

SLCC Pathways

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College Planning Council

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The pathways initiative is a multi-year college redesign effort to enhance learning and increase student completion using ‘nudge’ or ‘choice architecture’ principles that guide student decision making. Last year the college planning council commissioned a guided pathways collaborative work team to recommend an approach for establishing pathways at SLCC. The [2016 Phase I CWT final report](#) can be found at the planning council SharePoint site. The executive cabinet, planning council, and senior leadership has actively been developing the next steps for implementing pathways. This document represents the latest synthesis of the SLCC approach to pathways. It is intended to be a communication piece to help clarify to the college community the direction moving forward.

What is Pathways at SLCC?

SLCC Pathways provide a guided program of study intentionally designed to enhance learning and clarify a student’s route to program completion, a career and/or further education. Pathways has two components: (A) the use of research-based design principles¹ to re-engineer the student intake, advising, and support experience, and (B) the development of eight new first-year course sequences that lead to associate degrees within each pathway. These entry sequences and associate degree programs are guided by a common framework for curriculum, instruction, advising, assessment, and learning climate. This includes the deliberate and integrated use of high-impact practices in teaching and advising. In short, the first component is about designing an effective route into a pathway, the second uses deeply integrated and deliberately designed curriculum and pedagogy to improve student learning, increase student persistence, facilitate efficient program of study completion, and either placement into the workforce or transfer to baccalaureate degree programs. Both components are further described in the respective sections below.

The eight new first-year course sequences will be in the following pathway areas:

1. Arts, Communication and Digital Media
2. Business
3. Computer Science and Information Technology
4. Health Sciences
5. Humanities
6. Manufacturing, Construction and Applied Technologies
7. Science, Engineering and Math
8. Social & Behavioral Sciences, Education and Human Services

The pathways project is a college-wide project and applies to all degree programs both transfer and workforce. All programs will need to organize within the pathways framework.

Communication Plan

We must develop a student-centric lens as we communicate with students. There must be a consistent and clear framework for how and when we communicate with students (including prospective, current,

¹ These principles are generally described as “nudges” or actions that guide decision making while preserving freedom of choice. Examples include setting defaults, active choices, anchoring, and framing. For a summary of the research on these and others see Thaler, Richard H., and Cass R. Sunstein. *Nudge: improving decisions about health, wealth, and happiness*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.

and returning). We will develop a communication plan that will lay the ground work for the communication principles we will employ as we develop and roll out pathways.

SLCC Pathways Guiding Principles

- Completion rates need to improve.
- A primary reason for low completion is lack of intent (no clear goal, low academic motivation, and underdeveloped meta-cognitive skills)
- We must move to a learner-centered approach across all programs and services emphasizing the development of student intentionality
- Pathways will contribute to student belonging, identity, intention and engagement
- Pathways must be built collaboratively and have consistency through a whole college learning process
- Program alignment with transfer institutions or workforce partners is key

A. Re-engineer the Student Intake, Advising, and Support Experience

We will re-engineer the student intake, advising, and support experiences to accomplish the following three goals: (1) that every student selects a pathway or a more specific program of study, (2) that every student has an accurate and up-to-date academic plan, and (3) to minimize the number of students who go “off plan” and to intervene with those who do. We must empower students through teaching them how identify options, consider tradeoffs, and make realistic plans.

To accomplish these goals, we will make the following changes (these are broad outlines which may need adjusting as we go about implementation):

Advising Experience

- Academic advising will be organized to support the eight new pathways and the associated specific degree programs.
- We will implement a case-management, intrusive advising model where students are supported through the use of developmental advising towards the common goal of choosing and advancing through a program of study.² The tool used for this will be MySuccess (Starfish) & DegreeWorks.
- Students will develop an academic plan in the first calendar year or before completing the first fifteen credits (whichever comes first). The academic plan will be developed in collaboration with their assigned academic advisor. The student advising experience must be designed so that the student repeatedly reaffirms the plan or makes the necessary changes. This plan may

² See Karp, Melinda Mchur. "Entering a Program: Helping Students Make Academic and Career Decisions." Community College Research Center Working Paper No. 59, May 2013, pg.6: "In essence, developmental theories implicitly support a 'pedagogy' of counseling and advising—a set of activities and orientations that lead to *teaching* students how to develop self-awareness, identify options, weigh information, set goals, and make realistic plans."

be broadly defined, but it should guide student and advisor decision making regarding course and program selection.

- Career advising will be embedded within the pathway.

Intake Experience

- Students will be required to select a pathway as part of the intake experience (maybe *not* on the application itself but prior to first-term registration). The intake experience will guide students to select one of the eight pathways, but if a student knows the more specific program they wish to take, he or she will be able to select any currently existing degree or certificate program.
- Students who cannot or refuse to select a pathway may funnel into “integrated studies” but would need to do so through the approval of an advisor. This is not an option conspicuously available.
- Recruiting materials, intake processes, and web site communication will be redesigned to present the college through the lens of the eight pathways areas.
- The intake process redesign must be integrated with [the recommendations from the 2017 strategic enrollment management recommendations](#).

B. Pathway Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, and Learning Climate

Our pathways model envisions enhanced learning and completion within well-designed programs, not a set of courses. Instruction and related support must therefore focus on building the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary for success in subsequent courses. Courses must be deliberately linked and interconnected to reinforce learning and improve student persistence. Once a student has an academic plan and has entered a pathway the experience must be of high quality and deeply integrated.

- The general studies degree will phase out. In its place, students will select among the eight pathways. Each pathway will have a default first-year course sequence (equaling between 28 to 34 credits).
- We will redesign existing degree programs to the new first-year course sequences to provide efficient curricular routes to completion and transfer. Students will have the option of creating an intentional integrated studies degree but they would need to do so with an advisor.
- Faculty and academic leadership will advance the conversation about ways we build the knowledge and skills to design course and program curricula that motivate more students to persist longer at academic tasks alongside academic content. We encourage the “learner facilitation” models of instruction, where appropriate, be a key part of curriculum redesign.³
- Eight “pathways maps” will be developed. These maps do *not* specify the content to be taught in each course. Rather the maps determine: (1) which knowledge, skills, concepts, and habits of

³ For more information on this see *How Learning Works* by Dr. Susan Ambrose (and colleagues) and *Learner-Centered Teaching* by Dr. Maryellen Weimer.

mind are necessary for program graduates, (2) where each competency will first be introduced, (3) where each competency will be developed in subsequent courses, and (4) how related supporting services and high-impact practices (advising, internships, service learning, etc.) will be integrated into program design to support the identified knowledge, skills, concepts, and habits of mind.

- Each pathway will have a default set of courses and sequencing. The design will need to accommodate students who only take a single course in a semester. These will be designed based on the program maps detailed above.
- In addition to a default program course sequence, general education will also have a defaulted sequence and timing for each first-year pathway. Students, however, will retain full autonomy to opt-out of this default general education sequence and may elect to fulfill the college's general education requirements through any qualifying course.
- Faculty and academic administration will be encouraged to critically examine the continued viability and need for existing degree and certificate programs. Academic departments are encouraged to redesign the existing programs using pathway principles and to create meaningful linkages between the existing programs and the first-year pathways. "Program maps" will need to be developed showing the linkages between the program and the first-year pathway. Under an ideal design, students would enter the specific program through the first-year pathway introductory material.
- The success of pathways depends upon improvement of program-level articulation. We are working to advance program-level, USHE-wide articulation. This is perhaps the most difficult but most important aspect of pathways. Faculty and administration from other USHE institutions will be involved in program development. State-level policy specifying the requirements for junior status upon transfer may need to be explored.