



## A GUIDED PATHWAYS CASE STUDY: SPOKANE FALLS COMMUNITY 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.

"There are many good-hearted, equity-intent educators on every campus. But it's difficult to build the bridge from intent to action, and there's a real role for admin and leadership to support that."  
— Jared Anthony, English Instructor and director of the Center for Engaged Teaching and Learning

**Jared Anthony**  
English instructor and  
Director of the Center for  
Engaged Teaching and  
Learning



### 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.



# EMBRACING CULTURE CHANGE

“When people understand Guided Pathways, everybody buys in.” – Messina

## Key Concepts

- Centering the data on success and graduation rates, Guided Pathways shifted the priority from how the college experiences the student to how the student experiences the college.
- It’s not about having answers but about everyone learning and growing. Messina says, “The most important thing a leader can do is commit to a goal and be open about how you get there.”

## A Story About Raising the Floor, Not the Ceiling

Being primarily a transfer college made creating clear course maps for students more challenging, but Spokane Falls stuck with it. At first, they leaned toward maps for every situation. Over time, however, they realized that creating fewer maps would work if knowledgeable advisors offered additional guidance for individual circumstances. Also, they focused on the basics, offering the courses students needed during the year they needed them, creating a solid base versus aiming for the pie-in-the-sky. “We heard early and often that Guided Pathways work is messy and to be okay with that,” says Glantz.

“The culture of higher education is innovative yet hesitant. We tell students it’s okay to make a mistake. To be a Guided Pathways school, we must be comfortable with that, too.” – Shearer

**Kathy Shearer**  
Director of Disability Support Services



**Kimberlee Messina**  
President

“I’m a first-generation student, and I remember what it was like not to have the money to explore before I got my degree. Our students need to complete or transfer successfully. That’s why we’re here.”



# PUTTING STUDENTS FIRST

“Nobody works in a community college who doesn’t want to be here. It’s a lot of effort. But Guided Pathways has been transformational in the way people think about the impact on students and what we can do better.” – Kathy Shearer, Director of Disability Support Services

## Example: Full Service

Recognizing that the library is a place of resources, in addition to its academic focus, they revamped it to house student support services like a career center, a needs-based grants office, a tech support center, academic coaching and more.

“We’re not a self-serve college anymore. We’re a supportive college.” – Anthony

## Key Concept

Changing the governance model to have student representation on all the committees contributed to momentum and success.

# FACULTY AS CHANGEMAKERS

"We had lots of meetings in our department and across campus. One that stands out was like a swap meet. The faculty spent the day pitching courses that might be useful on other maps. It was a wonderful opportunity to share across departments and for faculty to rethink what a course offers students." – Anthony

## A Story About Becoming Assessment Experts

How did Spokane Falls develop its approach to assessing student learning outcomes across degree pathways? They provided 50% release time for two faculty members and asked them to spend two quarters looking at research, the scholarship of teaching and learning, and how to build a system that would work for everyone.

"These faculty (with a bonus that the individuals selected had coding and research backgrounds) ended up being ambassadors that could see at the 30,000-foot level and also navigate fears and resistance among their colleagues," says Sarah Martin, faculty assessment mentor and dean of Computing, Math & Science.

## Example: Dispelling Fears

The first pathways they created focused on the humanities to help with fears from faculty members that students wouldn't have an opportunity to explore or that a particular class might get cut. The pathway shows students the many career opportunities and associated salaries in the humanities with an AA degree, a bachelor's degree, and higher degrees such as law.

## Example: Learning Together

Spokane Falls created and invested in the Center for Engaged Teaching and Learning (CETL) to ensure the faculty have the skills and will to support student success. Setting up a director term for faculty and offering 100 percent release to lead it, along with 1/3 release for cohort participants in the new faculty academy, provides dedicated time and resources. The effort is also linked to Guidance 105, a course for students still determining what pathway they want to take.



"Instructors who might want to become Guidance 105 instructors meet alongside new faculty, normalizing expectations and awareness that Guided Pathways is who we are and Guidance 105 is part of that." – Anthony

# LEADING WITH DATA

When the incoming vice president of learning rolled out a new data dashboard to every department, showing how many students were on the map, how far along they were, their GPA, disaggregated data, and more, she was struck that there was no anti-data sentiment.

"People were full of inquiry, curious and excited about having access," says Glantz. "It was quite a transformation from 7 or 8 years earlier."

