

This **hands-on guide is designed to provide college stakeholders—particularly cross-functional teams—an introduction to engaging students in early GP development efforts.** We aim for users—instructional faculty, counseling faculty and other student services professionals, administrators, classified staff, and students alike—to:

- Recognize the continuum for engaging students
- Understand the specific value of engaging students in GP development
- Try different ways of authentically including student voices in GP inquiry and design
- Identify which methods work well in your own college context
- Learn from GP pioneers how it can be done
- Access resources that can be leveraged for collecting student voices on your own campus

Much like the GP movement itself, engaging students in large-scale change is nascent. The California Community Colleges (CCC) system has the opportunity to demonstrate to the field how to involve students as active members of our GP work—a blue sky aspiration. As the largest system of higher education in the world, we have a chance to collectively discover ways to meaningfully engage students in GP inquiry and design, and lead our community college peers across the country in this aspect of the movement. This guide offers our colleges support in taking a first step in this process.

User's Guide

Users will find five distinct sections in this guide:

- **Section 1: What We Mean by Student Engagement in GP Reform** defines student voices, outlines a continuum for student involvement in GP development, and connects students' engagement to the *CCC Guided Pathways Self-Assessment*.
- **Section 2: Why Engage Students in GP Inquiry and Design** discusses the value of engaging students in GP inquiry and design, particularly making inquiry and improvement more student-centered, creating urgency for institutional transformation, and strengthening the outcomes of students themselves.
- **Section 3: How to Collect Student Voices during GP Inquiry and Design** provides an overview of how to meaningfully involve students in these stages, including an overview of key steps, different methods, and associated considerations.
- **Section 4: What Collecting Student Voices Looks Like in Action** features short case studies of emerging student engagement efforts from GP pioneers in California and beyond.
- **Section 5: References and Resources** lists numerous reports and concrete tools colleges can draw on and/or repurpose in their own efforts to include student voices in GP inquiry and design.

We expect that some cross-functional teams may want to use all components of this guide to support their involvement of students in GP inquiry and design, while other teams might want to focus on specific sections. Whatever your departure point, we **encourage all teams to review *Section 1: What We Mean By Student Engagement in GP Reform* and *Section 3: How to Collect Student Voices during GP Inquiry and Design***, which offer concrete guidance on the steps for systematically listening to students and specific tools for gathering student voices. Know that your team can return to the guide in an iterative way as you deepen your student engagement practice.

Section 1: What We Mean by Student Engagement in GP Reform

When we talk about collecting student voices, we specifically refer to engaging students to amplify their experience as a means to positively impact the effectiveness of college policies, practices, or programs. **Engaging students in GP inquiry and design (and ultimately implementation) can happen on a continuum**—from a singular activity to gather student perspectives, to systematically listening to student experiences, to fully engaging students in GP decision-making.¹ Approaches range from informal activities (e.g., fishbowls) to formal methods (e.g., interviews, focus groups, surveys) to college-level engagement opportunities (e.g., participation on shared governance committees).

In California community colleges, student engagement in college improvement is just emerging—typically occurring in specific departments and programs or as part of initiatives aimed at increasing student success or through student leadership groups (e.g., Student Senate). Colleges primarily utilize one-time activities with a limited focus to gather student perspectives, such as a campus climate survey. With the GP movement, we have the **opportunity to move toward more authentic and continuous involvement of different student populations as part of the institutional culture**—identifying ways to more systematically gather students’ voices and allow them to have regular input into the decisions that affect their experience and achievement. Instead of just asking students how they feel about the college as it is, GP efforts should incorporate students in identifying areas in need of change, determining what to change, and assessing the effectiveness of any changes made.

What We Mean by Student Engagement in GP Reform

In this guide, collecting student voices refers specifically to...

- Engaging students to amplify their experience as a means to positively impact the effectiveness of college policies, practices, or programs; approaches range from informal activities (e.g., fishbowls) to formal methods (e.g., interviews, focus groups, surveys) to involvement in institutional-level decision-making (e.g., participation on shared governance committees)

¹ There is a subtle but important difference between an institution that “listens” to students and responds accordingly, and an institution that gives students the opportunity to explore areas that they believe to be significant, recommend solutions, and help bring about required changes. Listening to the student voices supports the perspective of student as “consumer”, whereas “students as change agents” explicitly supports a view of the student as “active collaborator” and “co-producer,” with the potential for transformation (Dunne & Zandstra, 2011).

Student Engagement and the CCC Guided Pathways Self-Assessment


All colleges involved with CCC Guided Pathways are using a *self-assessment tool* to direct their GP planning and development. This **self-assessment identifies key areas for student involvement in GP inquiry and design and outlines what moving along the continuum of student engagement can look like**. For the purposes of this self-assessment...

- **Inquiry** refers to engaging campus stakeholders in actionable research and with local data and creating consensus about guided pathways, core issues, and broad solutions.
- **Design** involves establishing and using an inclusive process to make decisions about and design the key elements of GP.

Specifically, the “cross-functional inquiry” (key element 1) and “integrated planning” (key element 3) components of the inquiry stage, and the “inclusive decision-making structures” (key element 4) and “guided major and career exploration” (key element 6) components of the design stage, describe what student involvement looks like from pre- to full-scale adoption (see sidebar, Get Started Collecting Student Voices).

Given that many CCCs are in the early stages of adopting these elements, **this guide is designed to help cross-functional teams establish “systematic listening” practices and begin moving toward more intentional, ongoing student engagement strategies throughout GP inquiry and design.**

Get Started Collecting Student Voices

To start your discussion of how you are currently engaging students in your GP work and what the next level of development could look like, locate where your college currently falls on the  Guided Pathways Self-Assessment scale of adoption for four key elements:

- Key Element 1: Cross-Functional Inquiry
- Key Element 3: Integrated Planning
- Key Element 4: Inclusive Decision-Making Structures
- Key Element 6: Guided Major and Career Exploration

Having this assessment in hand will inform how you approach the steps for collecting student voices, outlined in [Section 3: How To Collect Student Voices](#).

Student Voices Across the CCC Guided Pathways Self-Assessment

While this guide focuses specifically on collecting student perspectives at key points in the initial stages of GP development, student voices can inform many aspects of GP development. We identify some possible areas related to the *CCC Guided Pathways Self-Assessment*, as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Ways Student Voices Can Inform Self-Assessment Key Elements

<i>CCC Guided Pathways Self-Assessment</i> Key Element		Ways Student Voices Can Inform
Inquiry	1. Cross-Functional Inquiry	Provide insight into the factors impacting student journey at different key stages (connection, entry, progress, completion), barriers students face in reaching their educational goals, and how college structures contribute to these obstacles Offer input on strategies, policies, and approaches to close student equity gaps and the effectiveness of proposed and implemented changes
	3. Integrated Planning	Offer input into college-wide discussions about utilizing the GP framework as an overarching structure for the college's main planning and resource allocation processes
Design	4. Inclusive Decision-Making Structures	Help ensure that decisions are student-centered and student-informed by participating on cross-functional teams and in governance committees (as appropriate)
	5. Intersegmental Alignment	Highlight ways to smooth student transitions from feeder high schools through selection of and entrance into a meta-major Offer input on supports students are seeking to successfully transition to employment and/or additional education
	6. Guided Major and Career Exploration Opportunities	Once mapped by educators, provide feedback on meta-majors to ensure they resonate with students (e.g., programs included, descriptions, marketing)
	7. Improved Basic Skills	Provide perspective on students' experience of the assessment process and approaches designed to improve rates of basic skills completion and enrollment in college-level coursework
	8. Clear Program Requirements	Offer feedback on the clarity (or lack thereof) of program requirements

Table 1. Ways Student Voices Can Inform Self-Assessment Key Elements

CCC Guided Pathways Self-Assessment Key Element		Ways Student Voices Can Inform
Implementation	9. Proactive and Integrated Academic and Student Supports	<p>Provide input on mapped course offerings and schedules and where changes may be needed</p> <p>Offer insight into the key features of special programs that support success, and that could be scaled to reach more students</p> <p>Provide input on how to improve access to key services to reach different student groups (e.g., part-time, evening, online students)</p> <p>Share ideas for ways to re-engage students who fall off the path</p>
	10. Integrated Technology Infrastructure	Share perspectives on the user friendliness of technology available to support students' selection of a meta-major or career and help them monitor their academic progress
	11. Strategic Professional Development	Share stories and perspectives (e.g., student panel) with administrators, faculty, and staff that highlight what is working and where change is needed to ensure student success
	14. Applied Learning Opportunities	Offer perspective on the types of work-based learning opportunities that would engage students and provide them with the skills and knowledge they would need given their chosen meta-major

Section 2: Why Engage Students in GP Inquiry and Design

Bringing students into our guided pathways inquiry and design work can advance cultures of inquiry and improvement already in development on our campuses by making them more student-centered. Student engagement can also fuel and inform change—at the college, state, and national levels, and have a positive impact on students themselves—not just our institutions. We explore these benefits below.

Make Inquiry and Improvement More Student-Centered

We may assume we understand the experience of students as we pursue innovation and reform, yet we frequently forget to ask students themselves about what day-to-day challenges impact their CCC education; or what works well to support their success; or what ideas they have to improve their entry, progress, completion, and transition to additional education and work. Despite our best intentions, our colleges also are coming to realize that we may have unintentionally established rules, structures, and practices that do not fully recognize the student experience—inadvertently putting the onus on our students to navigate the complexity of our campuses.

Through GP reform, we have the **opportunity to reexamine our approaches and understand our processes and systems through the student lens**. Community colleges often have a plethora of quantitative data (e.g., course success, persistence, completion), often generated by our research and institutional effectiveness offices. However, **numbers can only tell part of a story**. For example, data can tell us the number of students who do not persist from one semester to the next; however, the numbers do not tell us *why* students might be struggling to re-enroll for another term. Evidence may indicate certain populations are experiencing disproportionate impact, yet reveal only partial understanding of what these student groups need to ensure their equitable outcomes.

As colleges embark on the development of guided pathways, gathering data from students will be paramount. Student perspectives will **augment and enrich the information gleaned through institutional data** by ensuring that the limitations of one type of data are balanced by the strengths of another. Student perspectives will provide critical context that can **inform the quality and feasibility of recommendations for policy and program improvement**. Students can also **offer much-needed insight on the effect of these changes over time**, providing a qualitative measure of whether or not these redesign and reform efforts are being “felt” by those whom we are trying to impact.

Why Engage Students in GP Inquiry and Design

Engaging students in GP inquiry and design allows us to...

