

Developing Guided Pathways: The Importance of Faculty Voice and Leadership

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Julie Bruno, President

Frequently, a creative or fashionable idea attracts attention at colleges across the state. Seemingly independent from one another, colleagues at different colleges and districts engage in conversations about a particular concept – newly conceived or perhaps reimagined from the past – that holds promise for helping colleges to better serve and support students. The latest such concept to garner attention and discussion is guided pathways.

The term “pathways” can have many different connotations. Some colleagues will immediately reference well known pathway models such as CTE career pathways, where courses are sequenced and the program is structured in such a way as to provide students with the optimal experience in achieving a certificate or degree. Another pathway that often comes to mind is the Associate Degree for Transfer that, once awarded, guarantees admittance to the CSU system and 60 units toward a baccalaureate. Others may evoke more recent efforts to integrate high school students into community colleges through options such as dual enrollment or middle college programs that enable high school students to begin college early, thereby showing them the pathway to a college award.

In the past year, another way of thinking about pathways has emerged and has received an extraordinary amount of attention in California. As a precursor, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) launched its national Pathways Project—referred to as the Guided Pathways Project—with colleges in 17 states signing on to participate. The Guided Pathways Project is “focused on building capacity for community colleges to design and implement structured academic and career pathways, *at scale*, for all of their students.”¹ Three California community colleges joined the effort: Bakersfield College, Mt. San Antonio College, and Irvine Valley College. Other California community colleges interested in guided pathways but not willing or ready to fully commit to the structured AACC model started their own local efforts. These local efforts, at various stages of development, frequently adhere to or are based on the AACC Guided Pathways principles. Additionally, the California Guided Pathways project was launched in December 2016. This new effort is designed to adapt the AACC Guided Pathways model to California community colleges. Initially, the project will include 15 to 20 colleges selected through a competitive application process.

Pathways have not just captured the attention of many of our colleagues; in January, the governor included \$150 million in his budget for guided pathways. The governor’s budget summary states, “The Budget proposes additional investment in student success. Specifically, the Budget includes \$150 million one-time Proposition 98 General Fund for grants to support community colleges’ efforts to develop and implement ‘guided pathways’ programs.”² Of course, the budget is not yet finalized and is subject to revision, but by including funding for guided pathways, the governor recognized the significance of pathways to our students and colleges.

In considering the implementation of any pathways program, discussions are and should be collaborative, involving participation from all constituent groups on campus including students, staff, and administrators. However, certain characteristics that are inherent in all pathways establish the obligation for academic senates and faculty to be at the core of the effort. Any pathway designed for students to achieve their educational goals includes curriculum, student preparation, degree and certificate requirements, and program development. In other words, pathways land squarely within the 10+1. Regardless of whether the pathway program is adopted from an existing model or is developed locally, academic senates must take the lead in decisions that involve academic and professional matters. As always, the goal is to ensure that all pathways provide a quality educational experience that enhances opportunity and illustrates the value of learning for all students.

As colleges continue to investigate pathways models, faculty must be thoughtful and deliberative in choosing the design. California community colleges serve populations with a variety of educational needs and goals. Implementation of any pathway program must include discussions about ensuring a comprehensive education that not only prepares students for their jobs and careers but also provides the knowledge and skills they will need to succeed in all aspects of life, including their roles as family and community members as well as national and global citizens. Furthermore, all pathways must provide students with wide exposure to diverse thoughts and perspectives

and minimize unintended consequences such as constraining student opportunity to explore, develop, and grow in thought and action.

The Academic Senate encourages innovation in education, and to provide support for these pathway efforts, Resolution 9.12 F15 *Support Local Development of Curricular Pathways* urges local academic senates and curriculum committees to be genuinely involved in decisions regarding any curricular pathway program under consideration. Furthermore, as pathways programs are designed, developed, and implemented in our colleges, the Academic Senate will be investigating and disseminating effective practices as directed by Resolution 9.03 F16 *Investigate Effective Practices for Pathways Programs*.