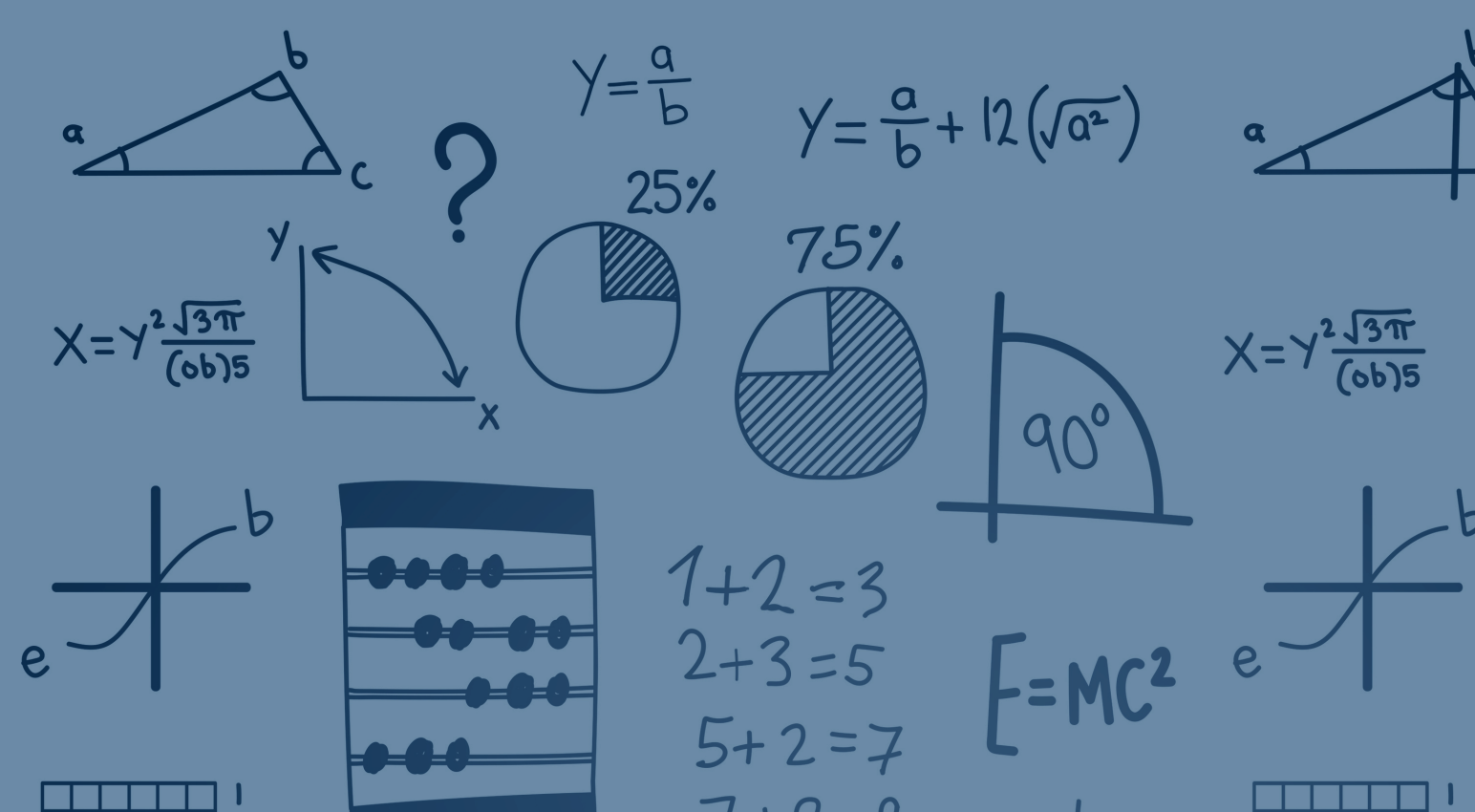
"We're seeing a challenge in Guidance 105 enrollment patterns. Black and African American students aren't enrolling at the same rate as other student populations. We need to figure out why it's not appealing or getting to all students." – Anthony

## Sample Practices

- By bringing everyone into understanding the disaggregated data, everyone wanted all students to succeed.
- While many thought that race couldn't matter in a place with little diversity, the data showed otherwise, leading to systems changes that helped all students by focusing on those most at risk.
- The work is ongoing.

## Quick Fact

The number of Spokane Falls students completing math in the first year rose from 13% to 39% between 2011 and 2020 and continues to rise yearly.



## MATH AND ENGLISH

“Our math and English departments demonstrated to the rest of campus that we look at results and use them. Now, continuing the work of Guided Pathways, the deans are bringing the math and English groups together. I don’t know how to describe the power of that. The word magic comes to mind for me, of less siloing and the understanding that we share our students across a degree.” – Shearer

### Sample Practices

1. Eliminating placement tests and offering guided self-placement has led to the success rate in some classes going down but to an increase in the number of students getting college credit.
2. Having a co-requisite offering in the form of a support class for English and math helps more students pass.

# ALWAYS IMPROVING, NEVER FINISHED



**Bonnie Glantz**  
Vice President of Learning

“We’re assuring that students have a different life after they’ve come into our lives. I have found it very reinvigorating to be part of this at our college.”  
– Glantz

“It’s reasonable for folks to say, ‘I’ve got a lot on my plate.’ ‘Students are more challenging than I remember.’ We must find our way through that.” – Anthony

“We have to do this. The continuous improvement model with the pillars is unique. With it, you eliminate 1000 miles of initiative fatigue. There’s energy savings. It’s hard work when setting it up. Still, the outcome is that students are clearer about where they’re going, which frees up people to put more individualized attention where it’s needed. The ultimate result of Guided Pathways? The system works better. – Shearer