- Examine our approaches and understand our processes and systems through the student lens
- Create a full data “story”—enhancing institutional data with ground-level student insights
- Foster an urgency for institutional transformation
- Motivate different college stakeholders to get involved in GP development
- Strengthen student outcomes (the deeper the engagement, the bigger the impact)

Generate Urgency for GP Reform

In addition, student perspectives can also be a **powerful lever for creating a sense of urgency, relevancy, and focus during an organizational transformation effort**, including guided pathways reform. Students have already made important contributions to shaping the guided pathways movement in California and beyond.

Completion by Design (CBD), which served as a critical foundation for GP, looked to students to motivate and inform institutional reform efforts across the nation. Specifically, **WestEd and Public Agenda** (2012) conducted interviews and focus groups with students in multiple states (Florida, North Carolina, Ohio, and Texas) as part of CBD, **lifting up what learners were lacking in their experience, and adding to a growing movement to ensure students' voices were front and center in community college redesign**. Through this research, WestEd and Public Agenda found that students were seeking clearer pathways into and through their colleges; more engagement and connection to their campuses, educators, and peers; more accurate, proactive, and continuous advising; greater structure for exploring and choosing a direction; improved and more timely information about choices and requirements; more relevant and efficient basic skills coursework; and better information about and access to academic and nonacademic supports.

The RP Group's Student Support (Re)defined study (2012-2014) explored **what nearly 1,000 CCC students say they need to achieve their goals**. Through this research, students reported they are more likely to succeed when they are directed, focused, nurtured, engaged, connected, and valued. This "success factors framework" has a direct alignment to the principles of guided pathways reform, as demonstrated in a *crosswalk of these factors and the four guided pathways pillars*. Ultimately, Student Support (Re)defined showed that **student voices are a powerful motivator and driver for change**. The project sparked a movement across our system, with institutions using the findings to facilitate dialog among people, programs, and divisions; engage in strategic and equity planning; and pursue actions designed to meaningfully strengthen student success and attainment (see *Student Support (Re)defined in California Community Colleges*).

Building on the CBD loss/momentum framework, the Student Support (Re)defined findings, and in support of the statewide initiative to increase student equity, the RP Group has been **partnering with colleges across the state to go "in-house" with gathering student perspectives**, conducting campus-based student focus groups at more than a dozen colleges to inform institutional reform, catalyzing stakeholders across the institution toward change work and informing the pursuit of specific strategies for increasing student progress and completion.

Similarly, in 2017, **Career Ladders Project (CLP)** worked with two Bay Area colleges to conduct multiple focus groups reaching over 130 students, diverse in their academic goals and experience, with a specific focus on **supporting the institutions in bringing student voices into their guided pathways inquiry and design work**. Through these focus groups, the colleges were able to *identify factors impacting student progress and completion* that could directly inform their own institutional approach to GP, as well as aid the work of other CCCs. The **Community College Research Center (CCRC)** also recently released a brief on *students' experience of guided pathways* in the City Colleges of Chicago system, which embarked on this journey in 2010 (Fink, 2017). Interviews with 48 students provide honest **feedback on what is working and what can be improved, offering the field at large an opportunity to learn from the experience of students attending colleges implementing GP** well ahead of other systems in the country.

All of these efforts show the value of engaging student perspectives to motivate and inform GP change, keeping the experience of students themselves at the center of any effort to strengthen their success and attainment. They also **offer useful tools and insights that can be leveraged** when developing your own strategies and approaches for engaging students (see additional information on these resources in Sections 3-5).

Strengthen Student Outcomes

Engaging student voices can also lead to positive outcomes for students themselves. While more study needs to be done, emerging research indicates that **being involved in meaningful decision-making can have a positive impact on community college students' learning outcomes and can lead to higher graduation rates** (Schuetz, 2008; Price & Tovar, 2014). More broadly, the frameworks that explain the effectiveness of student engagement on increased motivation and learning include intentional development of student voices. The opportunity to contribute their perspectives and experiences clearly supports students' need for self-determination, an innate desire for relatedness (or belonging), competence, and autonomy. When students have these needs met, engagement is a natural outgrowth (Schuetz, 2008).

To maximize the outcomes for students in offering their voices, research indicates that colleges need to be intentional with the students they select and the strategies they employ. Generally, **the smaller the student engagement activity, the smaller the impact on the student**. Not surprising, one-time, short-term activities (e.g., singular broad survey of students vs. ongoing advisory, decision-making, or design work) appear to have minimal longer-term benefits for participants. Students who are engaged in ongoing, sustained, highly-supported decision-making experiences show more significant impacts to their learning and completion outcomes (Carey, 2018).

The **most powerful approach for students is their engagement in institutional-level efforts combined with other involvement strategies at the faculty-to-student and student-to-student levels**, which all occur simultaneously and in reinforcing ways (Deil-Amen, 2011; Price & Tovar, 2016). This type of engagement would likely be found at the full-scale adoption end of the *CCC Guided Pathways Self-Assessment*. Research indicates that this level of involvement appears to have the largest impact on first-generation, students of color, with evidence of increases in community college persistence (Guiffrida, 2006); and increased graduation for students across multiple demographic groups (Price & Tovar, 2014). Certainly, these early insights about the positive impact of full student engagement add even more reason to pursue the involvement of our students in our GP inquiry and design work.

Student Contributions to the Guided Pathways Movement

Students have already shown their power to motivate change, contributing to key state and national efforts to generate support for the guided pathways movement and shaping the reform through participation in pioneering research. Studies include:

Student Voices on the Higher Education Pathway

Connection by Design: Students' Perceptions of Their Community College Experiences

WestEd and Public Agenda for Completion by Design, 2012

Student Support (Re)defined

The Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges, 2012-2014

Guided Pathways to Student Success: Perspectives from Indiana College Students and Advisors

Public Agenda for Indiana Commission for Higher Education, 2014

Bringing Student Voices to Guided Pathways Inquiry and Design

Career Ladders Project, 2017

What Do Students Think about Guided Pathways?

Community College Research Center, 2017

Section 3: How to Engage Students in GP Inquiry and Design

Capturing student voices, using what students share, and engaging students in our improvement work is imperative to making colleges more student centered. Regularly involving students and providing opportunities for them to share their experiences and perspectives has to be embedded in our institutional cultures to make guided pathways a reality. All college stakeholders—administrators, faculty, staff—must make a concerted commitment to learn from and with students and meaningfully include them iteratively in institutional redesign; this process is not a “one and done” activity. Gathering student voices requires ongoing attention throughout the inquiry and design phases and thoughtful and consistent strategies.

The following section offers cross-functional teams concrete approaches for gathering student perspectives through guided pathways inquiry and design. To develop a practice of systematically listening to students, cross-functional teams can think of the collection of student voices as an iterative research process. This research cycle includes determining what you want to learn, whom to engage, how to best answer your burning questions, and how to share and act on those results.

We outline five key steps for collecting student voices, starting with identifying the objective and guiding question(s) for your activity, followed by selecting, recruiting, and engaging student participants. We then describe different methods colleges can utilize to collect student voices, including the process for a given student engagement activity, and the advantages and limitations of these unique approaches. We conclude with a discussion of how to process and disseminate what students say and determine what your team needs to learn next.

Key Steps for Collecting Student Voices

- Step 1: Identify what you aim to accomplish by collecting student voices
- Step 2: Determine which students to engage and develop a recruitment plan
- Step 3: Select a method for collecting student voices
- Step 4: Analyze, summarize, and share student voices findings
- Step 5: Identify your next steps for student engagement

Who Should Lead Your Process for Collecting Student Voices?

A true cross-functional team is best positioned to carry out an authentic and effective process for collecting student voices. Different stakeholders will be able to contribute important ideas to and take responsibility for each step. For example:

- **Students** can advise on the most effective ways to recruit their peers for participation in a student voices activity; help identify the best method for collecting information from specific groups, and even lead certain activities; and share results to the broader student body.
- **Instructional faculty** can offer insights into key concerns among their fellow instructors about GP reform that student perspectives can address, provide a direct connection to conducting student perspectives activities in the classroom, and engage their peers with making meaning from the results during program redesign efforts.
- **Counseling faculty and other student services professionals** can identify key stumbling blocks for students, both inside and outside the college; help engage key groups of students in student voices activities; and disseminate results to encourage proactive and integrated student advising and support.
- **Classified staff** who work in areas that regularly interface with students, such as admissions and records and financial aid, are likely to have insight that other campus constituencies cannot offer; they can highlight specific challenges students encounter during key college processes, and engage their peers with student voices results to promote staff engagement in GP development.
- **Administrators** can identify how student voices can answer key questions across multiple campus initiatives; marshal resources and support to fund student engagement activities; identify venues for sharing results; and generally foster the ongoing engagement of students as part of the college's culture of inquiry and improvement.
- **Institutional researchers** (IR) can support and inform student voices activities, including pulling data sets to guide which problems explore and which students to engage, advising on method selection, helping carry out formal activities, and assisting with the analysis and summation of the information collected.

Step 1: Identify What You Aim to Accomplish by Collecting Student Voices

If we treat the collection of student voices as a research process, then cross-functional teams must **start with a key research objective**. *What is the purpose and intent of the research we want to do with students? Who should be involved? How will the information be useful?* In the context of guided pathways inquiry and design, a sample research objective could be: *identify key loss/momentum points where the guided pathways framework could ensure students select and begin a program of study, and complete an award within three years*. This objective should be the research's North Star, and all information collected should serve to meet this main objective. The objective should **help narrow and focus the research on what is most important to know from students**.

Step 1: Identify what you aim to accomplish by collecting student voices

- What is the purpose and intent of our student voices research?
- What is our guiding question or hypothesis statement for this effort?

A second, critical part of this step is **identifying a guiding question or a statement that tests a hypothesis**. Merriam-Webster defines a hypothesis "as a tentative assumption made in order to draw out and test its logical or empirical consequences." Sometimes the guiding **question is exploratory**: *How many of our full-time students who have a goal of transfer actually transfer within three years? What are the opportunities and challenges facing our full-time students as they select a major and enter a program of study?* Sometimes the question **tests an assumption**: *Undeclared students who do not enter a program of study by the start of their third semester are less likely to complete a certificate or degree. Students who have access to academic and career counseling make more timely progress to a degree or credential than students who only receive academic counseling*. From the guiding question or hypothesis, decisions can be made about which students should be engaged and how, what questions they should be asked, which methods to use to gather the desired information, and how best to disseminate and use what is learned.

