



# Paths to Success

**How Community Colleges  
Are Strengthening Guided Pathways  
to Ensure Students Are Learning**

**Edited by Tia Brown McNair  
and Lucie Bonneville**

**Foreword by Lynn Pasquerella**



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## Foreword

The coronavirus pandemic took an unprecedented toll on American higher education, with the most profound effect on community colleges. While nationwide enrollment at colleges and universities declined about 3.5 percent in spring 2021, community college enrollment dropped by 9.5 percent, according to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. As with health outcomes, COVID-19 had a disparately negative impact on communities of color in higher education. Black and Latinx students, who constitute about 40 percent of community college enrollment, experienced a 19 percent and 16 percent drop, respectively. And though community college enrollment tends to surge during economic downturns, many existing and prospective students saw no need to engage in either job training or retraining in an environment where there simply were no jobs.

Even prior to the pandemic, at least 40 percent of community college students left before earning a degree or certificate. These numbers have been fueled by a burgeoning skepticism regarding the return on investment of a college degree and a growing economic segregation. Despite statistics revealing that, over a career, graduates with an associate's degree earn on average \$7,300 more per year than people with just a high school diploma, students constrained by urgent financial needs may resort to the short-term benefits of an immediate job offer over the long-term benefits of a college degree. COVID-19 served as an additional catalyst for widening gaps in access, opportunity, achievement, and outcomes, leading to growing concern over the prospect of a lost generation of students.

Nevertheless, from these challenges has emerged a moment of enormous opportunity to revolutionize and reimagine higher education in ways that respond to the equity mandate arising from the intersecting crises of a global pandemic, financial recession, and moment of racial reckoning in America. There is much to be learned from the events that have unfolded since the inception of the Strengthening Guided Pathways and Career Success by Ensuring Students Are Learning project in 2019. COVID-19 has reaffirmed the importance of integrating the teaching of science and technology with the humanities and social sciences. It has also brought into stark relief the significance of all students having practice applying knowledge and skills to real-world problems within the context of the workforce, not apart from it.

In addition, the increasing polarization and partisanship reflected in culture wars around vaccine and mask mandates, as well as debates over the extent to which it is permissible to infringe on individual liberty for the sake of the public good, foregrounds why it is more critical than ever to engender in students the capacity to speak across differences. In a world where there are no agreed-upon facts, discerning the truth, thinking critically, analyzing and interpreting data, working on teams, and engaging in moral imagination are essential. As it turns out, these are the skills central to a twenty-first-century liberal education and those that employers identify as most important for career success. Yet, according to the 2021 employer survey from the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), *How College Contributes to Workforce Success: Employer Views on What Matters Most*, less than half of employers think college graduates are “very well prepared” in these areas.

*Paths to Success: How Community Colleges Are Strengthening Guided Pathways to Ensure Students Are Learning* offers a roadmap for positioning students for success in work, citizenship, and life by facilitating institutional transformation that centers on equitable access to high-impact practices, identifying salient learning outcomes, and fostering meaningful assessment. Indeed, the twenty colleges showcased in this publication illustrate how guided pathways programs can fulfill the promise of American higher education while preparing students to confront the unscripted problems of the future in a world none of us can fully predict. AAC&U is proud to partner with each of these institutions as we strive to achieve our shared objectives around promoting liberal education, equity, and quality in service to democracy.

—LYNN PASQUERELLA, *President of the Association of American Colleges and Universities*

## Acknowledgments

The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) and the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Student Success are grateful for the support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation\* and Ascendium Education Group, our funders for the Strengthening Guided Pathways and Career Success by Ensuring Students Are Learning project. We would also like to thank the Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCCSE) for partnering with us and serving as the project evaluator. We are especially grateful for our partnership with the twenty participating community colleges and for the dedication of the project team leaders and collaborators. Thank you also to the entire project advisory group for their field expertise and valued feedback. We also want to express appreciation to Ashley Finley and Kate McConnell at AAC&U for their invaluable contributions and dedication to the Ensuring Students Are Learning project. Thank you to Ben Dedman for providing the editorial support for this publication. And finally, we would like to thank AAC&U's Michele Stinson and design consultant Liz Clark for the exceptional design and production of this publication.

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## Introduction

# Strengthening Guided Pathways and Career Success by Ensuring Students Are Learning

*Tia Brown McNair*

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In 2018, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) launched a multiyear project, Strengthening Guided Pathways and Career Success by Ensuring Students Are Learning, in collaboration with the Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCCSE) to build institutional capacity and to develop resources that will help institutions strengthen their student learning efforts as part of the guided pathways framework for student success. As articulated in the 2015 publication *Redesigning America's Community Colleges: A Clearer Path to Student Success*, guided pathways is a framework that supports institutional transformation with student success at the center based upon a structured experience:

1. Mapping pathways to student end goals
2. Helping students choose and enter a program pathway
3. Keeping students on path
4. Ensuring that students are learning

Early evaluation findings from institutions that are implementing guided pathways indicated that campus efforts were progressing around the first three pillars of the framework, but additional work was needed to support capacity-building around the fourth pillar, ensuring students are learning. Thus, this project emerged in partnership with CCCSE.

Through a competitive selection process and in consultation with the project's national advisory group, AAC&U selected twenty community colleges that were implementing guided pathways but desired to deepen their work on student learning structured around three primary objectives:

- To contribute to the existing research for the ensuring students are learning component of the guided pathways framework and a set of professional development tools for institutions to measure success
- To develop an evidence-based process for examining teaching and learning outcomes within the guided pathways framework at the institutional level
- To work collaboratively with faculty to improve learning and quality in pathways programs to help students understand defined credential competencies and the alignment with employability skills.

As part of this effort, CCCSE led a refresh of the core components for the ensuring students are learning pillar:

- Scaled, high-quality, program-relevant, applied learning experiences
- Intentional and sustained student engagement
- Evidence-based, high-impact teaching practices across modalities
- Institution-wide commitment to equity-minded, asset-based teaching improvement
- Quality assessment of program learning outcomes that lead to credentials, further education, and/or gainful employment

The campus narratives included in this publication provide an overview of the institutional activities to implement these refreshed components and to achieve the project objectives.

As part of the selection process, all of the campuses completed baseline assessments on high-impact practices, equity in student outcomes, direct assessment of student learning, student engagement efforts, and institutional efforts that demonstrate commitment to equity. Campus teams participated in AAC&U's 2019 Institute on High-Impact Practices and Student Success to develop action plans to guide their project work, including identifying selected pathways and learning outcomes as the focus for their institutional work. Over the course of the project, campus teams participated in meetings, webinars, and trainings, where resources were shared and discussed, as well as professional development opportunities focused on direct assessment of student work products as part of AAC&U's Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) initiative.

During this project, the nation faced multiple crises, including COVID-19 and mounting racial and social injustices. As the campuses shifted to virtual learning, the project activities had to be suspended, but the dedication and commitment of the participating campuses prevailed and the implementation of curricular enhancements continued in fall 2020. In the midst of everything, the campus teams participated in structured interviews with leaders from CCCSE, completed evaluation surveys, and provided valuable insights for the resources that will be released from this project, including a project evaluation research report and web-based teaching, learning, and assessment framework.

Thank you to the participating campuses, the project team at CCCSE, the national advisory group, and our funders for joining us on this journey.

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*Tia Brown McNair is vice president for diversity, equity, and student success and executive director of the Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation Campus Centers at AAC&U.*



## Amarillo College

# High-Impact Activities to Advance Equity

*Tina M. Babb*

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Amarillo College is one of twenty community colleges selected to participate in the Strengthening Guided Pathways and Career Success by Ensuring Students Are Learning project led by the Association of American Colleges and Universities. Through the work of our faculty, staff, and administrators, we have established collaborative partnerships to scale and sustain our work to ensure students are learning.

