

Including Student Voices

Santa Monica College

Their Approach

Using design thinking, Santa Monica College's Guided Pathways Steering Committee began its inquiry work by identifying creative ways to involve students. As the primary users of the college, students provide input needed to inform and drive the work, from identifying problems to developing creative solutions that will transform the college. The committee decided to create a Student Advisory Squad representative of the diversity of the student body to work side by side with college leaders to redesign the processes and practices that shape students' educational journeys.

What They Did

To recruit for the Student Advisory Squad, the steering committee created 16 student profiles that represent a diversity of student perspectives at Santa Monica College, and counselors used the profiles to seek students interested in joining. Now fully staffed, the Squad includes 15 student workers paid to participate in monthly Guided Pathways meetings and their own monthly meetings, where they debrief on the reform process as it unfolds, share updates, and hold deeper discussions of key topics. The participating students receive leadership training from members of the Steering Committee that enables them to effectively articulate and share their opinions about how to improve the college's academics and student supports. Squad members also attend retreats, workshops, and meta-major sorting and naming sessions, solidifying their role as key contributors to Guided Pathways redesign.

What They Learned

Counselors are key to recruiting and working with students; they know students from classes, meet with them individually, and have the opportunity and time to tell them about participating in the Squad. Faculty and staff learned from collaborating with students at the table that they could provide invaluable insights about unintentional barriers to achievement and college completion. Moving forward, the steering committee is planning a more structured training for GP team leaders on ensuring that student voices are included. The committee is also developing training for student team members to give them strategies for entering discussions, participating, voicing opinions, and asking questions.

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