Step 2: Determine Which Students to Engage and Develop a Recruitment Plan

The next step in the process for collecting student voices is deciding whom you would like to engage to best address your research objective and guiding question(s) and ensure the information collected will be useful and relevant. *Whose voices need to be heard? Which student groups have a perspective that can inform the development and design of relevant pathways? Which students are not typically engaged, and how can they be reached?*

If you aim to capture voices from different student groups, consider providing opportunities for students with similar experiences and challenges to share in a way that allows for honest reflection. For example, the challenges faced by basic skills students are very different from those faced by STEM students; so, two separate focus groups or a survey that branches to different questions may be more sensitive to the varying realities of these two student groups. To get you started, Table 2 below identifies a few key populations typical to our community colleges, and offers ideas about possible recruitment strategies and locations for connecting with these students.

Different strategies and approaches, and points and locations of engagement may be necessary to effectively recruit and involve the desired student groups. Regardless of the population, experience shows that effective student outreach can be challenging.

Going where students are (e.g., classroom, learning community, student activities, common areas, special program locations) **during times that make sense for them is key to their engagement. Moreover, engaging different stakeholders who are best positioned to reach different students** can help. For example, if you aim to engage basic skills students in your student voices activity, faculty teaching these courses can assist with outreach and/or contribute class time to the activity. Institutional research (IR) staff can work with student government leaders to identify potential participants and do peer-to-peer outreach. Special programs directors can arrange times to connect directly with program participants.

Step 2: Determine which students to engage and develop a recruitment plan

- Which student groups need to be heard in order to best address our research objective and guiding question(s)?
- How can we involve different student groups with key perspectives on the research issue?
- What outreach strategies will specifically reach those student groups...
 - Which stakeholders are best positioned to reach those groups?
 - Which modes are most likely to capture their attention about the opportunity?
 - Where do these student groups gather? What venues can we tap or times should we hold student voices activities to reach specific populations?
- What incentives can we offer students for participating (e.g., bookstore gift card, food, college spirit wear)?

Table 2. Recruitment Strategies and Modes for Different Student Groups

Student Population	Possible Recruitment Strategies	Location and/or Mode of Recruitment
All students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer incentives (e.g., food, bus passes, gift cards) • Schedule student voices activity at locations and times that are most convenient for students • Recruit students in locations where they are likely to be and through modes they are likely to use (e.g., website, social media, student newspaper, flyers) • Develop a communication strategy that ensures that administrators, faculty, and staff are knowledgeable about and can speak to students about the activity's purpose and process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classroom • Cafeteria • Library • Student lounge • Social media • Campus communication methods (e.g., website, push notifications via text, email) • Peer-to-peer "viral" outreach
Students who are engaged and connected to the institution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact the Student Government to invite representatives to participate • Inform learning communities, special programs (e.g., Puente, Umoja, EOPS, DSPS), student club presidents, and faculty leads about the opportunity for their members to participate • Consider inviting coaches of the college sports teams to encourage their athletes to participate • Attend student meetings; instead of "recruiting", bring the activity to the students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standing meetings (e.g., student government, student clubs, learning communities) • Athletes' practice
Students who may not be engaged in extracurricular activities due to work schedule or family responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask department chairs to encourage their faculty to invite students to participate in research during class time or for extra credit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classroom • Cafeteria • Library • Student lounge • Social media • Campus communication methods (e.g., website, push notifications via text, email) • Peer-to-peer "viral" outreach

Step 3: Select a Method for Collecting Student Voices

Methods for collecting information from students can take many different forms, including both *qualitative*, *quantitative*, and *mixed methods* approaches that range in their formality.

- **Qualitative research** involves exploratory questioning that can be either structured or unstructured to examine and investigate students' experiences and perspectives; common formal qualitative research methods include focus groups and one-on-one interviews; informal methods might include classroom-based activities or college-level forums.
- **Quantitative research** offers a way to measure and quantify a problem or information to allow for statistical analysis that can uncover trends and patterns in responses from a large number of students; in education, surveys are one of the most often used quantitative strategies.
- **Mixed methods research** involves using two or more data collection approaches to balance the logic inherent in quantitative methods and the stories that emerge through qualitative approaches; mixed methods can increase the credibility and validity of the information collected and provide an opportunity to uncover deeper meaning in the data or themes that require further exploration.

We highlight a range of methods below, including student focus groups, interviews, surveys, and in-class activities (see Table 3 below for quick tips on when to use each option). All of these methods can inform GP inquiry and design, and contribute to many key elements identified in the *CCC Guided Pathways Self-Assessment*. Each method has benefits and challenges in terms of practicality, resources, sampling, generalization, and approvals. We provide a description of who can implement these methods, how each method or tool can be implemented, and the advantages and limitations of each. When available, we offer concrete examples of that method. We conclude the section with ideas for activities that different stakeholders can conduct in venues across the institution, leveraging their unique experience with and connection to students.

Institutional Review Boards

An Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that any research involving human subjects meets ethical standards and guidelines. This administrative body ensures that the research does not negatively affect respondents' welfare, rights, and privacy. Many colleges have an IRB or a process for this type of review, and your student inquiry project proposal may need to be submitted for consideration.

An important component of this review is an overview of the informed consent process, including the consent form that students will sign indicating that the scope and scale and risks and benefits of the research have been explained to them and they are volunteering to participate. Consent forms also explain how students' confidentiality will be maintained, the risk and benefits of participating in the research, how to end participation, and who to contact with questions or concerns.

The IRB application process can be extensive and may require additional information after the initial IRB review, so allow enough time for this process. For more information, visit: [The Institutional Review Board \(IRB\): A College Planning Guide](#).

Table 3. Tips for Selecting Methods

Method	Description	Ideal for...
Focus Groups	Facilitated small group discussion of 8 to 10 participants who share specific characteristics	Digging into specific exploratory questions with defined groups, allowing participants to respond to and build on each others' perspectives and experiences at the college ("what" and "how" questions)
Interviews	Facilitated in-depth, one-on-one conversations with students	Gathering specific student stories during targeted efforts, developing an in-depth understanding of these students' experience, and shining a light on key supports and obstacles and opportunities for improvement ("what," "how," and "why" questions)
Surveys	A collection of questions printed (in web, telephone, or paper form) to gather student experiences or perspectives	Identifying the scale of an issue, quickly quantifying students' experience with the college, or for gathering broad input ("how many" questions)
In-Class Activities	Strategies for gathering students' insights and perspectives during class periods and as part of course assignments	Taking the pulse of students in a particular section or cohort that can be used to inform course improvements and program and pathway development ("what," "how," and "how many" questions)
Activities across the College	Strategies for collecting student insights in venues across the institution	Collecting student input on specific college functions and/or processes, or collecting student perspectives in collegewide forums ("what," "how," and "how many" questions)

Step 3: Select a method for collecting student voices

- What method makes the most sense given what we want to accomplish and who we want to engage in our student voices activity? Does the situation call for a mixed methods approach?
- What are the most important questions to ask, and how should they be structured (e.g., What are the best response options for survey questions)?
- What is the best modality to capture students' perspectives (e.g., online survey, mobile app, focus group, in-class essay)?
- What is the scope and scale of the research (e.g., How long will the survey be open? How many focus group sessions will be held? How many interviews will be completed)?
- How can the activity be structured to engage students who are reluctant to participate (e.g., specialized outreach to certain student groups, placing dots next to a list of options as part of a focus group)?
- If appropriate, what needs to be prepared and shared to ensure that students understand the benefits and risk of the activity and can provide informed consent to participate and/or withdraw?

Focus Groups

Description	Facilitated small group discussion of 8 to 10 participants who share specific characteristics
When to Use	<p>To gather insights and perspectives from specific groups of students whose unique experiences will inform the development of a particular facet of guided pathways</p> <p>To understand specific student groups' perceptions or experiences while allowing different perspectives to be heard within the group</p> <p>Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How historically-underrepresented college students understand and view majors/ programs at an institution • How recent high school graduate students select a major or program • How first-generation students learn about support services (both academic and student supports) • What challenges students encounter in the onboarding process and/or in tracking progress to goal completion
Time Required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Up to two hours to develop and implement a student recruitment strategy (e.g., design flyers, craft an email, distribute recruitment materials) • Up to one hour to send confirmation emails, calls, or text to participants who have volunteered • Up to one hour to set up room (e.g., organize tables to be conducive to conversation, set out food, handouts, and supplies; post flipchart paper, markers) • Up to 90 minutes per focus group • Up to four hours per focus group to complete review and summary of key themes
Who Should Lead	A facilitator (an administrator, faculty, staff, student, or institutional researcher) who can moderate a conversation by remaining neutral, probing for understanding, clarifying key takeaways, and summarizing key points while ensuring that all participants have an opportunity to contribute
Logistical Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of student groups to include • Methods to recruit desired student groups and confirm date, time, and location with students who volunteer to participate • Scheduling (dates and times for groups) • Time to outline questions and develop protocol • Facilitator that will draw out students' honest input (e.g., external consultant, peer, practitioner not involved with students' day-to-day experience) • Location that is convenient for the student groups and allows students' confidentiality to be maintained • Confidential space that is conducive to a small group conversation • Food to compel participation
Resource(s) Needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitator to lead the discussion with students • Protocol that outlines 8 to 10 questions to be explored • Consent forms • Recorder (audio or person documenting the discussion) • Transcriber (if audio recorded) • Meeting space (e.g., room with a conference table versus traditional classroom setup that is comfortable, easy to find, private to maintain confidentiality with space to move around if necessary, and where food can be served) • At least one hour per focus group • Appropriate incentives (e.g., gift card to book store)

Focus Groups (Continued)

Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow for presentation of ideas and follow-up questions for a more nuanced exploration • Engage students in a personal way • Allow for more detailed questions to be asked and follow-up discussion • Provide direct insight into student experience • Tell the story that quantitative data cannot
Limitations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time intensive, including planning, recruitment, scheduling, facilitation, and data analysis • Not generalizable due to the small number of students participating • Often engage students who are more connected and involved • Geared toward students who are comfortable sharing in a group setting • Potential for students to provide responses that may be socially desirable versus reflective of their actual experiences and perspectives
Common Ways to Analyze and Synthesize Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review notes and/or transcription to pull out key themes • Use quotes to highlight themes (be sure to maintain students' confidentiality)
Case Example(s)	<p>Career Ladders Project <i>Bringing Student Voices to Guided Pathways</i> Research brief summarizing 16 student focus groups at two California Community Colleges to inform their guided pathways inquiry and design. http://cccgp.cccco.edu/Portals/0/Bringing-Student-Voices-to-Guided-Pathways-Inquiry-and-Design.pdf</p> <p>The Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges <i>Focus Groups</i> Overview of partnerships with colleges across the state to conduct focus groups and to summarize these conversations to offer recommendations and critical insights into the experience of various student populations. http://rpgroup.org/All-Projects/ctl/ArticleView/mid/1686/articleId/174/Focus-Groups-Past-and-Current</p> <p><i>Equity Focus Groups</i> Presentation highlighting key themes and takeaways from focus groups of student groups at Cabrillo, Cuyamaca, Los Angeles Valley College, Mt. San Antonio College, Reedley, and Riverside City Colleges. http://rpgroup.org/Portals/0/Documents/Projects/FocusGroups/EquityFocusGroupsSSSCPostConferenceWorkshopPPT20171013.pdf</p> <p><i>Student Support (Re)defined Focus Group Protocol</i> Protocol used with over 100 students attending four California community colleges, designed to get their direct perspectives on and stories about what they need to succeed, using the "six success factors" framework http://rpgroup.org/Portals/0/Documents/Projects/StudentSupportReDefined/Resources/MethodologyandInstruments/SSR_Focus_Group_Protocol.pdf</p> <p>See also Yuba College, Lansing Community College, Skyline College, and Bakersfield College in Section 4: What Collecting Student Voices Looks Like in Action</p>

