

Student Perspectives Support Guided Pathways

Findings from Cuesta College
Student Focus Groups

Darla Cooper, EdD

March 2018

Agenda

- Introduce student perspectives research
- Highlight key findings
- Identify implications from the findings
- Explore potential connections to six success factors and Guided Pathways

What is the RP Group?

www.rpgroup.org

Mission

Strengthen CCCs' ability to gather, analyze, and act on information in order to enhance student equity and success

Services

Research, evaluation, planning, professional development, and technical assistance—designed and conducted by CCC practitioners

Organization

501(c)3 with roots as membership organization

Background and Methodology

Why Did We Do This Research and How Did We Do It?

Motivations for Student Perspectives Research

- Supplement and complement quantitative data on student outcomes
- Opportunity to inform and support new guided pathways efforts
- Hear personal experiences of Cuesta students

Methodology

- Conducted 11 focus groups, reaching 91 students
 - 60-minute sessions
 - 2 days in February 2017
 - Incentives (Amazon gift card, snacks)
- Eight groups were at SLO campus
- Three groups were at North County Campus (Paso Robles)
- Included students at different stages of their educational journey



Stages of Student Journey

Explored three different phases of Completion by Design
Loss/Momentum Framework:

CBD Stage	Student Group
Entry	Students who started at Cuesta in fall 2017
Progress	Students who successfully completed 15-44 units at Cuesta
Completion	Students who completed 45+ units at Cuesta

Student Groups

- Distance Ed students
- Academic probation students
- Basic skills math students
- Noncredit students
- First-time students
- Students with 45+ units
- DSPS students
- Foster Youth students
- Latino students
- Low SES students

What We Asked Students

- Asked every group
 - Culture at Cuesta
 - Challenges
 - Supports
 - Advice

What We Asked Students continued

- Asked specific questions related to each CBD phase (Entry, Progress, Completion)
- Asked customized questions for:
 - Distance ed students
 - Academic probation students
 - Basic skills math students
 - Noncredit students

Key Findings

What Did We Learn from Cuesta Students?

Presentation of Key Findings

- Themes across student groups
- Themes unique to North campus
- Themes by CBD stage
- Themes unique to specific student groups
 - Distance ed
 - Academic probation
 - Noncredit
 - Math basic skills
 - Latino

Themes across Student Groups - Successes

- Cuesta is a good college
- Staff and faculty care about students and their success
- Counselors are very helpful
- Academic support services helpful
- Love Canvas (both online and F2F students)
 - Especially appreciate ability to track grades in classes, and “what if” scenarios

Themes across Student Groups - Successes continued

- myPathways excellent and useful resource
- Getting good quality education, teachers are qualified
- Promise program is making things easier for these students
- Help from EOPS and DSPS invaluable

Themes across Student Groups - Challenges

- Lack of community on campus
 - Hard to meet and make friends/connections with other students in and out of class, “antisocial,” no welcome week/events, no space to socialize or study in groups
- Faculty do not consistently use / do not know how to use Canvas
- Website difficult to navigate; myCuesta is antiquated and difficult to use
 - Complicated and burdensome processes related to waitlists and replacing cancelled classes

Themes across Student Groups - Challenges continued

- Work/life/school balance
- Isolated location of both campuses
 - Challenges related to food, transportation, and housing
- Tutors not available in certain subjects
- Can be difficult to access counseling
- Counselors don't always take students' whole lives into account when doing education planning
- Lack of awareness of resources and events; ineffective communication
- Problems with receiving accurate financial aid information

Themes Unique to North Campus

- Like the advantages that come with being on small campus
- Zoom program is extremely helpful
- No space for students to meet with each other (hopeful about new building, but concerned won't be open extended hours for evening students)
- Need for more student life, specifically sports (intramurals)
- More “freebies” and events at SLO campus

Themes by CBD Stage - Entry

- Program that comes to local high school campuses seen as very helpful in getting them prepared
- Students from out of the area at a disadvantage because don't have access to this program or Promise
- Had very few problems accessing counselor or complaints about counseling they received

Themes by CBD Stage - Progress

- Counselors are key to getting and staying on track
 - Struggled before found their way to counselor
 - Wish counselors would specialize
- Other resources include education plans, ASSIST, myPathways, university materials
- Some uncertainty about how long it will take them to achieve their goals, especially if attending part time

Themes by CBD Stage - Completion

- Stressed importance of finding “right” counselor and sticking with that person
- Would like college to help them gain more exposure to career exploration (guest speakers, internships, career fairs)
- Problems accessing advanced classes they need to complete transfer and/or degree
- Most were planning to earn degree and transfer
 - Unusual finding – statewide 69% transfer without credential

Themes – Distance Ed Students

- Reasons why they choose to take online classes
 - Class only offered online
 - F2F classes don't fit with work schedule
 - When deem class isn't as important to their learning