**We needed a way to see how faculty were defining high-impact practices, how these practices were being used in the classroom, and how we could leverage technology to identify equity gaps in student learning among different demographics.**

One of the first lessons we learned as we began our project was that many faculty on campus were already using high-impact practices (HIPs) such as writing-intensive projects in their courses. However, HIPs—shown by a variety of research to improve student outcomes and feelings of belonging—were not reaching all of our students. We needed a way to see how faculty were defining these practices, how they were being used in the classroom, and whether faculty were learning these engagement techniques through our Center for Teaching and Learning or at other academic workshops or conferences.

Finally, Amarillo College's institutional assessments are always performed on anonymous, deidentified student work artifacts, and the college will be able to disaggregate student learning outcomes assessment data according to students' age, race, gender, first-time-in-college status, or status as Pell Grant recipients. We needed to find a way to leverage technology to identify equity gaps in student learning among these demographics and set new equity benchmarks and goals. Amarillo College already captured disaggregated data on course success, but we wanted to examine this same level of detail in learning outcomes results.

Amarillo College's guided pathways project is led by a task force made up of staff and administrators from the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Office of Decision Analytics and Institutional Research, and Center for Teaching and Learning. The project resulted in several key outcomes.

### Developing Professional Learning Cohorts for Faculty

One of the highlights of this work has been a collaborative partnership between the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and the Center for Teaching and Learning to establish professional learning cohorts. This cohort model offers compensation to faculty to participate in professional development opportunities, identify and track successful use of HIPs across campus, and integrate teaching strategies with the college's learning outcomes assessment cycle.

### Indexing High-Impact Practices Used across the College

The Center for Teaching and Learning now tracks professional learning through registration of faculty into professional learning cohorts. Additionally, faculty are given the opportunity to attend assessment and teaching and learning conferences and are asked to share with their colleagues what they learned and how they implemented the strategies in the classroom.

### Identifying and Closing Equity Learning Gaps

Task force members from the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Office of Analytics and Institutional Research mined the demographic data on student work artifacts. Using the Blackboard Outcomes Assessment application and the college's student information system, we are able to retrieve the demographic data on the students and share that with the program faculty.

### Scaling Up Student Engagement across Three Programs

Faculty from the Biology, Criminal Justice, and English Departments participated in the professional development and learning assessment programs. These departments have a large impact on institutional assessment in part due to the sheer volume of student assessment data they manage. The learning outcomes the faculty focused on in this project were student engagement (Biology), high-impact practices with critical thinking components (Criminal Justice), and written communication (English).

Faculty in the Biology Department implemented two assessment methods to ensure students are learning: (1) surveys distributed in courses within the Biology major and (2) "KWL" charts that help students to reflect on what they *know* at the beginning of the course, what they *want* to learn in the course, and what they have *learned* by the conclusion of the course.

Overall, Biology students enjoyed the integration of the KWL charts in the classroom. The following are samples of student comments:

"I enjoy the KWL sheet. It makes me think about the lecture beforehand and helps organize my thoughts. It also provides additional information from other students and presents questions that I may not have thought about. Overall, I enjoy the assignment."

"I do enjoy the KWL sheet. It really helps connect the dots. I find it quite amazing how we know nothing at the beginning of a unit, but at the end we can really answer every question we had based on information being taught to us. This is a great method and you should continue to use it."

The Biology professor participating in the project has used this method since the spring 2020 semester and continues to use it based on positive student feedback received. In the most recently taught course section, only one student disagreed there were benefits of using the KWL method, while 94 percent of the students found this method to be helpful to their course success.

Additionally, data from surveys collected from Biology students reflect the students' sense of belonging and engagement in the eight-week course. The data show that students strongly agree that they had the ability to retain information, had the opportunity to build a connection with the instructor, felt engaged with the material, and could tell a difference between lessons that were more interactive and those that used a traditional lecture style of teaching. However, the ability to make connections with classmates received a slightly lower rating (see fig. 1).

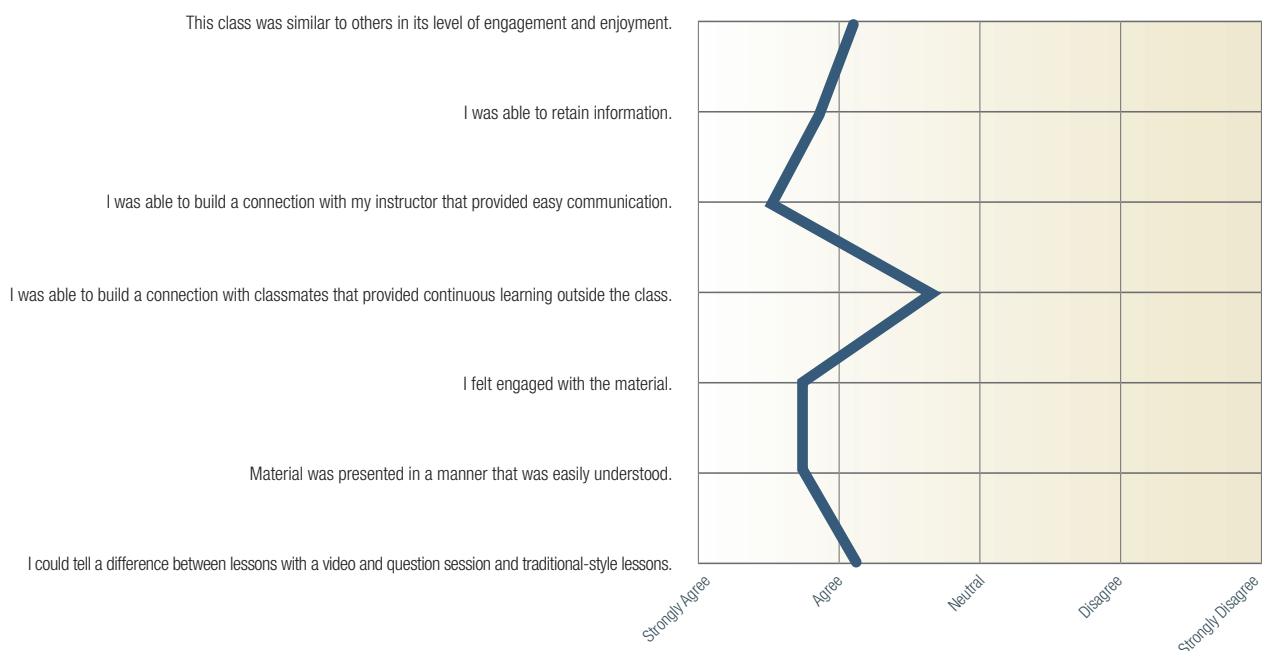
Faculty in the Criminal Justice program measured real-world applications using several engaging pedagogies such as writing-intensive work and a capstone project. Faculty also used the Transparency in Learning and Teaching (TILT) framework developed by Mary-Ann Winkelmes, executive director of the Center for Teaching and Learning at Brandeis University, as a tool to make their teaching and assignments more transparent and improve student success.

The assessment used by the Criminal Justice program faculty was a prison design project in the Systems and Practices course. Ninety-six percent of the students in this course demonstrated a "basic understanding" of the subject matter, critical thinking and analysis skills, evidence of self-reflection, and discussion of real-world applications. The remaining 4 percent of students scored in the highest "exemplary" category and demonstrated an "advanced understanding."