Interviews

Description	Facilitated in-depth, one-on-one conversations with students that can be informal or formal, structured or unstructured
When to Use	<p>To gather insights and perspectives from specific students whose unique experiences will inform the development of a particular facet of guided pathways</p> <p>To understand specific student groups' perceptions or experiences while maintaining full confidentiality</p> <p>Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What historically underrepresented college students or recent high school graduates understand about majors at an institution and why they select a particular program • Why students struggle to progress at key points in their community college journey (e.g., entry, persistence from semester to semester, completion of program requirements) • How first-generation students learn about support services (both academic and nonacademic supports)
Time Required	Up to 60 minutes per student
Logistical Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of students to include • Methods to recruit desired student groups and confirm date, time, and location with students who volunteer to participate • Scheduling (dates and times for interviews) • Time to outline questions and develop protocol • Interviewer to draw out students' honest input (e.g., external consultant, peer, practitioner not involved with students' day-to-day experience) • Location (in person or virtually) that allows students' confidentiality to be maintained
Resource(s) Needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviewer to ask prompting questions • Protocol that outlines 8 to 10 questions to be explored • Consent forms • Recorder (audio or person documenting the discussion) • Transcriber (if audio recorded) • Meeting space or audio/video conference line • At least 30 minutes per interview • Appropriate incentives (e.g., gift card to book store)
Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow for presentation of ideas and follow-up questions for a more nuanced exploration • Engage students in a personal way • Provide a safe setting for students who are not comfortable speaking in a group • Offer opportunity to ask interviewees to permit the release of their information • Allow for multiple methods for scheduling (e.g., in person, telephone, video-conference) • Allow for more detailed questions and follow-up discussion • Provide direct insight into students' experience • Tell the story that quantitative data cannot
Limitations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time intensive, including planning, recruitment, scheduling, facilitation, and data analysis • Not generalizable due to the small number of students participating • Often engage students who are connected and involved • Geared toward students who are comfortable sharing their opinions and experiences • Potential for students to provide responses that may be socially desirable versus reflective of their actual experiences and perspectives

Interviews (Continued)

<p>Common Ways to Analyze and Synthesize Information</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review notes and/or transcription and pull out key themes • Use quotes to highlight themes (be sure to maintain students' confidentiality)
<p>Case Example(s)</p>	<p>Community College Research Center <i>What Do Students Think about Guided Pathways?</i> Research brief summarizing findings from 48 student interviews at a Midwest community college https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/what-do-students-think-guided-pathways.html</p> <p><i>"They Never Told Me What to Expect, so I Didn't Know What to Do:" Defining and Clarifying the Role of a Community College Student</i> Research brief summarizing semi-structured interviews with students, faculty, and staff as part of a study of student success courses at three Virginia Community College system colleges. https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/defining-clarifying-role-college-student.pdf</p>

Surveys

Description	A collection of questions printed (in web, telephone, or paper form) where participants respond to each question based on their experiences and/or opinions
When to Use	To gather insights from a large and potentially representative sample of students to get quantifiable feedback that can inform the development of a particular facet of guided pathways Examples include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What to name meta-majors so they are recognizable by students • What is students' level of satisfaction with support services (both academic and student supports) • How many students report using specific support services • What does and does not work for students in a new progress tracking system
Time Required	Varies depending on design and length of survey and method for recruitment
Who Should Lead	A researcher or practitioner who has experience designing and analyzing surveys with input and support from those who will be using the information gathered to inform change
Logistical Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey instrument creation • Mode of collection (e.g., online, paper, telephone) • Recruitment method to engage desired student groups • Identification of sample
Resource(s) Needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey software (if deploying on the web) • Scanning software and hardware or data entry personnel (if deploying on paper) • Callers (if deploying via telephone) • Some knowledge of survey design
Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cheaper than labor-intensive focus groups and interviews • Relatively easy to administer • Ability to collect a large number of students' voices in a short amount of time • More likely to be generalizable depending on sample selection • Can be conveniently collected via online or paper • Address multiple topic areas quickly
Limitations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack detailed information; little or no opportunity to follow-up • No direct engagement with students, passive method for collecting information • No student stories or in-depth quotes • Survey fatigue (e.g., will not answer all questions) • Potential for students to provide responses that may be socially desirable versus reflective of their actual experiences and perspectives
Common Ways to Analyze and Synthesize Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Descriptive statistics (e.g., mean, percentages, frequencies) • Tallyed occurrence of attributes and traits across multiple participants to identify trends (e.g., cross tabulations) • Open-ended questions that allow for use of quotes to contextualize information from other questions • Trends over time with multiple administrations

Surveys (Continued)

<p>Case Example(s)</p>	<p>Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) <i>Survey of Entering Student Engagement</i> A survey that helps community colleges focus on good educational practice and identify areas in which they can improve their programs and services for students. http://www.ccsse.org/sense/</p> <p><i>Crosswalk of CCSSE Questions with Guided Pathway Pillars</i> A brief that links specific CCSSE questions to the four pillars of the guided pathways framework http://www.ccsse.org/tools/docs/working_with_results/CCSSE2017toPresent_Pathways_Tool.pdf?ts=20180108161134</p> <p>The Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges <i>Student Support (Re)defined Survey Instrument</i> A 20-minute telephone survey designed by the RP Group to collect information from nearly 800 students at 12 California community colleges on six “success factors” and the importance of these factors to their academic success http://rpgroup.org/Portals/0/Documents/Projects/StudentSupportReDefined/Resources/MethodologyandInstruments/SSR_Student_Survey.pdf</p> <p>California State University, Sacramento, Division of Student Affairs <i>Listening to Student Survey Project</i> Ongoing, large-scale student survey effort to collect information from different student groups about their experience at the university. http://www.csus.edu/saseep/listeningtostudents.html?utm_source=Perspectives%3A+January+2018&utm_campaign=January+2018+Perspectives&utm_medium=email</p> <p><i>See also Lansing Community College, Skyline College, and Sierra College in Section 4: What Collecting Student Voices Looks Like in Action</i></p>
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Classroom Activities

Through the RP Group's Student Support (Re)defined study, nearly 900 students at 13 California community colleges underscored the critical role that faculty play in their success (Booth, K., et al, 2013). As a trusted ally and as the college stakeholder who has the most direct engagement with students, **faculty can gather valuable information to support institutional transformation efforts such as GP reform.** The classroom offers a unique space where faculty can collect student voices to highlight areas of strength and needed improvements in course pedagogy and content. Faculty can also leverage their connection to students to get their input on program structure and supports. The classroom can be further used as a place to gather information regarding student experience beyond the course and program levels, in the college overall.

Faculty can engage students in **classroom activities or homework assignments** designed to collect information or gather ideas supportive of guided pathways development. For example, faculty might consider asking students to journal, conduct peer-to-peer conversations, or engage in debates to share their perspectives and feedback on the guided pathways framework, or offer input on the "student-centeredness" of the college's culture and areas where change is needed. This input can help determine areas of priority for students when designing your college's GP approach.

Fishbowls offer another classroom activity to engage all students in sharing their perspectives and generating ideas supportive of GP work. To conduct a fishbowl, students are seated in two circles, one outer and one inner; the inner circle is asked to respond to a number of questions while the outer group listens and observes. This research tool **can make large group conversations more manageable.** After the inner circle responds to the questions, the outside circle is allowed to ask questions. Then, the two groups switch. Once both circles of students have had an opportunity to consider the questions, they can reflect on the similarities and differences in their perspectives and responses, and share with the whole group.

Helping students share their **own personal narratives through storytelling** is another potential engagement strategy that can yield valuable information. Students often become more connected to and engaged in the institution when asked to share thoughts and insights based on their personal experiences, and the classroom can provide an effective venue for collecting student stories. Often students are comforted and inspired to hear from others, including administrators, faculty, and staff who have similar stories. Although storytelling has the same limitations as interviews or focus groups, classroom activities where students (and faculty) have an opportunity to tell their own stories creates an environment where students better understand each other, bond and support each other, and are more open to diversity and supportive of inclusion of different perspectives (see Nguyen, Purnell-Mack, Cooper, Rodriguez-Kiino, Kretz, Fagioli, Myers, & Rassen, 2017). Digital storytelling where computer-based tools are used to enhance students' narrative are a popular way to engage students around their use of digital media.

