A GUIDED PATHWAYS CASE STUDY: CLOVER PARK TECHNICAL COLLEGE

WHY WE'RE HERE: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR TRANSFORMATION

Guided Pathways exists for the same reason community and technical colleges exist: to get students where they need to go. While every community college and technical school will approach this data-rich, student-centered, continuous improvement framework differently, there's still much to learn from each other, especially in times of challenges. Read on to be inspired.

"When the data shows that not all students have equal exposure to enrolling or not all industry partners pay students equally for knowledge gained, faculty feel the fundamental unjustness and want to change it." — Samantha Dana, Associate Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness

Samantha Dana
Associate Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness

BACKGROUND

In 2016, College Spark Washington and the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges launched an eight-year, $7 million Guided Pathways pilot aimed at increasing student completion, closing equity gaps, and developing change leaders. Ten institutions led the way so others could learn from their challenges and successes.

In addition to an independent third-party evaluation that provides comprehensive insights about the implementation, with implications for policy, practice and systems [Read the report here], we offer these case studies to demonstrate the potential when institutions fully commit to this mission-central change effort.

GRATITUDE

Alongside Clover Park Technical College, Pierce College, South Puget Sound Community College and Spokane Falls Community College, we're so grateful to Everett Community College, Lower Columbia College, Peninsula College, Renton Technical College, South Seattle College and Tacoma Community College. Every institution advanced this work, and we could have focused on any of these early adopters for inspiration and lessons learned.

COMMUNITY AND TECHNICAL COLLEGES
Washington State Board

CLOVER PARK
TECHNICAL COLLEGE

college spark
washington

EMBRACING CULTURE CHANGE

Sample Practices
1. Clover Park created a Teaching and Learning Center to ensure faculty improvement.
2. The only way faculty can increase their salary is through professional development, half of which must be in inclusive pedagogy.

"When I started teaching in community college, you had to figure it out yourself. But learning how to be an effective teacher can be accelerated with instruction and good support, and you need to be willing to pay for these changes." — Broxson
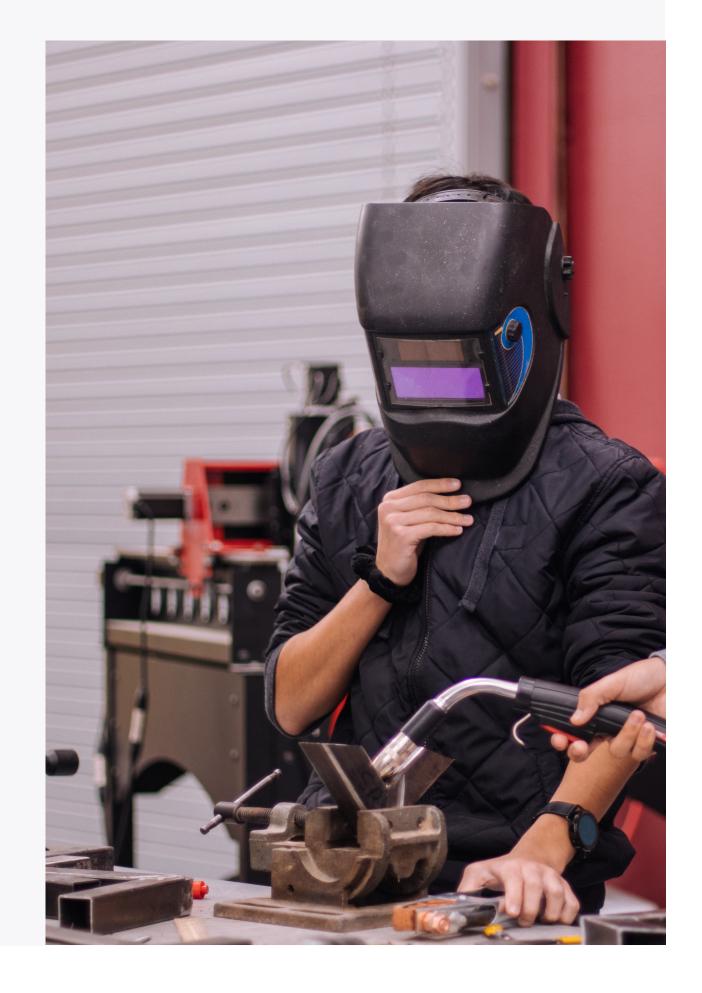

INTEGRATING STUDENT SERVICES WITH INSTRUCTION

Sample Practices
1. Due to previous work on Achieving the Dream, Clover Park followed and instituted the eight-step change model pioneered by John Kotter at Harvard University.
2. The model helped them form a cross-sectional, non-hierarchical team.
3. By breaking down silos, creating conversations and helping identify problems, the structure fostered a new way of seeing.
4. This positioned them to come up with creative solutions.