The English program faculty assessed their corequisite model (developmental education students paired with English composition students) using a research paper to measure students' written communication. The work by the English faculty serves as a pilot project for Amarillo College to begin the disaggregation of learning outcomes assessment data by gender, race, ethnicity, GPA, Pell Grant status, and first-time-in-college status. This work also serves as the foundation to scale up high-impact practices and assessment to other programs institution-wide.

*Tina M. Babb is director of institutional effectiveness at Amarillo College.*

**Figure 1. Averages of Survey Responses from Biology Students**





## Chattanooga State Community College

### A Focus on Completion

*Julius D. Dodds*

High-impact practices have been a cornerstone of Chattanooga State Community College's Focus on Completion (FoC) project since it launched in 2015. Focus on Completion strategically integrated service learning, undergraduate research, ePortfolios, and first-year seminars (such as a College Success course). In addition, Chattanooga State adopted the Community College Research Center's guided pathways model, which transformed the way the college viewed student engagement and credential obtainment.

The Strengthening Guided Pathways and Career Success by Ensuring Students Are Learning project that began in 2019 was an opportunity for Chattanooga State to focus its attention on one of its most popular pathways, Health Sciences and Professions, which leads to an associate of science degree. The Health Sciences pathway is the most declared course of study at Chattanooga State, with approximately 42 percent of each freshman class selecting this pathway while they complete general education requirements that prepare them for more specialized and highly selective programs. Electives within the Health Sciences

pathway aid students in preparing for these specialized programs of study at Chattanooga State or for transfer to a four-year university or college.

The Health Sciences pathway includes a number of gateway courses in the first semester that affect student progression, persistence, retention, and degree completion. However, the course that consistently has the most negative impact on student progression and persistence in Health Sciences programs is Human Anatomy and Physiology I (BIOL 2010). Of

**Recognizing the importance of increasing the number of college graduates, and especially people of color, in the health services professions in local and state communities, it was imperative that the college address the low course success rates of major gateway courses.**

course, this concerned all Biology faculty members, who continued to struggle with high course dropout rates and low student success rates. In addition, the College Success for Health Sciences first-year experience (CSHS 1000) is another required course in the Health Sciences pathway. The course was designed as an extended orientation and exploration of health professions and continues to undergo revisions to meet the needs of new students in the pathway.

Recognizing the importance of increasing the number of college graduates, and especially people of color, in the health services professions in local and state communities, it was imperative that the college address the low course success rates of these major gateway courses. Consequently, increasing student learning outcomes in both the CSHS 1000 and BIOL 2010 courses was ideal for our assessment of student learning in the Ensuring Students Are Learning project. Through intentional and sustained student engagement and high-impact teaching practices in both courses, the project sought to increase the student learning outcomes and student progression in the subsequent required courses.

Under the leadership of Karen Eastman, head of the Life Sciences Department, the structural design of the BIOL 2010 lab and lecture courses has been revised to a cohort model. The new design matches the instructors of the lab and lecture courses, who coordinate to align course objectives and monitor student learning assessment outcomes together as a team. This redesign harmonized the lecture and lab by successfully coordinating the class readings, lectures, and lab assignments and experiments.



PHOTOS: CHATTANOOGA STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE





Together, the instructors of each course section selected assignments to be enhanced and assessed during the Ensuring Students Are Learning project. Each lab instructor enhanced the same laboratory assignment in the fourth week of classes (osmosis experiments) by redesigning the questions, prompts, and experiments. Student work was graded according to a rubric adapted by the lab instructors. Two outcome measures were used to assess student learning outcomes in the newly designed course and lab experiments: lab critical thinking skills and the end-of-term grades. The end-of-term success rate (the percentage of students earning grades of A, B, or C) for all student subgroups increased from fall 2018 to fall 2019 by 10 percentage points. While the fall 2020 end-of-term grades revealed a decrease in the success rates, that semester was the college's first complete term with all online or virtual class instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The cohort model has been scaled up and includes courses offered at Chattanooga State's satellite campuses.

Matt Ragghianti, an instructor in the Nursing and Allied Health Division, was responsible for creating the assignment redesign for the CSHS 1000 course. In this course, students are required to explore two or more careers in the health services field and record their exploration process in written or electronic forms throughout the first six weeks of the course. Subsequently, students must present their findings and final career selection to their classmates via posters, PowerPoint presentations, videos, songs, or other formats. The presentation notes provide evidence of the critical thinking skills used in the process of identifying, researching, and presenting their final career choice. Student course success

rates for the CSHS 1000 course consistently range between 65 and 67 percent. Though the fall 2020 term was the college's first complete term with all online or virtual class instruction, the end-of-term success rate for the course remained at 67 percent.

In conclusion, teaching faculty are intentionally developing course activities and assignments that motivate and engage students in learning. Improving critical thinking skills in both the CSHS 1000 and BIOL 2010 courses has allowed students to experience success and gain a deeper understanding of their potential for success earlier in their programs of study. The skills learned in these courses will be valuable as students progress through other required courses in the pathway. Early indications reveal that the enhanced delivery model in the Human Anatomy and Physiology I course and the redesigned writing assignments in the College Success for Health Sciences course have provided evidence of student learning in the Health Sciences pathway.

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*Julius D. Dodds is director of academic retention at Chattanooga State Community College.*



## Community College of Baltimore County

# Paving the Way for Transfer and Career Success

*Danielle James and Jennifer Kilbourne*

The Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) is a large, multicampus institution located in suburban Maryland. The college serves over fifty-five thousand students and offers a variety of degrees, certificates, and workforce certificates. The CCBC curriculum links students to one of several guided pathways to help them define their academic and career goals.

One of the six defined pathways is General Studies (GS), enrolling 21 percent of our for-credit undergraduate students. The learning outcomes for GS are composed of lifelong learning “soft skills” (e.g., written and oral communication) and higher-order thinking skills (e.g., critical analysis, scientific or logical reasoning) required to live and work in a global society.

**Not having a process in place meant students in transfer programs were overlooked when the college worked to identify program-specific goals and targets for retention and completion. CCBC must ensure that the outcomes in place for students meet the needs of transfer institutions and build the skills needed in today’s workforce.**

CCBC focused our participation in the Strengthening Guided Pathways and Career Success by Ensuring Students Are Learning project on the GS pathway. GS students have unique needs and challenges in identifying a career plan, developing an academic plan that flows seamlessly into four-year partner institutions, and building connections to a community of students and faculty with shared interests.

Prior to this project, CCBC had a robust review process for career education programs such as Nursing, but these reviews did not extend to typical transfer programs that prepare students to continue their studies at four-year institutions. Not having a process in place meant students in transfer programs were overlooked when the college worked to identify

program-specific goals and targets for retention and completion. CCBC must ensure that the outcomes in place for GS students meet the needs of transfer institutions and build the skills needed in today’s workforce. Our primary goals for the project included (1) assessing GS outcomes through the program review process and developing intervention strategies to improve student learning; (2) increasing participation in high-impact practices (HIPs) in highly enrolled general education courses; and (3) disaggregating data about the integration of HIPs, including examining effects on achievement gaps.

During the 2019–20 academic year, participants in the Ensuring Students Are Learning project, including the GS program coordinator, faculty teaching GS courses, and administrators from several areas of the college, completed the first GS program review. We collected data on curricula, enrollment, student performance, retention rates, faculty-student ratios, transfer and articulation opportunities, and employment outlook. This informed the development of intervention strategies to drive success for GS students. The review process identified a number of areas for improvement:

1. Some students were taking a series of courses that did not give them a foundation for a major at any of our four-year partner institutions.
2. Students who were “undecided” lacked the necessary career support to guide them to majors and careers.
3. Retention and completion rates for GS students were slightly lower than retention and completion rates for the college overall.
4. Students were not connected to faculty or other learners with shared interests.