Classroom Activities

Description	Formal and informal strategies to gather students' insights and perspectives during class periods and as part of course assignments
When to Use	To gather feedback and insights from students attending classes or in a particular program to inform the development of a particular facet of guided pathways Examples include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you have a comprehensive educational plan? What resources and supports do you know about that are available to assist you with career exploration and educational planning? • What do you know about the college's meta-majors/areas of focus? • Where do you go to get information on the requirements for this program? What information do you need in order to determine your progress in this program? • What, if anything, makes staying enrolled at the college, and in this class, challenging? What is helping you stay enrolled? • What would help increase your chances of success in this course, this program? • What can you do to increase your own success and the success of your peers and the college?
Time Required	Varies depending on how and what information is requested from students
Who Should Lead	Any faculty who has an opportunity to collect information from students during their classes or as part of a course or program requirement
Logistical Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis and summarization of information • Dissemination of information
Resource(s) Needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Willingness and interest in developing activities and assignments to capture students' perspective as part of course time and requirements • Time to analyze and summarize key themes and findings • Opportunity and ability to share findings with key stakeholders involved in GP inquiry and design
Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cheaper and less labor intensive than focus groups, interviews, and surveys • Relatively easy to organize and implement • Offers space where students may be more comfortable sharing their feedback and experiences
Limitations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage a small number of students who are attending courses • Require time to analyze and summarize information gathered • Difficult to standardize data collection, analysis, and reporting • Unclear how and where to disseminate findings
Common Ways to Analyze and Synthesize Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List key takeaways and organize by themes • Identify student quotes that highlight a strength or need relevant to GP; be sure to maintain student confidentiality • Count the number of times a certain phase, idea, or perspective is shared • Note similarities and differences in responses by various student groups (e.g., traditional aged vs. older students)

Classroom Activities (Continued)

Case Example(s)	<p>Facing History and Ourselves <i>Resource Library Teaching Strategy: Fishbowl</i> Overview of the “fishbowl” technique. https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-strategies/fishbowl</p> <p>Institute of Educational Sciences, US Department of Education; Regional Educational Laboratory at WestEd <i>Speak Out, Listen Up! Tools for using student perspectives and local data for school improvement</i> Toolkit that outlines three tools—surveys, fishbowls, digital storytelling—that K-12 educators can use gather student perspectives on school-related issues. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/west/pdf/REL_2014035.pdf</p> <p>UMOJA Bellamy-Charlens , E. M. (2011). <i>African American Student Voices: Experiences Within an Umoja Community</i> (Doctoral Dissertation). Dissertation research summarizing key themes and experiences gathered from questionnaires, focus groups, and interviews with UMOJA students between 19-28 years old who were attending an urban Southern California community colleges from 2007-2010. http://sdsu-dspace.calstate.edu/bitstream/handle/10211.10/1428/Bellamy-Charlens_Erin.pdf?sequence=1</p> <p>University of Houston <i>The Power of Digital Storytelling to Support Teaching and Learning</i> Highlights how the University of Houston College of Education has used digital storytelling to inform teaching and support learning; includes guidelines and recommendations for how to engage in storytelling activities. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1125504.pdf</p>
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Activities Across the College

Student perspectives can also be gathered **in unexpected spaces and places and from individuals who take on various roles in the community college life of our students**. Data are everywhere in our institutions, and everyone can be involved in collecting relevant information from students. Depending on the student population of interest and the research objective and questions, colleges can strategically involve different stakeholders who interact with students in different venues, and help reinforce the collective and collaborative nature of GP inquiry and design. Table 4 below **highlights possible roles different college stakeholders can take in gathering student perspectives**, including a sampling of information they could gather and possible methods for collecting that evidence.

Table 4. Possible Information to be Collected and Research Methods to be Used by Various Stakeholders

Potential Research Stakeholders	Opportunity Areas for Data Collection	Methods for Collecting Information from Students
Admission and Records Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What are reasons students state for submitting a change major form?</i> • <i>Why do students drop a course? All their courses?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of change major forms • One-question survey
Financial Aid Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What challenges do students share with financial aid staff?</i> • <i>What do students indicate works during the financial aid process?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation checklist • One-question survey
Learning Community Directors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What do students say about the important supports they received that are useful, but unique to the learning community?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-class activity • Focus group • Survey
Instructional Faculty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What are faculty hearing from students about the supports they need, the challenges they are encountering to succeeding, specifically in the class and/or generally in school?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-class activity • Observation checklist • Fishbowl
Counseling Faculty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>How many students who are coming in this week are aware of the college's available meta-majors?</i> • <i>What are students' top three issues or questions (e.g., revising education plan, seeking academic/non-academic supports, seeking information on the connection between programs and jobs)?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SARS (Scheduling and Reporting System, a web-based software that tracks appointments and drop-ins sessions along with information on general topics addressed) • Early alert system • Referrals • Counseling case notes • Observation in guidance classes
Administrators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What meta-majors resonate with students, and how should they be described and marketed?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Town hall meetings • Shared governance meeting minutes

Table 4. Possible Information to be Collected and Research Methods to be Used by Various Stakeholders (Continued)

<p>Case Example(s)</p>	<p>Lansing Community College <i>Conversations with the Provost</i> Engagement of over 3,000 students in conversations with the college’s former provost to both normalize the GP concept, and get their feedback on what to name career communities and what programs to organize under these communities.</p> <p><i>See Lansing Community College in Section 4: What Does Collecting Student Voices Look Like in Action?</i></p> <p>University System of Georgia, Diversity and Inclusion <i>Guide and Tips for Planning a Town Hall on a College Campus</i> http://www.usg.edu/assets/diversity_summit/documents/Guide_and_Tips_for_Planning_a_Town_Hall_2016.pdf</p>
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Step 4: Analyze, Summarize, and Share Student Voices Findings

Once students' voices have been captured, the next step is to analyze, summarize, and organize the information to share with the various audiences that can benefit from these student insights.

Analyzing and Summarizing Student Voices Findings

When summarizing information, consider **how to organize it in a way that best represents the stories, ideas, and concerns shared by the students who participated**. Information might also need to be **processed in different ways for different audiences**; for example, administrators might be more interested in student perspectives on their experience with college-level processes, while faculty might be drawn to a separate set of findings such as students' experience with their academic program. Data analysis and summaries should also take into account which findings are most actionable in the short, medium, and long term.

Sharing Student Voices Findings

Sharing the results of student perspectives research is, in and of itself, another **way to engage key stakeholders, including students, in the guided pathways inquiry and design process**. Summarizing and disseminating key takeaways from the information collected **lets students know that their voices were heard and their input is valued**. Key stakeholders involved in the research process may also realize that their time and effort has led to information that can inform their work and their ability to serve students better.

Various dissemination strategies can also **provide opportunities for students to be part of the discussion as to what should be done with what is learned**. Consider how to effectively share specific messages and recommendations resulting from student perspectives research (e.g., chart, video, presentation slides, white paper, brief) such that they resonate with, and can be accessed and reviewed by, different audiences. Table 5 offers some possible formats for communicating student perspectives findings, where the findings could be shared, and how they could be disseminated. Timing is important. **Student voices should be summarized and shared as soon as possible** after completing the activity to take advantage of the momentum and interest the research process has incited. Dissemination should also **underscore how the data will be or have been used to affect practice and policy**, if appropriate.

Step 4: Analyze, Summarize, and Share Student Voices for Action

Analyze

- How should the information be organized to most effectively tell the students' stories?
- What recommendations/advice can we draw from the findings?
- What is your timeline for conveying this information?

Summarize

- How should findings be summarized for the different audiences who need/want this information?
- What messages do you want to share that relate to key audiences concerns and priorities related to guided pathways?

Share

- Who are your key audiences?
- Who should share the findings so different audiences and stakeholders learn about the results and recommendations?
- What is the best format for sharing the findings with key audiences and stakeholders, including students? What is the best "channel" (e.g., presentation, email blast, social, written report or brief, etc.)?

Act

- Given students' perspectives, what are the short- and long-term actions that we can take to advance the GP framework?
- What action do you want your various audiences to take?

Table 5. Approaches for Sharing Student Voices Findings with Various Audiences

Potential Research Stakeholders	Opportunity Areas for Data Collection
Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Posters highlighting key findings on kiosks throughout campus • Charts and diagrams highlighting key data on website • Presentations to student government • Emails highlighting key themes to students who participated in the research • Article in the student newspaper summarizing research and findings • Peer-to-peer outreach during campus events and activities
College Executives (Chancellors, presidents, vice presidents, trustees)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentations (e.g., shared governance or membership (senate) meetings, flex / professional development days, boards of trustees) • Brief or white paper summarizing key findings
Administrators (Deans, managers, directors)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New or revised policies and procedures highlighted with attention to how student input informed changes
Instructional Faculty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short videos sharing specific student stories to highlight a key finding or recommendation
Counseling Faculty	
Staff	

Step 5: Determine Next Steps for Student Engagement

Consider what next opportunity the college might offer to include students in GP development to ensure that your effort to engage students in your GP inquiry and design work continues past whatever initial student voices activity you implement. In some cases, the findings and recommendations that result from your process of collecting student voices may point to an area that requires deeper investigation or additional student perspectives. In other cases, a fresh development in your GP inquiry and design may indicate the need to reach out to a new population or examine a unique angle of the student experience. Even further, testing of new approaches, processes, and systems may call for student feedback on their effectiveness.

Whatever your stage of inquiry and design on the *CCC Guided Pathways Self-Assessment*, we strongly encourage you to **iteratively return to the process of collecting student voices and engaging students in your colleges' development of the GP key elements**. As noted in Section 1, **student involvement in cross-functional inquiry, integrated planning, inclusive decision-making structures, and guided major and career exploration is particularly required for full realization of these GP key elements**. Doing so in an intentional way, using the scale of adoption identified in the *CCC Guided Pathways Self-Assessment*, will help strengthen your institution's systematic listening to students and students' meaningful engagement. Undoubtedly, their input and involvement will ensure that this movement remains true to its core—keeping students at the center.

Step 5: Determine Next Steps for Student Engagement

- Given the results of our process of collecting student voices, what areas of the student experience may need deeper investigation?
- Assessing where we are *now* in our GP inquiry and design, what new perspective of the student experience might require student input?
- What new GP approaches, processes, or systems have we recently established that could benefit from student feedback?
- What ways can we move student engagement along the *CCC Guided Pathways Self-Assessment* scale of adoption in the GP inquiry and design stages, particularly in areas of cross-functional inquiry, integrated planning, inclusive decision-making, and guided major and career exploration?
- How can information be shared with students in way to keep them engaged as part of the GP inquiry and design process?

Section 4: What Collecting Student Voices Looks Like in Action

We can learn about engaging students in GP inquiry and design from the experience guided pathways pioneers across the state and nation. Many early adopters have already experimented with the different methods for gathering student perspectives outlined in the prior section, including through surveys, focus groups, informal meetings with college leadership, and activities designed to get student input on new meta-majors. We describe some of these college efforts below, featuring a range of examples from institutions in California and beyond: Bakersfield College (CA), Lansing Community College (MI), Sierra College (CA), Skyline College (CA), and Yuba College (CA).

In some cases, the college examples outline the details for one specific student voices activity. We review the motivations for the activity; the questions the college aimed to answer, the student groups engaged and the process for reaching out to those groups; the ways students were involved in providing their input; and what the college ultimately did with the information. In other cases, we show an evolution of student engagement activities for colleges that are further down the road with their GP development. When available, we provide a contact and/or source for more information that colleges can tap to learn more.

Cross-functional teams can use these case studies as a starting point for identifying and planning your own process for collecting student voices, in tandem with the information provided in *Section 3: How To Collect Student Voices*. Consider working with the discussion questions found in the sidebar, *Applying Case Studies to Your Own College Context*.