"We created a core team that aligned with our shared governance process. Every committee has co-chairs who work together, which creates more diverse voices. Also, now that we have a funded EDI office, EDI is at the table on those committees." - Dean Kelly, Vice President for Student Success

Example: No More Fast-Food Advising

One problem was the get-in, get-out beginning-of-the-year advising on top of the current workload. The solution? A welcome center with staff dedicated to new-student navigation, enrollment, financial aid and more, with technology that facilitated the support students needed. For instance, in an intake survey, if a student checks a box that they have a child, the childcare center gets notified and proactively reaches out about openings.

FACULTY AS CHANGEMAKERS

"For the program mapping, we had advisors, program and academic faculty all in the same room with a facilitator. For a while, it felt like talking and talking and not moving, but once a couple of programs got on board, others did too. Then things happened fast. You go slow to go fast." — Chris Mahoney, Dean of Instruction

Key Concept

Historically, students and technical program instructors didn't see the value of academic courses. However, when academic courses get revamped and contextualized in relation to technical careers and coursework, they round-out the student's education and career prospects.

This is long haul work.

Because of the scope and scale of these reforms, it's easy to get lost in the sauce in terms of accomplishments. There are wins for every college. Sustain the work by celebrating." — Dana

The best thing to come out of the Guided Pathways process is the dialogue between program and academic faculty, not only establishing understanding but building relationships." — Mahoney

Chris Mahoney, Ed.D.
Dean of Instruction

LEADING WITH DATA

"The college is very data-driven. In the past, there was less trust or capacity to ensure the data was good. Now we have a robust institutional research department and transparency with dashboards in Tableau." — Broxson

Thomas Broxson
Vice President for Instruction

Sample Practices

1. Faculty participate in outcomes and assessment day every year, looking at disaggregated data by race and ethnicity, adjusting their professional development plans and programs based on what they see, and using data in an iterative process to improve the quality of their programs.
2. The Teaching and Learning Center helps faculty address what they see in the data with professional development and pedagogy support.

"As a Guided Pathways coach, the most frequent question I get is, 'What improvements have other colleges seen, and what did they do to get them? Unpack that, and then I'll do it.' Because it's a movement focused on holistic college reform, it's not that simple. During the pandemic, students took fewer courses overall. We're still trying to see if math is working. With the interconnectedness and time to measure, it hasn't been clean for us." — Dana

MATH AND ENGLISH

"Our students are older, often without a recent transcript, with anxiety about taking college-level academic classes. Suppose a test tells them they need to take a pre-college class and spend more time and money before they can start their program when they are already doubting their decision. In that case, many turn around and never return, or they'll go for a short certificate instead of a degree." — Mahoney

"A Story About Forcing Functions

The math faculty at Clover Park weren't ready to let go of a placement test, so they designed their own. Before launch, a few administrators took the test and said, "Hold on, it's too difficult." That's when COVID hit, and the testing center closed. That forced them to pivot quickly to self-placement and corequisite courses, and faculty saw that those approaches worked.