Based on those findings, we are designing nine new pathways that will connect GS students, upon admission, to a transfer or career interest that best fits their needs and aspirations. This restructuring provides an opportunity for students to commit to a path that meets both transfer and career goals. Future efforts will include the integration of advising, career planning, and faculty mentoring for GS students.

CCBC also created a series of curriculum maps that align existing GS coursework with the new pathways. These curriculum maps streamline course selection by providing two or three courses as recommendations for students instead of the myriad options that make it difficult for students to stay on track. With these recommendations, students can put together a cohesive program that prepares them to move directly into programs at four-year institutions with fewer lost credits. A map for truly “undecided” GS students embeds a three-credit career exploration course.

CCBC also focused on analyzing the infusion of HIPs in high-enrollment general education courses. HIPs are used in the classroom to boost student engagement, success, and retention. According to a 2013 study by Ashley Finley and Tia

Brown McNair, *Assessing Underserved Students' Engagement in High-Impact Practices*, HIPs can lead to deeper student learning and engagement. This is especially impactful for traditionally underserved populations. General education courses, which serve as the backbone for a less-structured program of study, were targeted as an effective area to infuse HIPs.

The Ensuring Students Are Learning project permitted CCBC to develop and expand a data dashboard that tracks disaggregated success and retention rates for students participating in HIPs-infused course sections. When we examined data from HIPs-infused course sections versus

other sections, HIPs students were retained to the next semester at higher rates than non-HIPs students. That advantage ranged from 8 to 13 percentage points, depending on the course, and each difference was statistically significant (see fig. 1).

The project also examined the course success rates (defined as earning a grade of A, B, or C) of White and African American students in HIPs and non-HIPs sections. While the results were mixed, there was a strong pattern of closing achievement gaps across courses. Most notably, there was a large course success gap in non-HIPs sections of Psychology 101, with 75 percent of White students and 47 percent of African American students earning a successful grade (a gap of 28 percentage points). However, in HIPs sections, the achievement gap narrowed to 17 percentage points (73 percent for White students and 56 percent for African American students). While there is still much work to accomplish, these data are encouraging (see table 1). They also support the need to disaggregate data to ensure gaps such as these are not overlooked.

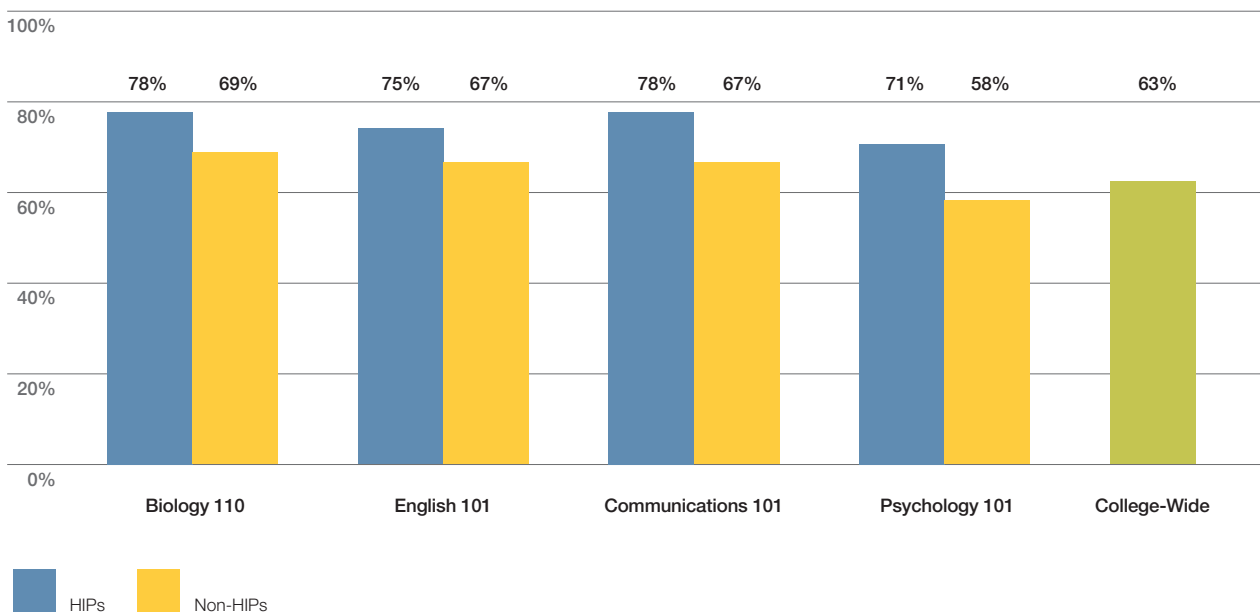
Working with the Ensuring Students Are Learning project has helped CCBC make great progress toward ensuring GS students meet their desired transfer and career goals. This essential work to support GS student success is ongoing.

**Table 1: Gaps in Course Success Rates for White and African American Students in Psychology 101**

	Non-HIPs Sections	HIPs Sections
Total	62%	66%
White	75%	73%
African American	47%	56%
Gap	28%	17%

*Danielle James is chair of social sciences, and Jennifer Kilbourne is dean of curriculum and assessment—both at the Community College of Baltimore County.*

**Figure 1: Retention Rate Comparisons between HIPs and Non-HIPs Course Sections**





## Crafton Hills College

# Supporting Student Engagement and Success in Math

*Josh Robles and Giovanni Sosa*

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Our goal at Crafton Hills College is to develop and implement strategies that result in meaningful gains in student learning and student success. In the Strengthening Guided Pathways and Career Success by Ensuring Students Are Learning project, the Math Department's method for accomplishing this goal has been through high-impact practices (HIPs) tied directly to classroom instruction and instructional support activities (e.g., tutoring and supplemental instruction). Despite the challenges posed by working almost exclusively in an online environment during the COVID-19 pandemic, our college's faculty and staff have developed clear pathways for student success. Such work includes the practical application of HIPs via professional learning opportunities for faculty, the development and assessment of student learning outcomes directly tied to the overarching curriculum goals of the Math Department, and the swift transition of our instructional support departments (especially our tutoring center) to a remote environment while still maintaining (and enhancing) the available support services to students. Given the critical role of our college's Math Department in leveraging these resources, the focus of this narrative is to highlight these departmental efforts.

### Key Outcome: High-Impact Practices in Math

The focus of the Math Department has remained on using the professional learning that its faculty receives to strengthen its corequisite courses, namely by implementing collaborative assignments, projects, and applied learning experiences. The department has hosted community of practice (CoP) meetings that allow both part-time and full-time faculty members to contribute and collaborate on classroom techniques. Through these meetings, instructors have built a large pool of resources such as project assignments and in-class activities focused mainly on algebra and statistics courses. Another focus of the department has been on keeping students engaged outside of the classroom, and directed learning activities (DLAs) continue to serve as a core component of such efforts. DLAs require students to visit the tutoring center, acting as a pseudo-intrusive advising technique since students are required to meet with tutors outside of class. Indeed, the active use of tutoring, particularly embedded in-class tutoring, is a cornerstone of the department's approach to enhancing student learning in an array of its course offerings.

In fact, the department has found that embedded tutors help to facilitate student interaction with faculty, particularly in cases when students feel apprehensive about approaching instructors directly.

The Math Department has also revamped and streamlined its process for assessing student outcomes. Each course learning outcome is now tied to program and institutional outcomes. During one of the CoP meetings, instructors were guided as they used techniques to effectively assess student outcomes. Such learning outcomes work has resulted in increased efforts to create interactive classrooms with an emphasis on presenting material in new ways to enhance clarity and understandability.