Themes – Distance Ed Students cont'

- What they like about online classes
 - Welcome and access to syllabus before register
 - Having access to lectures, videos, and notes to review whenever they want
 - Can be more structured than F2F classes
 - Allows students to move more at own pace
 - Wished many techniques in online classes were used to supplement F2F classes

Themes – Distance Ed Students cont'

- Challenges related to online classes
 - Accessing certain software, only available on campus, but hours are limited
 - Confusing process for waitlisting online classes
 - Procrastinating students when assignment depends on interactivity
 - Pop up assignments makes planning ahead difficult
- Not using online counseling or tutoring

Themes – Academic Probation Students

- Only one student attended, however, still identified need to provide greater support for students on academic probation
- Got sick, but took responsibility for how she interacted with instructor
- Needed an advocate to help her figure out her options after getting on probation; not knowing options, not getting to right person who can help
- Recommended that students on probation be required to see counselor before registering

Themes – Noncredit ESL Students

- All want to improve their English
 - Most for better job; Some to be able to communicate more effectively
- Faculty, staff, and students helpful
- Process to get tested and registered easy
- Want counseling that can help them explore their options after noncredit (careers, classes, certificates)
- Want opportunity to practice English with native speakers in social settings

Themes – Math Basic Skills Students

- Re-entry students more likely to enroll level lower than they placed
- Found course with instructional aide to be most helpful

Themes – Latino Students

- Student composition community mirrors that of local community
 - However, faculty composition does not
- No strong Latino community or identity on campus
 - Aware of clubs for Latinos, but unclear about what they do or why students should join
- Lack of cultural awareness on campus

Discussion

- Which findings/themes stand out to you?
- What implications do you draw from these findings/themes?



Preliminary Implications and Connections

Strengthen Sense of Community

- Students want to meet students with similar interests and goals
- Cohorting students and/or having academic/career communities (meta-majors)
- Faculty can help by creating community in class
 - Icebreakers and group work/study
 - Use Canvas to create community in F2F classes

Students Need Support Throughout their Journey

- Counselors are key both before students begin and at every stage along the way
- Tools like myPathways can supplement by allowing students to self-track
- Faculty can lend specific expertise and insights related to their subject areas/careers

Increase Awareness of Resources

- Students need to be connected to resources earlier
 - Easier way for students to match themselves with resources they need
- Encourage faculty to promote resources in class and/or allow classroom visits from support services
- Explore new ways to reach students with information about resources

Improve Technology and Increase Faculty Use of Technology

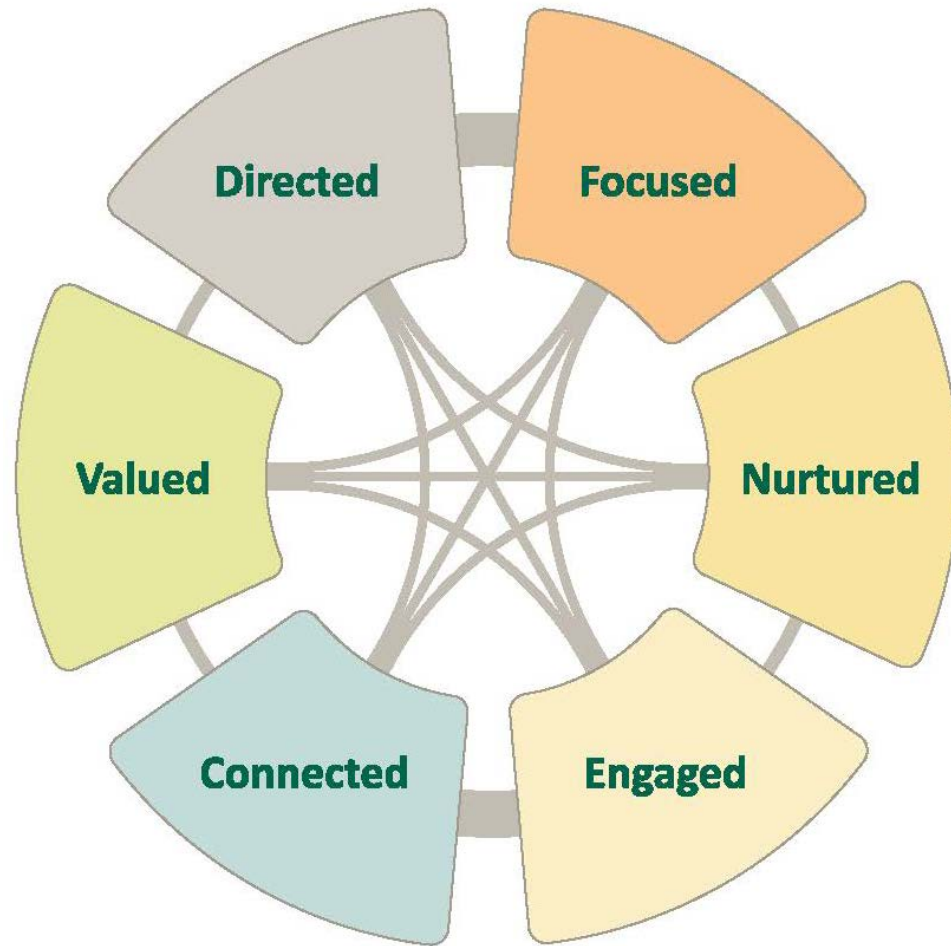
- Re-examine current technologies from student perspective
- Share with faculty how students view advantages of faculty using technology
- Provide additional training and other support for faculty related to Canvas