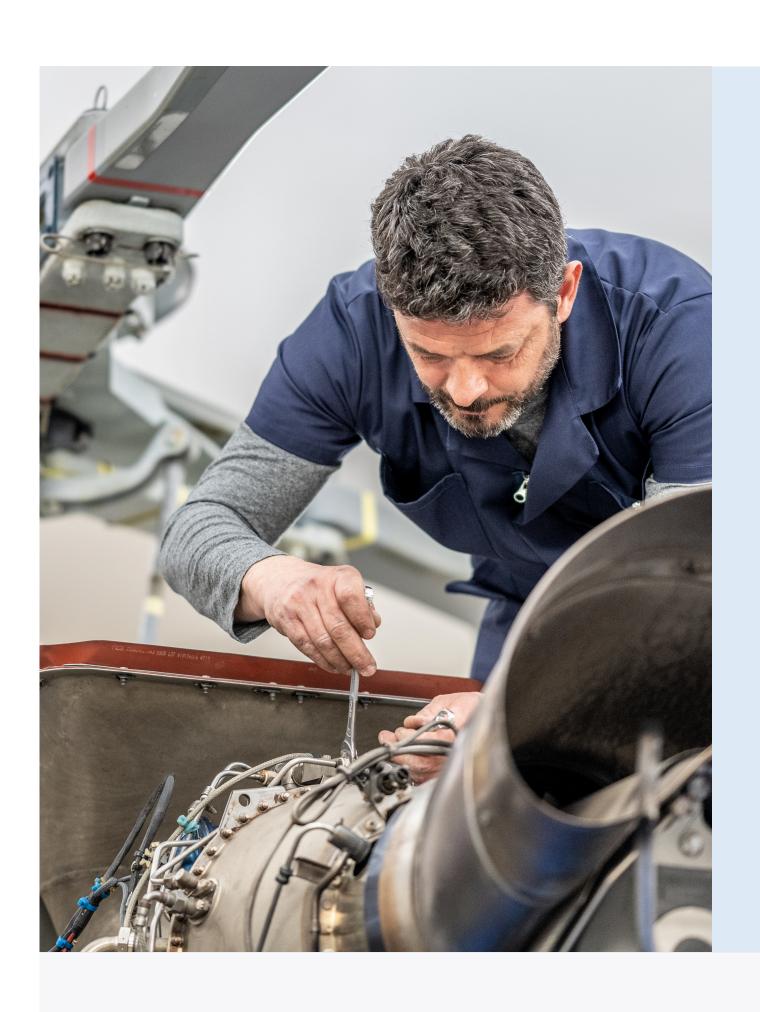**Quick Fact:**

During the first year they implemented math

SELF-PLACEMENT
and
COREQUISITE

courses, math completion rates

DOUBLED.

Example: Difficult Choices

When they eliminated their pre-college math and English sequences and moved all students into college-level classes with corequisite options, they had to rethink staffing. Like most colleges, they'd hired people without master's degrees to teach those courses. Since they were tenured, they offered them the opportunity to get master's degrees and helped pay for it. This option was a sacrifice for some faculty who'd spent as many as 25 years at the institution. Ultimately, not everyone stayed. "Those are the tough things that happen when you redesign a system." — Broxson

A Story About Food and Drink

Mahoney appreciates the Guided Pathways analogy, equating classes to a buffet and students needing to put together a meal. "But at a technical college, the problem is more like binge drinking and eating," she says. "If welding is a nice meal, and the academic courses intended to supplement the learning are the wine, then students generally start with the meal and end with the wine, if they finish at all." The task then was to bridge the gap between and integrate technical and academic courses in the student journey.

PUTTING STUDENTS FIRST

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ALWAYS IMPROVING, NEVER FINISHED

"The faculty now see the process of change as a constant, looking at data, seeing how students are doing and what the industry needs in their fields." — Broxson

Key Concept
- What's next? With half of Pierce County graduates not taking part in any post-secondary training, there continues to be a huge unmet need to make pathways between high school and technical colleges and the workplace easier to navigate in ways that reach more people.

"It's one of the things that we're still wrestling with, and it's important for Guided Pathways moving forward." — Broxson

"Our college feels very different from 5-6 years ago. We're always figuring out what's working and not, collecting faculty, staff and student voice with surveys and focus groups. This year, we're looking at maps and intake surveys and asking how it worked, and we'll continue to refine." — Kelly

Dean Kelly
Vice President for Student Success

KEY CONCEPT

Because of initiative fatigue, post-COVID fatigue, workload and challenges, people need to see the data and understand why their engagement is needed. In addition, people need to be compensated for their work, such as stipends for academic leadership.

"Guided Pathways and COVID played a role in where we are culturally. Regardless of what you call it, all the work we do supports all our students." — Dana