Additionally, this academic year, the department (among others) participated in online convenings of the California Community College Equity Leadership Alliance led by the University of Southern California's Race and Equity Center. Five members of the Crafton Hills College community have attended these meetings, which feature discussions about race and equity. Those who have attended are now working to disseminate the content across the campus. Workshops have been formed for our campus in-service professional development days, at our monthly all-campus Zoom meetings, and in many other venues. Topics have ranged from specific in-class scenarios, such as techniques tied to being sensitive with accurately using students' names, to broad campus-based initiatives such as a campus climate survey.

### Evidence of Effectiveness

Such trainings have resulted in tangible differences in how courses are taught. This is perhaps most notable in how the Math Department teaches statistics. The statistics course now offers students a more writing-intensive experience. While students are still required to perform statistical operations, course assignments are more intentionally designed to help students tell broader stories based on their findings and have thought-provoking discussions about the theoretical implications of such work. The course also exposes students to research across a broad range of disciplines. This high level of engagement is present both in and out of the classroom. The department also implements projects throughout the course, culminating in a final project. The department believes that such efforts have contributed to the largest year-to-year increase in course success rates (from 54.4 percent in the 2018–19 academic year to 62.7 percent in 2019–20) and the sharpest year-to-year decline in course withdrawal rates (from 15.2 percent in 2018–19 to 10.6 percent in 2019–20) that it has observed in the last five years.

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*Josh Robles is assistant professor of mathematics, and Giovanni Sosa is dean of institutional effectiveness—both at Crafton Hills College.*





## Finger Lakes Community College

# Creating a Culture of Assessment through Meaningful Conversations

*Nani Nehring Bliss, Debora Ortloff, and Patricia Thompson*

Establishing an authentic culture of assessment requires advocates to be in for the long haul. Twenty years ago, assessment was an acknowledged part of the accreditation process at Finger Lakes Community College (FLCC), but it was largely seen as a procedural afterthought, a time-killing process of mandated box-checking and documentation. It was the price we had to pay in order to keep the doors open so that the real work of teaching and learning could continue. Not until 2013 was the slow-growing institutional commitment to assessment transplanted into fertile soil. That year, answering calls from both state and regional accreditors, the college's leadership hired a full-time director of academic assessment and established a strategic plan that included a goal to improve graduates' proficiency in written communication, a move that required the assessment of writing in 200-level courses in all programs. As the college became committed to creating a comprehensive campus-wide learning framework, it funded All Write, a multiyear project to support writing development and assessment across the curriculum. Working in parallel, these efforts would finally help assessment take deeper root across campus, shifting from an intermittent requirement to an ongoing, transformative practice.

These efforts required a couple of years to lay the groundwork. In that time, the academic assessment initiative worked through shared governance processes to comprehensively reform curricula at all levels—course, program, and institution—to a wholly outcomes-based learning framework that not only met various accreditation requirements but also established core values held by our academic community. Concurrently, the All Write project focused on creating space for diverse faculty learning communities to consider writing expectations, pedagogy, curricula, and assessment at different levels within their disciplines. In time, written communication was ensconced as one of four institution-wide outcomes within our learning framework, and the two initiatives merged.

The next few years were devoted to alignment and capacity building. Under the auspices of a new Office of Assessment, Planning, and Continuous Improvement, work on the learning framework took shape as peer-to-peer faculty coaching to help programs prioritize, map, and align to the framework. A cross-disciplinary team honed a written communication rubric based on a corresponding VALUE

(Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education) rubric from the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U). FLCC contracted a diverse team of assessors, and we established a baseline assessment of written communication in 200-level courses over two years of data collection from 2015 to 2016. Overall, only 23 percent of our students were graduating from FLCC as proficient writers in their fields. We had our work cut out for us.

First, we leaned into our budding data analysis and institutional research capacity to disaggregate our data so we could glean insights from a range of factors. While we hadn't yet developed a dashboard system to allow stakeholders a means of visually tracking and analyzing key data points, we nonetheless broke out results manually by rubric criteria, students' programs of study, general education writing performance, race, and gender, as well as students' status as first-generation students, Pell Grant recipients, or veterans. In addition, we hadn't yet instituted a structured means through which colleagues could use these data to support more informed conversations and decision making about teaching and learning. But again, we pushed forward, tailoring highly visual reports to render results intelligible to different audiences for different purposes and carving out time to work with each of them.

Because the project's work was highly customized, coaching took many forms; we met colleagues wherever they were in the process and provided support as necessary. We built extensive resources that included our iteratively annotated assessment rubric (highlighting questions asked and indicators looked for when assessing specific criteria within different

**Faculty and staff now benefit from access to a range of campus resources for support with all stages of assessment work, from mapping and scaffolding courses to assignment design; artifact collection; and the analysis, sharing, and meaningful use of data.**

disciplines), assignment templates, and a range of strategies so faculty could work on their own and check in for feedback. Underlying all of this work was a commitment to ensuring faculty agency throughout the process. Coaching stayed firmly in its lane as an inquiry-driven process, offering stakeholders opportunities to consider for themselves what learning means, what it looks like, and who the intended learner is within their various disciplines.

Investments in technology and time primed our success in moving our assessment projects beyond the initial institutional

level into program work. In five years, we had increased our capacity for data analysis, developed an in-house assessment platform, and contractually dedicated three full teaching and learning days (TLDs) each year to authentic assessment work. Altogether, faculty and staff now benefit from access to a range of campus resources for support with all stages of assessment work, from mapping and scaffolding courses to assignment design; artifact collection; and the analysis, sharing, and meaningful use of data. The work is further

**The Ensuring Students Are Learning project has allowed us to continue supporting an authentic and sustainable culture of assessment at Finger Lakes Community College that fosters collegial dialogue, relies on evidence about our learners and their development, and shapes curricular and pedagogical decision making.**

captured in narrative-based portfolios in which programs' stakeholders tell their stories and record their examination of trends in student demographics and development. TLDs prompt the difficult and messy work of collaborative reflection, but the results are tangible: we are telling our stories about how we're continuously working to better understand who our students are and what they need in order to genuinely learn and feel consistently supported as they pursue educational pathways at our institution.

By our fifth year of strategic curricular and pedagogical investment in written communications and assessment infrastructure, we could claim significant improvements. Writing results were up steadily, from 23 percent to 40 percent proficiency, and, perhaps even more importantly, we now

had a foundation on which serious curricular and assessment reform could continue. As the college pivoted toward adopting aspects of guided pathways frameworks, we found ourselves ready for the next step: AAC&U's Strengthening Guided Pathways and Career Success by Ensuring Students Are Learning project. This opportunity has enabled us to move more quickly and deliberately through this expansion—moving from the institutional-level assessment of writing to shared program-area assessment.

One example of an expansion under this project is a unique assessment project within our relatively large Department of Environmental Conservation and Horticulture. The department designated one 200-level course, Ecology, to assess student writing as well as various program learning outcomes. This created a rare opportunity to bring the department together as a whole to consider outcomes at many levels. Similar to the institutional work to assess written communication, conservation faculty worked together to construct a single rubric that could be interpreted from various programmatic perspectives. The entire process has sparked valuable conversations among departmental faculty about what they want students to be able to demonstrate, how and when specific learning is developed, and how it can be measured best.

