The Guided Pathways Model

Background Research and Philosophy

Research conducted by the Community College Research Center (CCRC) indicates that higher education reform efforts that touch only a segment of the student body or a slice of the student experience are not enough to have significant impact on college completion rates and other measures of institutional success (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015). CCRC research points to the need for community colleges to move away from narrow, stand-alone initiatives and move toward interventions that are more:

a) **scalable**—reach a large percentage of the student body,
b) **systemic**—integrate multiple campus-support programs to generate collective impact on student success, and
c) **sustainable**—go beyond early, short-term interventions (whose effects fade over time) to long-term programs that support student success from college entry to program completion.

Purpose and Practice

To help address the foregoing issues, the CCRC, in conjunction with the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), has developed a *Guided Pathways Model*. The model involves "redesigning each part of the student experience, from the stage where students choose programs and start remedial or college-level work to the time of graduation" (Bailey, 2017, p. 2). The model consists of the following key practices.

1. **Mapping pathways to student end goals**. Clear maps are created by advisors and success coaches for every program the college offers, and it makes these maps easily accessible to students, so they can see:

   a) What courses are necessary to complete a program or qualify for transfer,
   b) How long it will take them to complete a program or transfer track, and
   c) What opportunities there are for employment or further education after program completion.

2. **Helping students choose and enter a program pathway**. New students are helped to explore different academic/career programs and complete an educational plan for their chosen program.

   a) Undecided students narrow their options by choosing from different meta-majors or "major clusters" (social science, health sciences, business, etc.).
   b) Colleges redesign developmental education so that students can enroll more quickly in college-level courses relating to their chosen pathway.

3. **Keeping students on a path**. Along with academic advisors, students keep track of the progress they are making toward completing their educational plan.

   a) If students are experiencing academic difficulties in certain courses or attempt to register for courses that are "off track," an early-alert system notifies advisors, so they can reach out to students and provide support.
   b) Colleges continually review institutional policies and practices that may be impeding student progress (e.g., inconvenient class scheduling, insufficient number of course sections, class cancellations, and courses in which there is an unusually high number of D, W, and F grades).

4. **Ensuring that students are learning**. Pathways are designed around specific learning outcomes that align with student competencies needed for educational or vocational success upon program completion (e.g., successful transfer to and performance at a four-year campus, or successful entry to and performance in a particular career field).

Since more than two thirds of community college students test into at least one remedial course, reforming developmental education along with the Guided Pathways reform initiative is the "next frontier" (Jenkins, Lahr, & Fink, 2017, p. 1). Integrating these two reform efforts will enable underprepared students to acquire basic academic skills more efficiently and enter Guided Pathways more expeditiously.

How AHE Supports the Philosophy and Practice of the Guided Pathways Model
by Dr. Joseph Cuseo

AHE is *scalable*—it's capable of reaching a large percentage of the student body.

AHE's multifaceted system—which includes such practices as ongoing professional development for course instructors and academic advisors, as well as a required first-year seminar for entering students—aligns well with the multiple prongs of the Guided Pathways Model. AVID's writing, inquiry, collaboration, organization, and reading (WICOR) strategies are scalable across the college curriculum, including the career and technical education curriculum.

AHE's holistic approach to student development ensures *comprehensive* support for the student as a "whole person," encompassing both academic and "non-academic" (personal) factors that are known to affect student persistence and program completion (Tinto, 1993/2012). A focus on both cognitive and non-cognitive factors is particularly relevant to the many academically underprepared students on community college campuses. AHE's holistic approach is also applicable to and scalable for academically prepared community college students. Guided Pathways scholars and proponents argue that completion of pathways can be stymied by "nonacademic issues, such as poor organizational skills, weak self-confidence or motivation, or the lack of a clear plan" (Jenkins, Lahr, & Fink, 2017, p. 2).

AHE is *systemic*—it integrates multiple campus-support programs to generate a collective impact on student success.

AHE's *comprehensive, cross-divisional infrastructure* has the potential to generate synergistic (multiplicative) effects on student success. Its system calls for the formation of interdisciplinary and interdepartmental teams intentionally selected from a broad cross-section of the campus community, including Academic Affairs and Student Support Services. In addition, AVID's first-year seminar connects students to student-support professionals by bringing them to class as guest speakers or bringing students to key campus support services via course assignments.

AHE is *sustainable*—it goes beyond early, short-term, college-transition support for new students to supplying sustained support throughout the college experience.

The transferable learning strategies and skills developed by the AVID system (e.g., writing, inquiry, collaboration, organization, and reading) are delivered proactively in the first-year seminar, but they continue thereafter by their inclusion in discipline-based courses that students take at later stages of the college experience. AHE also extends student support beyond the first-year seminar by fostering formation of out-of-class learning communities via the "AVID Center"—a physical and social space where students can collaborate with one another, as well as with peer tutors, peer mentors, academic advisors, and course instructors.

AHE helps students choose a program pathway and complete an educational plan.