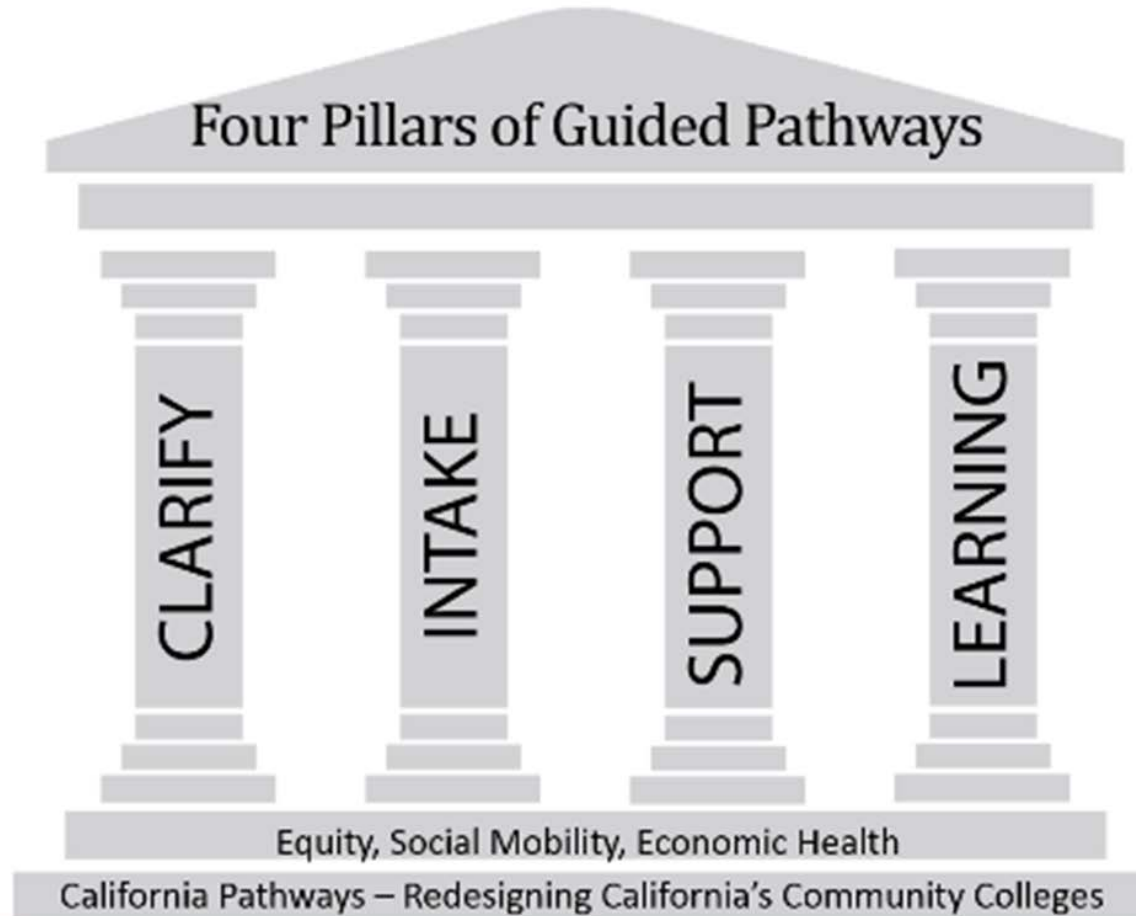
Potential Connections to Six Success Factors and Guided Pathways



Six Success Factors



GUIDED PATHWAYS



theRPgroup

Research • Planning • Professional Development
for California Community Colleges

Four Essential Practices of Pathways

1. *Clarify paths to student end goals*
2. *Help students get on a pathway*
3. *Help students stay on path*
4. *Ensure that students are learning*



Small Group Discussion

- What connections do you see between your students' experiences and
 - Six Success Factors?
 - Guided Pathways?
- What actions seem most urgent to address?

Thank You!