In all, the Ensuring Students Are Learning project has provided critical funding that has allowed us to continue to pursue our support of an authentic and sustainable culture of assessment at FLCC that fosters collegial dialogue, relies on evidence about our learners and their development, and shapes curricular and pedagogical decision making. We are heartened to witness how these efforts have helped engender a significant cultural shift on campus. We have transitioned from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning; from independent, close-minded teaching practices to those that value collaboration, openness, and continuous improvement; and from a sense that assessment is mandated, top-down busywork to an understanding that it is vital to the success of programs, their faculty and staff, and, most importantly, the students we all serve.

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Houston Community College

## Assessing Student Engagement in the Liberal Arts

*Misha Turner, Betty Fortune, and Andrea Burrridge*

To support its efforts to improve teaching practices and student learning experiences, Houston Community College (HCC) focused recent guided pathways activities around one area of study (Liberal Arts, Humanities, and Education) and two specific courses (the English 1302 gateway course and Government 2306 capstone course). The rationale for this focus stemmed from the fact that this area of study is a high-enrollment program as part of the HCC core curriculum. The English 1302 course was selected in order to assess student learning near the beginning of students' program pathway (approximately 25 percent completion), while the Government 2306 course could assess learning near the end (approximately 75 percent completion). The goals were to increase student success rates in both courses; to ensure parity in persistence, success, learning, and completion rates for students of color and their peers; and to increase student success rates by 2 percent for all students enrolled in the



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selected courses. Considering that the English 1302 and Government 2306 courses have historically had equity gaps in student outcomes achievement and thus have the potential to make a large impact on student learning and success, this project provided HCC with the opportunity to improve teaching practices and enrich the learning experiences of large numbers of students at the college.

In order to launch the Strengthening Guided Pathways and Career Success by Ensuring Students Are Learning project, a team composed of Government and English course faculty, curriculum and assessment leaders, success and completion leaders, student services staff, and faculty of educational policy administration assembled in the summer of 2019. The team developed strategies for implementing an action plan and creating professional development activities to support this work. To further support the project, team members participated in the 2019 Institute on High-Impact Practices and Student Success led by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U). Team members learned how to develop the necessary processes for collecting student work artifacts and evidence of learning, improving teaching and learning, and further engaging in discussions about student success. The HCC leadership team also met to

**This project provided the opportunity to improve teaching practices and enrich the learning experiences of large numbers of students at the college. Team members learned how to develop the necessary processes for collecting student work artifacts and evidence of learning, improving teaching and learning, and further engaging in discussions about student success.**

develop an action plan to assess learning outcomes, administer a survey to English 1302 and Government 2306 faculty members to inventory existing high-impact practices used in the classroom, gather baseline data, and provide professional development to participating faculty members.

After several discussions among HCC administrators and leaders of the English and Government departments, the team decided to assess students' proficiency in written communication within writing-intensive courses using AAC&U's Written Communication and Critical Thinking VALUE Rubrics.

To support English 1302 and Government 2306 faculty involved in this activity, the college provided professional development opportunities in the fall of 2019, which gave the

**“Understanding the VALUE rubrics more in-depth helped me to frame our class discussions, guided me to better frame the sequence of my instruction, and allowed me the opportunity to give students feedback, which later proved extremely beneficial to them as they continued to write and submit their final papers.”**

**—Houston Community College  
Faculty Member**

faculty an overview of the project’s learning outcomes assessment and discussed the implementation of writing-intensive courses as a high-impact practice. The participating faculty members were also provided the opportunity to review and discuss the Written Communication and Critical Thinking VALUE Rubrics. Following the professional development activities, the HCC leadership team began creating processes to assess student learning in the English 1302 and Government 2306 courses. To ensure that a broad representation of student work products was included, HCC leaders developed a sampling plan for faculty to collect student work products and writing samples, utilizing guidelines provided by AAC&U. The sample was drawn from work completed by students within the two most recent academic years. Our team developed a representative sample of student work by

- analyzing all assignments used by each faculty member teaching in the selected courses;
- utilizing stratified sampling methods in different sections;
- collecting samples at different points along student pathways, including English 1302 students with less than thirty completed credit hours and Government 2306 students with more than forty-five credit hours (students not meeting these criteria were not sampled); and
- choosing fifty student work artifacts per course.

As part of our participation in VALUE Institute assessment, the six participating faculty members who taught the English 1302 and Government 2306 courses (three faculty members for each course) submitted a summary that included the percentage of the final course grade that the students’ assignment represents, the overall assignment difficulty, a brief description of the assignment, and written responses about whether the assignment was explicitly designed to address particular dimensions of the Written Communication VALUE Rubric. Although the COVID-19 pandemic affected the

implementation of the project within several courses during the spring 2020 semester, faculty members submitted students’ written assignments and artifacts from ten sections of English 1302 and eight sections of Government 2306 for VALUE Institute scoring.

Examples of the students’ written assignments that faculty submitted include an analysis of literature that used the Critical Thinking VALUE Rubric to structure the desired learning outcome, literature-focused research papers requiring three critical sources, a final semester assignment that asked students to critically think about ethical problems within existing frameworks and the potential for change, and a written critical thinking exercise involving an analysis and evaluation of components included in the course curriculum.

The participating faculty members have been highly engaged in this work. Below, two faculty members describe the teaching and learning experiences in the Ensuring Students Are Learning project:

“I thoroughly enjoyed working with AAC&U. This process caused me introspectively to reexamine the benefits of all assignments and make a few productive modifications.”

“Understanding the VALUE rubrics more in-depth helped me to frame our class discussions, guided me to better frame the sequence of my instruction, and allowed me the opportunity to give students feedback, which later proved extremely beneficial to them as they continued to write and submit their final papers.”

In spring 2021, three faculty members also participated in an interview conducted by the Center for Community College Student Engagement to share their experiences related to a variety of topics, including the Ensuring Students Are Learning project, high-impact practices, and equity. In conjunction with the faculty members’ continued participation in AAC&U activities, four faculty members participated in the VALUE Institute online scorer training.

As part of our next steps, HCC’s associate vice chancellor of instruction has been charged by the chief academic officer to review and assess the results of the Ensuring Students Are Learning activities and develop a plan to scale this work up to reach greater numbers of HCC students.

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## Indian River State College

# Transformative Teaching and Learning

Keara Sodano

Assessment of general education learning outcomes is a critical process for ensuring students are learning the broad and essential skills for transfer and the workforce. The general education learning outcomes at Indian River State College (IRSC)—communication, critical thinking, social awareness, and problem solving—reflect the foundational skills needed for success in education, employment, and public life. These skills align closely with the outcomes most valued by employers (e.g., oral and written communication, critical thinking, ethical judgment, and the ability to work in a team) as highlighted in the *How College Contributes to Workforce Success: Employer Views on What Matters Most* report published by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) in 2021.

The general education program and associate in arts (AA) degree at IRSC are foundational yet loosely interconnected and decentralized. Courses for AA degree tracks are distributed through departments and disciplines organized in disciplinary “meta majors.” This is intentional to allow students to develop broad knowledge and skills across the disciplines, think for themselves in different contexts, and foster the mental flexibility that is essential for problem solving within a rapidly changing, diverse, and global economy.

General education is the largest curricular program at IRSC and affects the greatest number of students. Therefore, curricular improvements to that program provide the greatest impact on learning and some of the most comprehensive insights into equity and achievement. But bringing together faculty across the humanities, communications, social sciences, natural sciences, physical sciences, and mathematics to collaborate on a general education curriculum is challenging.