Applying Case Studies to Your Own College Context

When reviewing these case studies as a cross-functional team, consider using the following discussion questions to inform your own process for collecting student voices:

- What seemed most valuable about this student engagement activity?
- How might this student engagement example work in our college context?
- What is different about our college context that we need to consider?
- Who might be best positioned to lead this type of activity? What additional support might our college need to secure to carry it out (e.g., outside facilitator, trainer)?
- What timeline are we working with and what resources are available for this type of activity?
- What more do we need to know in order to consider planning and implementing this activity?

Bakersfield College

Background

Bakersfield College (BC), located in California's Central Valley and serving nearly 28,000 students annually, launched its guided pathways work in January 2014. In a recent Academic Senate for California Community Colleges [Rostrum article](#), two faculty leaders offered this explanation for Bakersfield's decision to rethink how it was serving students (Strobel & Wojtysiak, 2017):

[BC]'s embrace of the college [Guided Pathways System (GPS)] comes after a sobering look at our student success rates and several professional development workshops that enabled us to better understand the students who now make up our student body today.... Higher education attainment rates in our county are half the statewide average, and [BC] faculty came to realize that we needed change. We are also a Hispanic serving institution and recognize that poor educational attainment is a fundamental equity issue.

BC is one of three California community colleges selected to participate in the AACC national Pathways Project, attending intensive institutes to support its work over a three-year period. The college tackled its GP work on multiple fronts from the start—documenting its educational plans in DegreeWorks, building student support services, creating Course Identification Numbering System (C-ID) and transfer degree curriculum, and implementing a strategic outreach and intake program funded by the California Community Colleges Student Success and Support Program (SSSP).

BC included students in their process early in their GP development and continues to involve students as a means of assessing the impact of changes as they are made, striving to engage a variety of student perspectives. Below we describe BC's first effort to engage students in informing its GP reform.

What Questions Was the College Seeking to Answer by Engaging Students?

BC conducted a series of focus groups with students and faculty as part of its GP inquiry and design. The college's objective was to build understanding of pathways integration at the college, and the kinds of experiences that students perceive as critical to their success in the community college, as well as the kinds of challenges they face. The articulated outcomes for these focus group outcomes were to understand (1) students' educational goals for attending the college, and (2) students' learning experience at BC.

Which Students Did the College Engage and How?

Initially, BC sent an invitation to all faculty, and faculty in turn referred students to participate in focus groups. The college made efforts to specifically reach out to and include students from equity-focused, STEM, and basic skills courses. BC also recruited students that it thought were receiving effective support from the college, such as those using supplemental instruction. Notably, the inclusion of students who it believed were well-served revealed many barriers that the college was not aware existed. BC also realized early on in conducting their student focus groups that it needed to talk to specific populations separately in order to elicit more honest responses, rather than mixing student groups (e.g., STEM and basic skills students together).

Five focus groups of about 25 students were conducted at BC's main campus and its center. The comments were very different between the two locations, suggesting that colleges should be sensitive to the potential diversity of students that may be associated with different locations. Students were recruited for participation through faculty in classrooms, the student government, and BC's supplemental instruction program. The only incentive for participation was food.

The outreach effort was lead by a management employee who, at the time, was working on her doctorate; she now serves as BC's Director of Academic Support Services.

What Activities Did the Students Do?

As an AACC Pathways Project college, BC leveraged the *Pathways Focus Group Manual* developed by the initiative with support from CCSSE. This guide provides a comprehensive "how to" for conducting focus groups with students, and the college further customized it for its own context and research objectives, as show in the sample protocol below.

The management employee who is now Director of Academic Support Services led the focus groups. She was selected for this task given her education in counseling; and her doctoral work prepared her well for running the 90-minute focus groups. She worked with an administrative assistant to take notes and additionally recorded the sessions.

BC chose to modify the AACC protocol, as it was found to be cumbersome. Using all the questions and the complete profile simply took too long. Prior to beginning its guided pathways work and before identifying the need for transformation, the college had conducted a number of focus groups with students. This prior experience allowed BC to narrow the questions to fit the time and its needs. Questions centered on understanding students' educational goals for and experiences with attending the college, including prompts about students' process for goal selection, the relevance of their coursework to their program of study and career goals, and factors that support their success in college.

How Did the College Leverage Students' Engagement?

The information obtained from students identified various barriers to student success, including the challenge of balancing school and work, and issues with respect to counseling services. In response to the former, the college increased the availability of work opportunities on campus. In response to the latter, the college provided professional development to counselors and shifted its advising model. Previously, BC expected counselors to be equipped to advise all students, acting as experts with respect to all majors and all career goals. Today, the college has identified "Completion Coaching Teams" that support students in each of the colleges 10 meta-majors. These teams integrate counseling by selected counselors and advising by discipline faculty.

The college continues to conduct student interviews in order to determine how it is doing with its GP reform and how new approaches are impacting the student experience. Despite the steps taken over a period of more than two years, the college continues to identify ways they can further improve the student experience.

For More Information...

Contact Maria Wright, EdD, Director of Academic Support Services
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Bakersfield College Guided Pathways Website
<https://www.bakersfieldcollege.edu/bcpathways>

AACC's Pathways Focus Group Manual
<http://cccgp.cccco.edu/Portals/0/AACC-CCSSE-Pathways-Focus-Group-Manual%20%281%29.PDF>

Guided Pathways: Two Professors' Perspective on Why We Need the College GPS
<https://www.asccc.org/content/guided-pathways-two-professors%E2%80%99perspective-why-we-need-college-gps>

Lansing College

Background

Lansing Community College (Lansing) is located in Michigan's capitol and serves over 21,000 students annual. In 2014, Lansing began its guided pathways journey, first with a homegrown effort, followed by participation in a statewide initiative driven by the Michigan Community College Association and the Center for Student Success. Seeking additional structure for and support to its work, Lansing subsequently joined the first cohort of AACC Pathways Project colleges in 2016. Today, the college has adopted meta-majors, restructured provision of its student support, and is well underway with its GP implementation.

Throughout this evolution, Lansing has engaged students in a variety of ways at multiple key junctures to inform its GP development. Today, the collection and use of student perspectives in formal and informal ways is becoming more pervasive in different functions of the college. Below we describe three activities Lansing pursued with students related to two key moments: naming and mapping meta-majors, and providing feedback on GP implementation. Under each activity, we describe what questions the college aimed to answer, which students were engaged and what they did, and how Lansing used the information.

Naming and Mapping Meta-Majors

Lansing realized early on the importance of engaging students in its GP design and development. Christine Conner, Lansing's Guided Pathways Coordinator and a fashion faculty member, shared that it was clear the college "needed student approval of what GP should look like and involve" from the start. In turn, the college initially sought students' direction on what to call its meta-majors through a campus survey. In 2016, the college's Center for Data Science developed the tool in SurveyMonkey and deployed the survey to students. To encourage broad participation, the college pushed this poll out through the campus email system, advertised on its website and via posters, and talked to student clubs and organizations so they could encourage their membership to respond.

The survey itself explained Lansing's movement toward a GP approach and the restructuring of programs so they were grouped in more student-friendly ways with direct connections to their employment and educational goals. The poll then asked participants to vote for their preferred name for these program groups: "meta-major," "career divisions," or "career communities."

Ultimately, the college was pleased by students' participation, securing a 35% response rate. Career communities surfaced as the overwhelming favorite, with approximately two-thirds of the vote. According to Conner, "It was exciting because students were so interested, and it was obvious that they felt strongly, so we went with career communities."

Following in early 2017, Lansing engaged students to both further normalize the GP concept, and get their feedback on what to name each individual career community and what programs to organize under these communities. To do so, the GP leadership team organized eight "Conversations with the Provost," led by then Provost Richard Prystowsky. Again, Lansing aimed to engage participants representative of the entire student body. The team outreached widely through posters, student emails, promotions in the student newspaper and on the college website, and again worked through its strong student networks, including its "student academy" (honors students), student employee system, and student organizations.


Sessions took place in student-centered places such as the college’s student commons, Center for Engaged Inclusion, and larger meeting rooms on campus, and during times that would accommodate different student schedules. Participants were offered free pizza and “pop” and the opportunity to share their thinking with top college leaders. This approach proved successful, as over 3,000 students total attended these conversations.

Prior to holding the sessions, GP leadership team developed draft career community names and program groupings to help guide these discussions. Proposed career community names included (1) arts and communication; (2) business, economics, and management; (3) computer engineering/manufacturing and industrial technologies; (4) health and human services; and (5) liberal arts. The sessions followed a rough script, asking three key questions:

1. Do the following groupings make sense to you in that the programs of study are related?
2. If the groupings guaranteed that your required core courses and electives would apply, how likely would you change your program of study? Is this important to you?
3. Do you have any suggestions for improving the names of the groupings?

Conner notes that students were very forthcoming with their opinions, and admits that participants struggled with some of the terminology, stating that computer engineering/manufacturing and industrial technologies was “clunky” and that students were not completely satisfied with “liberal arts.” That said, participants could not identify more descriptive alternatives; so, in the meantime, Lansing decided to pilot the career communities with these names. At the same time, Conner underscores the iterative nature of this work, noting that the college is now considering renaming the “liberal arts” to “transfer studies” based on ongoing input received from students and practitioners and the college’s on-the-ground experience implementing these communities.

Providing Feedback on GP Implementation

Once its GP implementation was underway, Lansing wanted to check in with students about how it was doing with its GP reform work, and what more students thought needed to happen. The college specifically aimed to take students’ temperature on their understanding of GP; explore students’ experience at the college as GP-related reforms were being deployed; and ask them if GP was fully implemented at Lansing, how that experience might change. Lansing specifically selected student focus groups to answer these questions, and received tools and support for this activity as part of its participation in the AACC Pathways Project. Specifically, Lansing leveraged the CCSSE Pathways Focus Group Manual for guidance for how to recruit students and what to ask once they were in the room, customizing the proposed protocol for its own context.  support—out at one of the AACC Pathways Project Institutes—offered the GP leadership team an added chance to learn from other colleges’ experience with this approach.

With this activity, Lansing took a more discerning approach to recruitment. Again, working with its Center for Data Science, the GP leadership team identified prospective participants based on their schedules and invited students by name. It reached out to specific student groups, including part-time and full-time learners, and students who were at varying stages of their Lansing journey, from entry to nearing completion. In late fall 2016, 90 students participated in a total of six sessions that last between two and three hours; again, the college provided food. Lansing engaged a facilitator from its Business Community Institute (Workforce Development Division) to lead these sessions.

Lansing learned a number of lessons when implementing this activity. Conner shares that keeping student groups separate (e.g., part-time and full-time students) allowed the college to get “pure” information from each population. She also suggests dedicating ample time to planning and outreach to target audiences. Serving food continued to offer a draw for students and Conner also found that engaging faculty in student recruitment proved highly effective.