Conceptualizing new and innovative educational pathways for students is exciting and invigorating. Pathway models hold tremendous promise, and the appeal of these models resides in the integrated and intentional approach, the holistic focus on the students' experience from the students' perspective, and in the flexibility to adapt to our 113 unique colleges. Of course, any pathways initiative at a college must be a collaborative effort that engages all constituent groups on campus, but academic senates and faculty must take the lead and be at the center of all stages of planning and implementation. The Academic Senate for California Community College is committed to supporting faculty as they begin and continue this work for their colleges, their communities, and their students.

[1] Information on AACC Pathways Project may be found at <http://www.aacc.nche.edu/Resources/aaccprograms/pathways/Pages/default.aspx>

[2] A summary of the Governor's proposed budget may be found at http://www.ebudget.ca.gov/FullBudgetSummary.pdf?utm_source=Ed100

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Guided Pathways: One Professor's Response to Redesigning America's Community Colleges

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With the California Governor's 2017-18 budget including \$150 million for Guided Pathways and the California Guided Pathways Project,[1] guided pathways have clearly arrived in the California Community College System. The California Guided Pathways Project is supported by the Foundation for California Community Colleges, funded by the College Futures Foundation and the Teagle Foundation, and modeled after the American Association of Community Colleges Guided Pathways Project. In response, the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges' Resolution 9.03 Fall 2016, Investigate Effective Practices for Pathways Programs, makes clear the role that faculty must play in understanding and shaping the guided pathways movement.

One important presentation of the concept of guided pathways is *Redesigning America's Community Colleges – A Clearer Path to Student Success* by Thomas R. Bailey, Shanna Smith Jaggars, and Davis Jenkins, which was published in 2015 as a response to the nationwide issue of low graduation rates in the community colleges based on research cited by the authors. This text promotes the guided pathways approach in lieu of the cafeteria style of program offerings. The book and its content have been shared among administrators both nationwide and statewide. In turn, college administrative leaders are sharing it with faculty. In particular, the chancellor of the Los Rios Community District offered to provide a copy of this book to all staff members (upon request) provided that they read it. A website was set up for staff to provide comments on the book. One Sacramento City College professor, Dr. Liam McDaid disseminated the following response to the faculty at the college and the LRCCD chancellor:

Redesigning America's Community Colleges is the latest fad book in education. Corporate fads seem to be passed on like hand-me-downs to government and education. Oddly enough, it seems the military responds faster to corporate fads than other organizations, but education is usually last on the fad food chain. This book came out this year, so some leapfrogging happened with this book. Perhaps it's due to the title of the book, being that it's written "for us."

Are all the ideas in *Redesigning* wrong? No. Its comments on the disconnect between the area of counseling and academic programs is spot on and much can and should be done to bridge those gaps. But it suffers from a fatal flaw: it already assumes as true what it seeks to prove, that the "cafeteria model" of community colleges is flawed and a waste of taxpayer money. The question that needs to be addressed is this: are we here for the widest possible access, or the best possible outcomes? *Redesigning* assumes the latter is true. These two goals are in conflict with each other and *Redesigning* should be given credit for forcing us to face that. One fundamental question is connected to our values as a community college: do we wish to limit access to get our numbers up? Because any other scenario for increasing our metrics is unrealistic. Also, are the metrics measured even meaningful? *Redesigning* admits that the jury (and data) is still out on whether its ideas will actually produce the outcomes they claim to seek.

Education has long been in the crosshairs of those who wish to weaponize it (or outright destroy it) through monetization. What GDP do we add to the community? How many jobs do we help create? How much extra (taxable) income do we generate through our activities? Little is mentioned in these discussions about the intangibles of education. This is because they are viewed as side effects of economic impacts – or in the worst case scenario, ignored as irrelevant. *Redesigning* plays right into this trap.