The purpose of IRSC’s Strengthening Guided Pathways and Career Success by Ensuring Students Are Learning project was to assess the critical thinking skills of IRSC students within courses using high-impact practices such as collaborative learning and intensive writing. A sample of students who had completed either 25 percent or 75 percent of the AA degree was drawn from courses associated with the Social and Behavioral Sciences meta major to ensure that students were learning critical thinking within this guided pathway. The project developed a plan for faculty professional development for intentional assignment design and high-impact practices that would be scaled across courses

within the AA degree. The ultimate goal was to design a general education curricular experience for students that is high-quality, relevant, engaging, culturally responsive, and structured to support completion of the AA degree along any of its guided pathways. The intent was to leverage general education learning outcomes, high-impact teaching practices, and assessment to ensure that students are learning the essential knowledge and skills throughout the loose network of courses, faculty, and departments.

Coaching was used to support faculty within the Social and Behavioral Sciences meta major to align the critical thinking outcome to faculty teaching and assessment practices. The coaches’ role was to promote reflection about teaching practices, help faculty set goals to improve learning, and help them stay on track with those goals. Three coaches were each assigned three faculty. Coach assignments were made after reviewing project applications, which gathered interests, needs, and current resources of faculty applicants. A coaching checklist was developed outlining steps in the process and possible coaching questions to ensure consistency among the coaches. Coaches met with faculty cohorts throughout the fall 2019 semester for spring 2020 implementation and again in fall 2020 for spring 2021 implementation. Coaches asked probing questions: “What would a demonstration of student



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learning of critical thinking look like in your discipline? Can you help me understand what you are currently doing to support students' demonstration of critical thinking? What would it mean for students if your work on alignment between the outcome, assignment, and teaching practice improves?" Coaches became partners with faculty in a thought-provoking and creative process that was often transformative, inspiring both parties to maximize their potential.

Coaches promoted deep learning as well as the intentional and transparent design of assessments and teaching practices. These were considered high-leverage areas of focus that had the greatest potential for improving the experience and outcomes of students. Coaches sought high-leverage areas because they had the greatest potential to spill over into other areas to improve the experience of both the student and professor. One faculty participant reported that "as a result of this project, I started some movement towards more authentic learning and assessment in all my courses." Coaching supported the development of common language and understanding of AAC&U's Critical Thinking VALUE (Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education) Rubric that was used for assessment. Faculty planned for intentionality between outcomes, assessments, and teaching practices. Coaches supported faculty in adopting transparent teaching and learning methods that explicitly focused on showing students how and why they were learning course content in particular ways, an important aspect of helping students break down their own learning. According to the Transparency in Learning and Teaching (TILT) framework developed by Mary-Ann Winkelmes, executive director of the Center for Teaching and Learning at Brandeis University, transparent design requires that faculty discuss the purpose, tasks, and criteria for success in each assignment with students before they start to do the work. As a result of the coaching, faculty were able to effectively scaffold teaching

**Coaches promoted deep learning, guided intentional and transparent design of assessments and teaching practices, and became partners with faculty in a thought-provoking and creative process that was often transformative, inspiring both parties to maximize their potential.**

and learning throughout the semester, allowing students to practice knowledge and skills for eventual mastery. In addition, students became active and internally motivated participants in the learning process. Another faculty participant celebrated the achievements of our process and her students: "I ended up revising the project based on your feedback and implemented the case study this semester. The students ROCKED it! The quality of the final project and the students' experiences of doing the collaboration were beyond anything I expected."

Artifacts of student work were collected from participating courses and sent to AAC&U's VALUE Institute for external review and scoring using the Critical Thinking VALUE Rubric. As a result of this project, participating faculty will be able to assess students' critical thinking in order to develop more evidence-based, high-impact teaching practices within their courses. Piloting the coaching model of transformative professional development was important because it developed a systematic process for engaging with this challenging work. This model and process can be scaled up to include all faculty teaching courses within the AA degree to ensure that students have high-quality, program-relevant applied learning experiences and sustained student engagement throughout their curricular experience.

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## Kapi'olani Community College

# No Ke Kauhale Ke Kuleana. In Our House, Student Learning Is Everyone's Responsibility

*Veronica F. Ogata, Nawa'a Napoleon, Chantelle Awana,  
Rumi C. Y. Heine, Lisa Miller, and Jacob Tyler*

*Lupe* (kite) flying is an ancient Hawaiian practice. *Kahuna* (priests) of old Hawai'i would use the lupe to ensnare the spirit of a departed individual and help move the spirit to the next life. In our recent guided pathways project at Kapi'olani Community College (KapCC), faculty were asked to awaken their lupe and capture the critical thinking outcomes that help our students move to the next level of scholarship.

KapCC's values are guided by *kūlia*, or creating meaningful curricula and learning experiences that serve as a foundation for all students to stand on and move forward, and *kuleana*, or sharing a common responsibility to support the future of our students, college, community, land, and sea.

### Summary of the KapCC Guided Pathways Project

For over two decades, KapCC has used high-impact practices (HIPs) in courses to foster and enrich students' active engagement and learning. Since 2016, when we first implemented a guided pathways framework across the college, faculty have been diligently implementing HIPs in their concentration courses, which act as career and transfer pathways for students. However, after completing a campus inventory prior to attending the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) Institute on High-Impact Practices and Student Success, our team realized that we lacked specific evidence that demonstrated the effectiveness of HIPs for the

achievement of student learning outcomes, particularly critical thinking, in concentration courses.

As part of the Strengthening Guided Pathways and Career Success by Ensuring Students Are Learning project, our campus team focused on developing an evidence-based approach to examine students' critical thinking in concentration courses. In 2020, the project's leadership team collaborated with seven faculty across several concentration pathways—Psychology, Economics, Education, Computer Sciences, and Engineering—to implement this project. These pathways employed various HIPs such as global learning and diversity, undergraduate research, and collaborative assignments and projects.

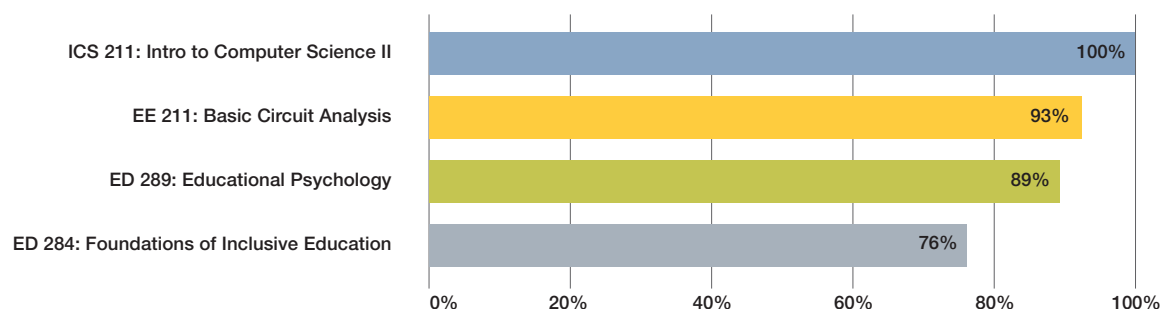
The faculty worked closely with our team to modify course assignments at the beginning of the project and again when, in spring 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic forced faculty to transition courses entirely online. Faculty used AAC&U's Critical Thinking VALUE (Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education) Rubric to assess if their students met, did not meet, or exceeded the benchmark of performance (70 percent; see fig. 1). These results, along with the faculty observations that follow, provide solid evidence of student learning.

### Faculty Observation: Undergraduate Research in Educational Psychology (Chantelle Awana)

One of my students surveyed K–12 students and found several factors that contributed to their anxiety in school, including social anxiety, selective mutism, and obsessive-compulsive disorder. She concluded her research report by providing recommendations for teachers to reduce students' anxiety by providing emotional support, teaching self-calming techniques, allowing students to have breaks, and providing them with consistent routines and schedules.