Lansing returned to these focus group results time and again in 2017 to inform their continued GP design and implementation efforts. The college recorded these sessions, and Conner advises other institutions to do these same, stating, “We’ve returned to these [recordings] over and over and over again.” Conner summarizes top takeaways as follows:

- Current students want the benefits of GP right now!
- Students would also like their program faculty advisors and general advisors to be upfront with them and to take their personal/individual lives into consideration when talking to them about educational planning. They want honest and logical advice that will get them to their goal with the exact amount of classes and the least amount of money.
- Making sure that every Program Pathway is created from courses that provide the necessary skills for employment or transfer to the next institution.
- Becoming a student-centered institution is a tough task for a college to take on, but it is for all of the best reasons--our students.

The college will widely share these findings, along with other student data and updates on GP progress, at a series of workshops during an upcoming week of professional development prior to the start of the spring 2018 semester. Conner reports that all of these sessions are fully subscribed.

Ultimately, Conner notes the power of student voices to help the college stay focused through the difficult work of institutional reform. Remembering back to one of the first “conversations with the provost,” Conner recalls one young woman who started at a university, took a semester off, and returned to higher education at Lansing. While a casual exchange was taking place between the provost and students about the prospect of guided pathways coming to the college, this student was on the edge of her seat, hand raised high. When the provost called on her, she exclaimed her enthusiasm for the possibility. Then, the student stated:

You said you’ll be giving us direction, and you’ll let us know when we’re taking something not on our pathways. So, you’re saying that right now I could be walking into oncoming traffic, and no one is stopping me. I don’t want to be walking into oncoming traffic. Please, stop us from making a mistake.... We expect that when we come to college that we will be guided, not that we should know everything on our own.

For Conner, this story, and so many that have followed, have been deeply impactful.

For More Information...

Contact Christine Conner, Guided Pathways Coordinator, conne4@lcc.edu

Sierra College

Background

Located about 30 miles outside of California’s state capitol of Sacramento, Sierra College (Sierra) serves nearly 25,000 students annually across three campuses. In May 2016, the college launched a homegrown effort to develop a comprehensive guided pathways approach, including:

- Academic maps and interest areas (meta-majors)
- Structured onboarding processes
- Proactive academic and career counseling
- Enhancement of its early alert system
- Instructional support and co-curricular activities (including professional development)

A two-year presidential taskforce titled “Re-engineering for Student Success at Sierra College” (R4S) oversees this effort. The president charged this taskforce with examining all aspects of the college’s policies, procedures, and practices, with the goal of improving student success at all levels. This taskforce aims to develop a roadmap for fundamental change at Sierra that will thoughtfully, genuinely, and effectively move it from a model focused on access, to a model that focuses both on access and completion. Fifteen faculty (instructional and special services) and two Executive Deans (former Dean of Liberal Arts and former Dean of Student Services) comprise this leadership team, selected for their roles at and perspectives on the college. At the same time, this group employs full collaboration practices to ensure stakeholders are engaged and informed, and have every opportunity to provide input and feedback as the work unfolds—including students.

One of the college’s first GP design efforts centered on mapping the college’s 150 degrees and certificates and organizing them into the pathway structure. Sierra recognized this step as a critical juncture to engage students, as described below.

What Questions Was the College Seeking to Answer by Engaging Students?

As the college began developing its “interest areas,” often referred to elsewhere as meta-majors, it recognized that student understanding of the interest area concept and the naming and organization of these areas must appeal to and work for students. In turn, it sought student input on what to call the interest areas and how to group programs under these different categories.

Which Students Did the College Engage and How?

Sierra involved its Student Senate in this activity, asking this leadership group to identify peers to participate. While engaged students were the first to get involved, efforts were made to expand involvement to the student population more generally. Sierra made an all-call to students at large, reached out to student workers, and worked with some faculty to do activities in class. Sierra additionally engaged students in classes in local high schools. Existing contacts at the high school were used to identify students to participate in the card-sorting activity described below.

What Activities Did the Students Do?

Faculty initially developed maps (two-year plans) for all majors and certificates, a collaborative effort involving discipline and counseling faculty. Sierra then convened students to participate in the process of developing related interest areas. The college deemed the student perspective as paramount to this endeavor, as opposed to the professional and academic perspective employed while faculty mapped the curriculum. When students were convened, the R4S taskforce informed participants generally about the GP concept and engaged them in the sorting activity described below.

Playing cards were developed to represent each of the college's programs. Groups of five to seven students received the cards, post-its, markers, and paper. The group was then asked to sort the cards in a way they believed made sense. The goal was to (1) come up with a manageable number of groupings, and then (2) name the groupings. The R4S team gathered data from all the groups who engaged in the activity, and then worked with Sierra's Office of Research and Planning to conduct an analysis. The research team employed text mining techniques (using R) to develop a dendrogram, which showed those programs that were most often linked together. This analysis showed clear relationships between programs and formed the basis for the college's discussion about which programs belonged together in interest areas. Based on this analysis, nine interest areas were identified:

1. Applied Technologies
2. Business and Innovation
3. Earth and Environment
4. Education
5. Language and Literature
6. Public Safety, Health, and Wellness
7. Visual and Performing Arts
8. Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math
9. People, Culture, and Society

While Sierra involved students in different ways through this process, the college found that even more student input would be ideal. The R4S team also recognized it is critical to ensure that faculty are involved and have opportunities for input too; as Sierra's R4S leadership says, "Don't rush the process."

How Did the College Leverage Students' Engagement?

This process yielded several options that the R4S taskforce then shared with the Academic Senate, modified, and finalized. After finalizing the interest areas, the taskforce worked with the college's marketing department to create interest area icons. Then, Sierra used SurveyMonkey to gather student votes on the images. Students received an email requesting their participation, ensuring a response would require no more than two minutes. The college is still in process with finalizing these icons.

Through this initial effort to engage students in GP design, Sierra discovered some valuable lessons. While involving students in the formation stages of GP development has its benefits and their feedback is desired, the R4S team found that “it is critical to remember that students are busy being students.” They also discovered that, when possible, it may be more effective to present concepts to students in person.

For More Information...

Contact Pat Efsseaff, Executive Dean, Student Success, pefsseaff@sierracollege.edu

Reengineering Sierra College for Student Success

<https://www.sierracollege.edu/planning-governance/r4s/index.php>

Skyline College

Background

Skyline College's (Skyline) institutional transformation is grounded in a shared vision—known as its “Comprehensive Diversity Framework”—developed by faculty, staff, and administrators over several years of collaborative inquiry and reflection. Initially published in 2013, this vision formed the basis for an overarching completion initiative, the *Skyline College Promise*, with the aim that all Skyline students would “Get In, Get Through, and Graduate on Time.” The Promise included the adoption of guided pathways among the signature components of the college’s comprehensive approach.¹ In spring 2016, Skyline began its GP work in earnest, including collective study of the national literature on guided pathways, site visits to early adopters across the nation, and multiple college-wide forums and working sessions. These foundational efforts gave rise to the development of an inclusive, cross-functional Design Team and various work teams. An early focus on the Design Team has been the development of meta-majors.²

Skyline is actively engaging students in shaping its GP reform. The *Design Team* oversees the college’s redesign work. This team of over 25 members includes faculty, administrators, staff, and students; these stakeholders also serve on six “Inquiry Teams.” Each Inquiry Team focuses on a different aspect of GP implementation, including (1) designing a first-semester exploratory course for students, (2) fostering development of students’ affective domain to promote college success, (3) redesigning GE, (4) integrating high-impact practices, (5) redesigning student support services, and (6) developing an undeclared student experience.

Skyline’s Design Team recognized the importance of broadly involving students in making the case for GP to all campus stakeholders and in providing additional direction as to where to begin its GP development. The Design Team established principles to guide the college’s creation of meta-majors, including “focus on student perspectives/perception.” In turn, Skyline has been intentional about systematically seeking student involvement in its inquiry and design process, leveraging the Career Ladders Project as a resource to help build internal capacity to include student voices on an ongoing basis. In 2017, the college engaged students through a series of focus groups to gather their perspectives on the key factors impacting their ability to get in, get through, and graduate on time. The success of this initial engagement led the college to continue developing and deepening its practice for bringing student voices into its GP work, including soliciting student input on its meta-major development. Below we describe these two efforts—student engagement with making the case and naming meta-majors.

1 Find a diagram showing the relationship between the Skyline College Promise and guided pathways [here](#).

2 Find an article summarizing Skyline’s effort to launch development of guided pathways college-wide [here](#).

Making the Case for Guided Pathways

In early 2017, Skyline engaged the Career Ladders Project (CLP) to conduct student focus groups, one of its first efforts to systematically include student perspectives in the conversations about designing GP taking place at the college. The focus groups centered on better understanding students' experiences at Skyline, particularly what helped or hindered their selection of a major, and their ability to choose classes and access needed supports. Engaging an outside partner with GP expertise allowed the college to ensure its student perspectives research addressed foundational issues and key elements related to guided pathways design. CLP worked closely with Skyline's Office of Planning, Research and Institutional Effectiveness (PRIE) and Office of Student Life and Leadership Development to recruit and engage students and ensure that the collaboration enhanced PRIE's long-term capacity for gathering student voices.

As outlined in *Skyline Students Voice Their Perspective* (2017), CLP worked with the college's Office of Student Development to send an open invitation to all students, encouraging them to sign up for one of several predetermined focus groups. The college identified these slots based on a student traffic map created by PRIE and in consideration of convenient times for both day and evening students. Students received a \$25 gift card, which incentivized their participation and recognized and respected the time they contributed to this activity; the Office of Student Life and Leadership Development also fed students pizza during the focus group sessions.

Ultimately, Skyline recruited 51 students for seven time slots. PRIE provided statistics on characteristics of 40 of the 51 participating students who RSVP'd, including race/ethnicity, gender, age, number of units accumulated, length of study at Skyline, and educational goals (Dadgar, Buck, Sinclair, Fischerhall, & Palmer, 2017). While the number of participants was strong, participants tended to be somewhat more White and female, when compared to the overall college population. CLP's Director of Research Mina Dadgar, who led this effort on behalf of the organization, shared that future recruitment could be strengthened to ensure participants are more representative of the college population by "going where students already are," such as engaging specific learning communities or special programs, working directly with faculty teaching key courses, and/or conducting focus groups during class time (strategies successfully utilized by CLP at other institutions) (personal communication, January 18, 2018).