Education adds measurable economic value because we live in an advanced nation where everything can be measured that way. What percentage of California's GDP is generated by the arts? Is this the reason for their existence? Education provides worth to individuals in the intangible form of confidence building and group interaction. Being able to inform oneself to participate in the political responsibilities of our society. Being able to discern when someone is trying to fool them and why. Becoming a role model for a family or whole neighborhood by showing what can be accomplished. None of these things can be measured economically. If we limit access, many of these intangibles will be more difficult to achieve.

Sacramento City College has been here for a century because we are here for whatever educational needs our students have. We don't expect them to show up with a career path already mapped out. We are the last best hope for mass education in the twenty first century, and this is the real reason why the cafeteria model has persisted for so

long. It addresses needs that aren't economic. Make no mistake, we do have a positive effect on our regional economy and we do matter that way. But that is not and never has been why we are here. We are a bridge to a better life and economic improvement is but a small portion of the treasures our students take with them when they graduate or transfer. Our college shows anyone that there is always a way to change one's life for the better and when students say that SCC saved their life, they do not exaggerate. This fact should be at the heart of our institutional vision and mission.

Whether one supports all, some, or none of the ideas in *Redesigning America's Community Colleges*, the ideas contained in the text need to be understood and debated. Faculty, administrators, and other college staff must work together to design and provide the best educational programs and opportunities for the citizens in their college service areas as well as throughout California.

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[1] <https://foundationccc.org/What-We-Do/Student-Success/California-Guided-Pathways-Project>

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Guided Pathways: Two Professors' Perspective on Why We Need the College GPS

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Jessica Wojtysiak, Bakersfield College

(Note: The following article is part of an ongoing dialogue about the guided pathways framework. For reference, previous Rostrum articles on this issue may be accessed on our website under publications.)

We appreciate the attention the ASCCC gave the Guided Pathways framework in the February 2017 *Rostrum*. We agree with one author's view that the ideas behind Guided Pathways need to be understood, discussed openly, and debated critically. For that reason, we offer the following report from our perspective as lead faculty on the Guided Pathways System (GPS) implementation team at Bakersfield College (BC).

Bakersfield College's embrace of the college 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. About 80% of our students are first-generation college students, and the same percentage arrive on our campus unprepared for college coursework. Less than a third of our students were getting their degrees or certificates or transferring after six years, and only one percent of students who placed into the lowest level of remediation ever reached transfer level coursework. Higher education attainment rates in our county are half the statewide average, and Bakersfield College 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.

The traditional "cafeteria model" we used at BC makes the false promise of access to a better life. The cafeteria model in community colleges that was created in the '60s and '70s was set up to be the cheapest way to educate the masses, not because it was a pedagogically sound way to educate. The promise is false because the cafeteria model fails to provide the proper guidance that today's first-generation and basic skills students need. These students do not know how to navigate the bewildering collection of choices regarding courses, majors, degrees, and careers. If anything, the cafeteria model has become a Darwinian system—if you can make it through the cafeteria model and go on to get a bachelor's, you are the exceptional one.

We mapped out the number of students who start out below college level and do not make it to the next level of remediation. These students were not just taking a long time to get to college level coursework and get their degree; they were giving up entirely. We lost even "A" students between semesters. The flood of students entering our doors for the first time was reduced to a mere trickle by the end of the remediation sequence. The over-arching goal of BC is transforming lives for the better, but that transformation cannot happen for the two-thirds of students who are lost in the higher education maze. Bakersfield College joined the American Association of Community College's national Guided Pathway Project not because we were doing well but because we had a hunger and widespread commitment to do better. The main goals of the college GPS are making the pathways clearer, giving students the tools to make the right choices that fit their interests, and being intentionally intrusive in our guidance.

We believe that the college GPS solves the fundamental problem of clarity. Our students want to know how college fits their life plan: how to prepare for college in high school, how to choose a path and how to stay on the path. These three problem areas should be considered from a student's perspective.

