

Guided Pathways Design Principles in Practice

Field notes from Site Visits to Learn about Guided Pathways from colleges in New York and Arizona

Mina Dadgar, Dina Buck, Kris Palmer & Chase Fischerhall (June 2016)

As Skyline College takes steps to better serve its students to “Get in, Get through, Get out on time,” it has sought opportunities to research evidence and learn practices from other dynamic colleges nationwide committed to success for all of its students. In June 2016, a Skyline Delegation made up of instructional and counseling faculty, administrators and Careers Ladders Project staff visited higher education institutions in New York and Arizona that are redesigning their colleges and making progress towards improving students’ experience and outcomes.

The Skyline Delegation visited and spoke with representatives from Arizona State University (ASU), LaGuardia Community College (LCC), Guttman Community College (GCC) and Mesa Community College (MCC) - all of which have increased the number of students who reach their educational goals of certificate completion, obtaining an Associate’s Degree, and/or transferring to a four-year university. The Skyline Delegation was inspired by the



seminal research by Community College Research Center at Columbia University that identified impactful practices at these colleges in the recently published book, *Redesigning America’s Community Colleges* by Bailey, Jaggars and Jenkins. This brief memo summarizes learnings and three key design principles from CCRC research and the Skyline Delegation site visits.

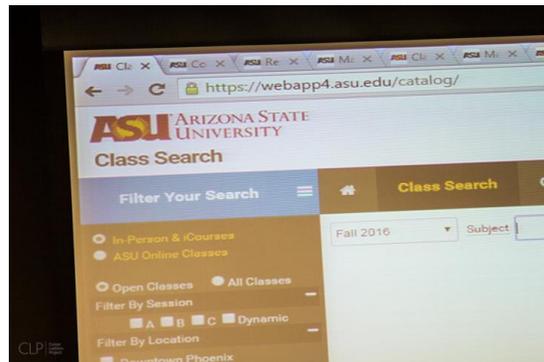
Undergirding design processes for all sites has been *consistent review of data and evidence, a culture of familiarity around current research and consistent consideration of student experience are integral to a successful design process*. Student voice was pivotal to the pathway planning processes. While the principles outlined below are all evidence-based approaches to institutional design that support student success and equity, our site visits confirmed that they could be successfully implemented in different ways according to each college’s specific student demographic and resources at hand. A Skyline College vision of Guided Pathways Design may incorporate each of these elements in unique ways that best serves the college and its students through constructively engaging the campus community in each stage of planning, implementation, and assessment.

Design Principles

Principle #1: Helping students choose a program of study

Exploratory Majors/Meta Majors and intentional support services help simplify students' initial choice of a major while providing embedded structural guidance toward choosing a program of study:

- At Arizona State University (ASU), instead of having to choose among a few hundred different majors, students who have not chosen a major select one of only nine exploratory tracks. These exploratory tracks (launched in the summer of 2013) include Business, Education, Health and Life Sciences, Humanities, Fine Arts & Design, Math, Physical Sciences & Technology, Social and Behavioral Sciences and Pre-Engineering. After completing 45 credits, all students are required to choose a major. ASU provides undecided students with multiple opportunities to learn more about different programs and career options, from mandatory enrollment in a college success course that includes modules on career exploration, to online tools (ME3), developed by the college to help with independent exploration of careers based on skills and interest.
- Similarly to ASU students, Loraine County Community College (LCCC) students who are undecided about a major have the option to select from a list of nine Program and Career Pathways when they apply. The Pathways allow new students to experience coursework from different areas within one of the pathways before being required to select a specific degree or certificate. The nine pathways they may choose from include Business and Entrepreneurship, Computer and Information Technologies, Culinary and Hospitality, Education, Engineering and Manufacturing, Health and Wellness, Human/Social Services and Public Safety, Liberal and Creative Arts, and Science and Math.
- Pasadena City College has implemented two Meta Majors: Digital Media and Design Technology. These two majors allow students to explore different pathways within the larger fields of digital media and design technology so they may determine which focus best suits them while fulfilling degree requirements in their first year regardless of which focus they eventually choose.
- At LaGuardia Community College (LCC), the college has developed First Year Seminar courses that are offered to new students based on “discipline” Meta Major of interest. The courses are taught by faculty in the Meta Major with the goal of helping students learn about different programs of study and careers under each discipline and allowing students to interact with others who have similar interests. According to a peer mentor, the fact that the First Year Seminar courses were specialized by discipline made them particularly useful to students.



Principle #2: Help students get through by clarifying course requirements for each program

Default program maps simplify student choice by showing the shortest path to the degree while accommodating and even supporting students who “opt out” of the default course sequence.