A CLP facilitator ran each focus group, asking students what their process had been in selecting majors and choosing courses, what resources had been helpful to them in navigating their college experience, and what other help they felt they needed. When time allowed, facilitators also asked students if they knew of anyone who had dropped out of college and if they knew why that individual had decided to leave (Dadgar, Buck, Sinclair, Fischerhall, & Palmer, 2017). Dadgar reported that students were highly engaged, indicated that they appreciated participating in such a conversation, and wanted to know when Skyline would implement changes based on their input (personal communication, January 18, 2018). Further, utilizing highly-trained facilitators that were welcoming and nonjudgmental about the students' experience likely contributed to participants' candor.

CLP recorded, transcribed, and analyzed all seven focus groups, identifying recurring themes and determining key issues facing student entry, progress, and completion (Dadgar, Buck, Sinclair, Fischerhall, & Palmer, 2017). Themes included:

- Most students found choosing a major to be a daunting task.
- Choosing courses and getting into the right ones was often challenging.
- Students generally found that the supports available to them were helpful, but many were unaware of the different types of supports that exist.
- Students yearn for a sense of community and peer connection.

Skyline Students Voice Their Perspectives provides a summary of these findings and includes the protocol employed by CLP.

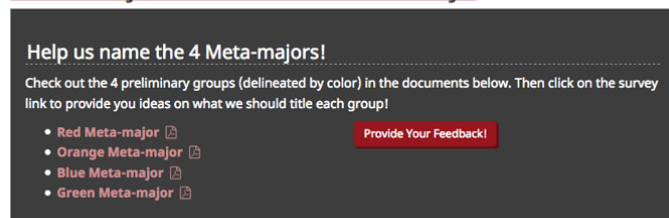
Naming Meta-Majors

Building on the success of this initial effort to bring student voices into its GP work, Skyline is continuing to seek opportunities to include student perspectives as it moves from its inquiry to design phases. The college's *Meta Majors and Guided Pathways* page provides a glimpse into this commitment. To develop meta-majors, the Design Team held all-faculty workdays to allow departmental faculty to work together to map degree and certificate course sequences for their programs. This data was then compiled into data visualizations and graphs to analyze overlapping courses among degrees and certificates across campus. The college then conducted focus groups with students from areas that had no overlapping courses (Automotive, Cosmetology, and Massage Therapy) as well as Counseling and Communication courses to understand from a student perspective what relationships these stand-alone degrees and certificates had to the four meta-majors. These conversations resulted in groupings that made sense to students.

During fall 2017, the college subsequently launched an effort to collect student input regarding the naming of its meta-majors. Initially, the college organized its programs under four different meta-majors, temporarily assigning each grouping a color. A short online survey asked students to review the programs grouped under each color, and offer a suggestion for what each grouping might be called, as shown in the screenshot below (see *Figure 1, Skyline Meta-Major and Guided Pathways Student Survey*). Skyline also held additional focus groups with a number of student groups including Middle College juniors and seniors, transfer students, and students that sit on the Communication Squad and the Associated Students of Skyline College (ASSC) to solicit feedback on names for each cluster of degrees and certificates. In completing this process, Skyline realized that many of the students on campus that were interviewed were already socialized to know the current divisional naming conventions and decided to create a beta-test using students from its high school partners.

Figure 1. Skyline Meta-Major and Guided Pathways *Student Survey*

Meta Majors and Guided Pathways



Comprehensive Redesign

Skyline College is committed to empowering students to find success at every point in their educational journey. The Skyline College Promise is the College's commitment to help students "Get in, Get through, and Graduate on time". To fulfill this commitment, Skyline College has embarked on a comprehensive college redesign. This effort encompasses the Skyline College Promise Scholars Program; developing meta-majors and guided pathways; making impactful changes to teaching and learning, and integrating efforts across the college.

From this feedback, Skyline then drafted two potential names for each meta-major. With the two sets of names that emerged from the student feedback, the college created two mock websites along with a questionnaire for high school students to explore and answer questions about their experience with the meta-majors.

Continuing Student Engagement

Skyline continues to grow its student engagement, expanding the ways it both listens to students and gives them a position of power in its redesign work. In addition to including two students on the Design Team that oversees the college's GP efforts and four seats on its Communications Squad, Skyline regularly connects with the Associated Students as a resource. The college is also further implementing focus groups to gather additional information on a variety and range of topics, from "how did you choose a major" to "read these two potential department names and explain what you think this department does." When a product is ready, such as outreach/marketing materials, the Design Team readily gathers student feedback to ensure it will resonate with a student audience.

For More Information...

Contact Dr. Angélica Garcia, Vice President of Student Services, garciaa@smccd.edu, or Dr. Jennifer Taylor-Mendoza, Interim Vice President of Instruction, mendozaj@smccd.edu

Skyline Meta-Major and Guided Pathways Homepage
<http://skylinecollege.edu/metamajors/>

Skyline Students Voice Their Perspective
http://skylinecollege.edu/metamajors/assets/documents/Skyline_Students_Voice_Their_Perspectives_MD.pdf

Skyline Guided Pathways Resources
<http://skylinecollege.edu/metamajors/resources.php>

Yuba College

Background

Yuba College (Yuba), located in Marysville, CA north of Sacramento, serves just over 10,000 students annually. Flagging enrollments and dissatisfaction with student outcomes motivated Yuba leaders to jumpstart an institutional transformation effort in 2016. Yuba started with a site visit by the Aspen Institute designed to assess the college's challenges and opportunities, based on the criteria for and lessons learned from the Institute's *Community College Excellence* program. This visit resulted in recommendations for how Yuba could activate this reform using the Completion by Design (CBD) *loss/momentum framework* to direct its work, including gathering student perspectives to demonstrate the urgency for change and to engage stakeholders across the college in this effort. In spring 2017, Yuba additionally joined the *California (CA) Guided Pathways Project*, fully committing the institution to embracing the GP approach for its improvement framework.

What Questions Was the College Seeking to Answer by Engaging Students?

Motivated by the Aspen Institute's suggestion, participation in the CA Guided Pathways Project, and the potential for student voices to inspire and inform the college's GP reform, a team of Yuba leaders—including the Vice President of Academic and Student Services, Director of Academic Excellence, and the Academic Senate President—engaged the RP Group to conduct a series of student focus groups in fall 2017. These focus groups aimed to explore students' experience at each stage of the loss/momentum framework: connection, entry, progress, and completion.

Which Students Did the College Engage and How?

The RP Group's approach was to talk to student groups identified as experiencing disproportionate impact in Yuba's Student Equity Plan in each loss/momentum stage. In total, the RP Group conducted 13 student focus groups over the span of four days, involving 127 students from specific populations (students with disabilities, veterans, African Americans, Native Americans, Hispanics, low-income students, students age 20-24, and foster youth). These focus groups also included prospective Yuba learners: high school students, individuals attending the local One Stop adult school, and concurrently-enrolled students.

The RP Group worked with Yuba's Research Analyst, Cassie Leal, to develop a recruitment strategy to engage students from each of these populations. Ms. Leal led a multipronged approach, from broad publicity on the college's website, to direct outreach to key populations through multiple texts and phone calls, to class announcements via Canvas (the college's online learning management system). Participants were offered a \$25 Yuba bookstore gift card as an incentive for participation and food was provided.

What Activities Did the Students Do?

Connection stage students engaged in 60-minute focus groups, held at the high school, One Stop Center, or center where they were concurrently enrolled. These participants answered questions about (1) their college goals and barriers to enrollment, and (2) Yuba knowledge and experience.

Students in the entry, progress, and completion stages took part in 90- to 120-minute sessions that integrated round-table discussion with dot-voting activities to keep participants engaged throughout the focus group. These interactive exercises involved participants in ranking issues and generating new information about specific challenges and supports experienced during key college processes and/or facilitating and impeding their college journey. Participants were commonly asked about:

- Educational goals and plans
- Challenges they faced during that particular stage of their journey, either as a student in general or as a member of a particular population
- Steps they are personally taking to overcome those challenges, and the supports the college offers to help them succeed in spite of these obstacles
- Advice to college leaders to help better serve students during this stage and in particular from this student group

In addition to these common questions, the RP Group uniquely asked students in the entry stage about their onboarding process and experience in basic skills English and math coursework. The research team particularly explored how students in the progress stage track their movement toward their goal, and students nearing completion were specifically asked about how prepared they feel to take their next steps.

How Did the College Leverage Students' Engagement?

This activity generated a rich array of data, highly supportive of the college's decision to pursue guided pathways. These focus groups surfaced pointed insights about challenges students are experiencing, as well as practices they perceive to be supportive of their success at each stage of the loss/momentum framework. Additionally, these sessions generated insights on key issues students' grapple with across the entirety of their Yuba journey. Further, given the approach of engaging students experiencing disproportionate impact at different stages, the focus groups revealed considerations unique to specific student populations.

The RP Group submitted a report to the college in December 2017, summarizing these findings and providing related recommendations, mapped to both the loss/momentum stages and the four GP pillars. In January 2017, Yuba held an all-day FLEX GP workshop led by Kathy Booth as part of the college's CA Guided Pathways Project participation, which included an interactive session on this student perspectives research facilitated by the RP Group. This session aimed to further build the case for Yuba's guided pathways work and more broadly engage stakeholders across the college. Participants had the opportunity to process the student focus group results in small groups, identify which findings related most closely to their work, and pair student perspectives with outcomes data to fully understand the context for pursuing guided pathways. The college concluded the FLEX workshop by discussing what more it needs to know to inform its GP workplan, and how to both engage and provide professional development to stakeholders across the college in service of that plan.

For More Information...

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Section 5: References and Resources

The various materials, reports, and resources highlighted through the guide are **organized by the following categories**: Research, Reports, and Journal Articles; Focus Groups; Interviews; Surveys; Classroom Activities; Guides and Toolkits; and Websites. **Bolding has been added** to the resource titles to aid the reader in identifying the documents that are most relevant.

Research, Reports, and Journal Articles

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Community College **Survey** of Student Engagement (CCSSE)

<http://www.ccsse.org/sense/>

Community College Survey of Student Engagement **CCSSE Survey Tools**

<http://www.ccsse.org/aboutsurvey/aboutsurvey.cfm>

Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges Student Support (Re)defined

Student Survey Instrument

http://rpgroup.org/Portals/0/Documents/Projects/StudentSupportReDefined/Resources/MethodologyandInstruments/SSR_Student_Survey.pdf

Skyline Meta-Major and Guided Pathways Student **Survey**

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Classroom Activities

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Guides and Toolkits

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Websites

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<http://www.chabotcollege.edu/learningconnection/ctl/arenas/StudentVoices-MakingVisible.asp>

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