Guided Pathways advocates argue that the model should not "*limit* choice, but rather provide a systematic process through which students can make *more informed* choices" (Bailey, 2017, p. 3). That being said, it is a model that requires students to choose a meta-major at college entry, which has raised concerns among student development professionals about how to intentionally and proactively support students' early decision-making and future planning (Atkinson, Frank, & McLaughlin, 2018). The AHE system can provide

such support through its advising modules that are designed to help students gain early self-awareness of their strengths (talents), interests, and values, and explore academic and career programs that are congruent with their personal attributes. AHE's first-year seminar also assists first-term students in educational planning and developing a well-informed graduation plan that includes relevant coursework, co-curricular activities, and experiential learning opportunities.

AHE can redesign developmental education so that underprepared students enroll more quickly in college-level courses related to a program pathway.

Among the most effective approaches to reforming developmental education are those that contextualize or connect academic skill-building directly to content being covered in credit-earning college courses (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015). For example, rather than delivering developmental education in the traditional form of *pre-requisite* courses that students must complete before they are allowed to enroll in college-level, credit-earning coursework, the *co-requisite* model accelerates developmental education by teaching academic skills in supplemental courses or "labs" that students enroll in *concurrently* with a college-level course (California Acceleration Project, 2018). This practice enables developmental students to make early progress toward a postsecondary credential, while simultaneously addressing their developmental needs (Edgecombe, 2011). Several states that have adopted the co-requisite model in lieu of the traditional pre-requisite approach have reported substantial gains in college completion rates (Complete College America, 2018).

Another advantage of the co-requisite model is that it allows students to make immediate use of the academic skills they are developing in supplemental sessions and apply them directly to the college credit-bearing courses in which they are concurrently enrolled. This practice should enhance student motivation to acquire the skills they are acquiring in the supplemental program; in addition, the college-level course in which they are concurrently enrolled supplies students with a meaningful context to apply their developing skills. Research indicates that for effective learning strategies to truly "take hold" in students (i.e., to become fully incorporated into their habitual approach to learning, rather than attempting to develop them in isolated skill-development workshops or stand-alone, skill-building courses), students need to have a sense of purpose for using these strategies in relation to a specific task (Perin, 2011). Research conducted in the state of Washington reveals that integrating basic skills instruction into career and technical education courses results in higher rates of student credit accumulation and program completion (Jenkins, Zeidenberg, & Kienzl, 2009).

Despite growing evidence for the effectiveness of these approaches to redesigning developmental education, most colleges have not implemented them at scale (Jenkins, Lahr, & Fink, 2017). AVID's WICOR strategies can be readily coupled with, or infused into, content covered in college-level courses, enabling students to experience accelerated developmental education within the context of relevant curricular pathways. Moreover, in addition to developing academic skills such as writing and reading, WICOR strategies include higher-order thinking (inquiry), collaboration, and organization, thus addressing other important aspects of college readiness (Conley, 2010).

AHE can help keep students on a path.

AHE's Socratic tutorial model prepares and positions peer tutors to help students succeed in key gateway courses within program pathways, particularly "gatekeeper" courses that have alarmingly high D, W, and F rates. AHE also connects students to peer mentors who can provide non-academic (psychosocial and motivational) support, helping students cope with personal issues that may impede their persistence to program completion.

Lastly, AVID's longitudinal data collection system can help track student progress across the respective pathways, enabling college campuses to identify where bottlenecks in student progress take place. This diagnostic information can then be used by the college to design and deliver timely support at pivotal points during the student's journey from pathway entry to program completion.

References

Atkinson, V., Frank, L., & McLaughlin, M. (2018, February). *Stranger in a strange land: Supporting first-year, undecided students in the land of guided pathways*. Paper presented at the 37th Annual Conference on the First-Year Experience, San Antonio, Texas.

Bailey, T. R. (2017). *Guided pathways at community colleges: From theory to practice.* Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges & Universities. Retrieved from https://www.aacu.org/diversitydemocracy/2017/fall/bailey

Bailey, T. R., Jaggars, S. S., & Jenkins, D. (2015). *Redesigning America's community colleges: A clearer path to student success*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

California Acceleration Project. (2018). *Powerful acceleration strategies*. Retrieved from http://accelerationproject.org/

Complete College America. (2018). *Corequisite remediation: Spanning the completion divide*. Retrieved from http://completecollege.org/spanningthedivide/#the-bridge-builders

Conley, D. T. (2010). *College and career ready: Helping all students succeed beyond high school*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Edgecombe, N. (2011). *Accelerating the academic achievement of students referred to developmental education* (CCRC Working Paper No. 30). New York, NY: Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University. Retrieved from https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/accelerating-academic-achievement-students.pdf

Jenkins, D., Lahr, H., & Fink, J. (2017). *Implementing guided pathways: Early insights from the AACC Pathways colleges*. New York, NY: Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University. Retrieved from https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/implementing-guided-pathways-aacc.pdf

Jenkins, D., Zeidenberg, M., & Kienzl, G. S. (2009). *Educational outcomes of I-BEST, Washington State community and technical college system's Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training program: Findings from a multivariate analysis* (CCRC Working Paper No. 16). New York, NY: Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University. Retrieved from https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/educational-outcomes-of-i-best.pdf

Perin, D. (2011). *Facilitating student learning through contextualization* (CCRC Working Paper No. 29). Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University. Retrieved from http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/facilitating-learning-contextualization-working-paper.pdf

Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition* (2nd ed.). Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Tinto, V. (2012). *Completing college: Rethinking institutional action*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.