- ASU has created “major maps” for each major showing, term-by-term, the courses a student needs to take to stay on track. The major map illustrates the fastest way to finish a program of study: take advantage of “double dippers,” courses that meet both major and GE requirements. Once a student chooses a specific course option, the major map automatically changes to show the new course sequence that follows a specific prerequisite option. ASU balances student choice with structure by identifying “key gateway courses” that a student will need to complete in sequence, to stay “on track”. When students fail to complete key gateway courses in a specific semester, they are flagged as off-track and an advisor will reach out to them to understand why. If students are off-track for two consecutive semesters, advisors may ask them to change their major. Because program maps are clear and students’ course taking is tracked, ASU can use analytics to predict demand for the course sections to allow students to remain on track.

“We don’t want to get students to rack up excess credits for units they can’t use.”
 - ***Dr. Maria Hesse***

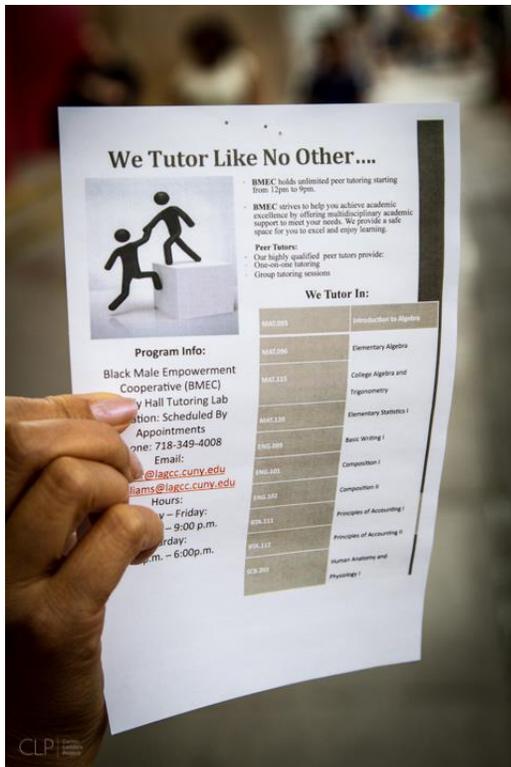
“We have changed the conversation from what do I take next, to what are your career goals and let’s help you find the best elective to give you those skills, and your internships... we are letting technology take care of things that are black or white & humans focus on the grey areas”
 - ***Dr. Maria Hesse***

- Mesa Community College (MCC) is creating program maps for each program of study. MCC has created “mapping sequence teams,” cross-functional teams of instructional faculty and counseling faculty to clarify course sequence for each program. Mapping coaches help the cross functional teams with the process and ensure student, faculty and counseling perspectives are all taken into account. While still in progress, MCC has shared the following as the lessons learned in its process of clarifying and simplifying a default program map for each program of study:
 - ❖ “Cross-functional” was the key phrase. It was very helpful to have faculty from across instructional departments collaborating with counseling faculty on designating and finalizing required courses and sequence for each program.
 - ❖ “Start with the end in mind.” Begin with learning outcomes and create consensus around those learning outcomes, and then see which courses meet those competencies. That early work helped faculty decide which

- ❖ GE courses would meet the competencies of each Meta Major. Next, address capstone courses that touch on several competencies.
- In 2012-2013, Miami Dade College convened 27 faculty and mapped program pathways. The college began by first working on creating maps for its most popular programs: Business, Psychology, Biology, and Criminal Justice. Together with Allied Health and Nursing programs (which were already mapped out), these programs enrolled 80 percent of the school’s students (as reported on MDC’s website). MDC is currently creating “communities of interest,” which are designed to introduce students to the broader field of interest and choose a specialized program of study or change major (Jenkins 2014).

Principle #3: Helping students reach completion or successfully transfer by providing proactive and integrated academic and non-academic supports

Among the colleges that we visited, an important thread was the high degree of collaboration between instructional and counseling faculty and the **integration of instruction and student supports**. This took various forms:



- At Guttman Community College (GCC), an entering cohort would split into “houses” and a team of instructional faculty, counseling faculty, and peer mentors would be responsible for that group of students. The faculty and peer mentors would meet regularly to discuss individual student progress, coordinating their actions and communications with each other and the students through technological platforms. Collaboration among the support team is at the heart of Guttman’s student centered model. Faculty receive release time and are asked to attend weekly team meetings to discuss each individual students’ progress.

“Now that I am part of a team, I realize that weekly team meetings [where we] get into granular discussions about the progress of individual students and their struggle is really important.”
 - **Guttman Community College Faculty**