Because they do not have any family history to draw from, new students are uncertain about what is involved with those college-required careers their high school teachers and counselors have told them about. While in high school, no family member has firsthand experience to guide them in selecting high school classes that will prepare them for college. Anything their family can tell them about college and college-required careers is based on third-hand information that high school students would consider less reliable or not relevant to their particular background. If the high school student is blazing the trail to college for his or her family, the student is going to rely on a peer network for information. Unfortunately, many of these students' peers are also blazing the trail to college for their own families, if they are interested in college at all.

Because they do not have any family history to draw from, students do not know how to choose a major that will lead to a higher-paying career. At Bakersfield College, new students must choose from a menu of 72 degrees. Many students will just pick a major at random to fill a mandatory box required in the registration process with no real commitment to that major. Without that commitment to a clear path, students wander about trying to find majors that fit their interests and abilities. They take classes they do not need. At Bakersfield College, the number of units accumulated by students to get an associate's degree in programs that award ten or more degrees per year is a mean of 85.0. That is 25.0 excess units they should not have had to take. At \$46/unit, the student wastes \$1150 in tuition, not to mention the cost of textbooks, living expenses while attending school, and lost time. Financial aid will mitigate some of these losses, but the restrictions placed by financial aid on the total number of units towards a bachelor's degree covered mean students risk running out of financial aid while taking upper division courses after transfer.

Even if they are clear and committed to a major, 85% of our students do not have family members who know what it takes to complete a four-year bachelor's program. Making the transition from high school ways of studying to college ways of studying is extremely difficult without guidance. One must learn to handle college-level courses that, according to Title 5, require two hours of study time outside of class for every hour in the classroom. Students did not have to do that in high school, and they must learn to succeed in courses that move at twice the pace of a high school class. Students must also deal with being told that a two-year program may actually require three or four due to remediation, and they must learn to succeed while also juggling their family responsibilities, such as caring for younger siblings, their own children, or other relatives, especially if the primary breadwinner becomes disabled at a job that does not have the generous benefits found in jobs where a bachelor's is the minimum entrance requirement. If the student starts out at a community college, he or she may also have to face the added problem of having to change institutions half-way through that bachelor's pathway. If the transfer institution requires additional lower division courses, the student is understandably frustrated because the Institution appears not to have communicated with each other and worked the transfer system out.

The data collected and presented in *Redesigning America's Community Colleges*^[1] shows that our school is not unique. Community colleges across the country are struggling to fulfill the promise of higher education. We believe that changing our system from the traditional cafeteria model to the college GPS will empower a wider range of students to explore higher education because it makes the journey less intimidating. The college GPS will also enable those students to actually complete their educational goals and to do so in a much timely and, for the student, more cost-effective manner. As educators we strive to make things clearer, more understandable, and less intimidating. We want our students to succeed. For this reason, we are working to create the college GPS with other faculty at Bakersfield College, and we encourage other faculty to engage in the deliberate process of institutional self-reflection.

The creation of the college GPS at BC is an iterative process driven by faculty discussion. One of us—Strobel—co-wrote a paper on the college GPS that uses the geographic GPS app device as an analog for describing the philosophy behind the college GPS. You can find it on our [President's College Projects website](#) ^[2]. The college GPS paper also shows how the college GPS integrates all of the statewide student success initiatives we all have been working on for the past several years into a coherent framework, including multiple measures assessment, accelerated remediation, SSSP, Equity, and others. Bakersfield College faculty are working on the meta-majors—"areas of study" or "areas of interest"—with student input. We are carving out the role of faculty in the completion coaching teams that will provide the intrusive guidance our students need. Both of us wish the process could be faster, but we welcome those intense discussions because we know that careful deliberation and action will generate better outcomes for our students. For more information about our process, please contact Nick Strobel at nstrobel@bakersfieldcollege.edu or Jessica Wojtysiak jessica.wojtysiak@bakersfieldcollege.edu.

[1] Authors: Thomas Bailey, Shanna Smith Jaggar, and Davis Jenkins. ISBN 9780674368286

[2] *What is the Guided Pathways Model? Using the College GPS to Describe the Philosophy of Guided Pathways* at <https://www.bakersfieldcollege.edu/download/18362>.