All of my students are required to volunteer in a school setting, but due to the pandemic, I redesigned my assignment to have students conduct research using a survey instead of carrying it out in-person. This modification posed two primary setbacks: (1) ensuring that my students understood online survey research design, the validity of this method, and how to create nonbiased, nonleading survey questions,

Figure 1. Percentage of Students Who Exceeded the Benchmark of Performance







KAPI'OLANI COMMUNITY COLLEGE

and (2) students having access to teachers and students to participate in their surveys. As many students struggled to find participants to take their survey, some interviewed their peers or posted their survey on social media to obtain responses.

“By conducting this research, I learned about how family problems affect students mentally and emotionally throughout their school life. Being able to learn about what people went through forced me to adjust my mindset to provide additional support needed in the classroom,” an Educational Psychology student said.

#### **Faculty Observation: Collaborative Learning in Basic Circuit Analysis (Jacob Tyler)**

One group of students got into a lively discussion about whether or not a particular design would work. At one point, they began sketching their circuits on the whiteboard and running through calculations to validate their design. Once one member convinced the other two it would work and they built and tested it, the student exclaimed, “I’m an electrical god!” This work is usually done in an in-person lab, but I moved my lab online because of COVID-19. The breakout feature in Zoom allowed students to continue their work in teams and design a circuit for a specific function. This assignment was the fourth lab experiment, so with each successive experiment, I provided less and less instruction and guidance. I made sure students were aware of this approach and the reason for it. I provided them with a copy of the VALUE Critical Thinking Rubric during the first lab so that the goal they were aspiring to reach was clear.

#### **Faculty Observation: Diversity and Global Learning in Intro to Computer Science II (Lisa Miller)**

My student demonstrated an understanding of several dimensions of the complex problem of automated, targeted

data usage in social media. She was able to broaden her worldview, articulate the complexity of the issue, hypothesize possible solutions, and discuss potential pitfalls in those solutions. The assignment that I had originally designed for this project, an in-person group activity, did not happen due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I had to rapidly convert my course from face-to-face to online over our spring break. As an alternative, I created an assignment where students were asked to watch the movie *The Social Dilemma* and write an essay regarding the issues discussed in it. Particularly, they were asked to think critically about how they, as future technology workers, would be inheriting the challenge of repairing current social issues arising from data mining, targeted advertising, and instant information access. They were then asked to discuss their level of responsibility (as technologists) for unintended side effects of technology and what, if anything, they would do to alleviate these problems. The level of introspection and deep critical thought the students revealed in their essays impressed me greatly.

#### **Faculty Observation: Undergraduate Research in Foundations of Inclusive Education (Rumi C. Y. Heine)**

Through my student’s completion of a literature review and interview, she learned about the triumphs and challenges of inclusive practices and was able to take an informed “next step” to move inclusion forward in the state of Hawai‘i. She expressed, “A teacher’s low self-evaluation of their teaching capabilities can lead to poor teaching and negative opinions about inclusive education. As a future teacher, I believe that self-confidence and educating yourself can yield positive outcomes. I also need to advocate for better education systems that will ensure the successful inclusion of all students.”

As schools shut down during the pandemic, I remodified my assignment to allow students to conduct their in-person, in-classroom interviews via Zoom, Google Meet, or FaceTime. This was difficult, as teachers in the K–12 settings were also adjusting to teaching virtually. I then expanded the options for carrying out their interviews via email or phone so that students could complete their assignments in a timely manner.

#### **Conclusion**

Our KapCC team wants to emphasize the value and importance of this project. Amid the pandemic and contending with a multitude of circumstances, this project helped us to stay the course together and not lose sight of our *kuleana* (responsibility), as faculty and as an institution, for our students.

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Kilgore College

## Assessment of Student Learning in Workforce Programs

*Mario Cantu, Ron Doss, Ursula Dyer, Kelly Kaemmerling, Staci Martin, Alesha O'Steen, and Kenya Ray*

Kilgore College is located in the Piney Woods region of East Texas. The geographical area of the city of Kilgore encompasses the “world’s richest acre,” where the greatest concentration of oil derricks stood during the Texas oil boom. The region has a history deeply rooted in the petroleum and processing industry and is home to Eastman Chemical Company. Kilgore College is the region’s leading provider of technical education.

Kilgore College’s Strengthening Guided Pathways and Career Success by Ensuring Students Are Learning project was designed to create and implement a more systematic approach and process for the assessment of workforce programs similar to the ongoing assessment of the college’s general education courses. The pathway selected for the project was Industrial Technology, with an initial focus on three specific programs: Instrumentation and Electrical Technology, Industrial Maintenance Technology, and Process Technology. Each program is robust in its curriculum, is designated as a “validated partnership program” by Eastman Chemical Company, and is supported by other industry partners. A fourth Industrial Technology program, Corrosion Technology, was added to the project in spring 2020.

The programs incorporate both internships and a Troubleshooting capstone course within their respective curricula. High-impact practices were enhanced or added within the capstone courses. Student work artifacts were collected from each program’s culminating assignment. One hundred artifacts were submitted to the VALUE (Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education) Institute to be scored for evidence of critical thinking using VALUE rubrics.

In Industrial Maintenance Technology, students were exposed to troubleshooting through the use of an online simulation that portrays a tank mixing process. They were given a written assignment to test their understanding of the troubleshooting process for potential problems that could occur. Students also built a real-life, working mixer unit to match the simulation unit. Adding high-impact practices in lab activities prior to the culminating writing assignment clearly presented many benefits. First, the students completed the simulation assignments more quickly than ever before. Second, grades for the Troubleshooting capstone course showed

improvement as a result of this course revision. The percentage of students earning an A in the course went from 40 percent to 71 percent. Finally, students commented on how well they grasped the material. The next step will be to get feedback on how they have used this knowledge in the workplace.

The Instrumentation and Electrical Technology program also saw small improvements following the completion of the first troubleshooting project assessment. In order to solve the troubleshooting problem, students had to design a flowchart and propose a solution. Prior to the project, the instruction focused on how to design troubleshooting flowcharts and a working system. In the end, some students (15 percent) demonstrated mastery, and some (60 percent) performed adequately, while others (25 percent) performed poorly. These results indicated that flowcharting needed to be incorporated earlier within the troubleshooting criteria to allow for more focus on problem solving.

The Instrumentation and Electrical Technology program saw small improvements after completing the second troubleshooting project assessment. The second group was given a different assignment, which entailed using a programmable logic controller (PLC) to identify a system error and provide a solution. The majority of students were successful with this assignment. The A students (45 percent) successfully identified the error and solution. The B students (35 percent) and C students (20 percent) did not identify all system errors. These results indicated that more troubleshooting examples needed to be introduced during PLC programming instruction. Adding the examples should improve learning in the future.

The Process Technology program redesigned lab instruction and assignments to incorporate more critical thinking practice. Students in the capstone Troubleshooting course were trained to analyze and explain their solutions. The form used to grade the assignment was aligned with the critical thinking rubric created for this project. The Process Technology program realized small improvements in the development of the students’ ability to critically think. Two student groups have now completed this redesigned course content. Of the first group, 88 percent achieved a passing score (As, Bs, and Cs) for the culminating assignment. Of the second group, 74 percent achieved a successful score for the same assessment. Although the training and instruction

**Kilgore College’s Ensuring Students Are Learning project was designed to create and implement a more systematic approach and process for the assessment of workforce programs.**

for the two groups were similar, it was undetermined as to why fewer students in the second group were successful. To promote greater success, more emphasis has been placed on the requirement for students to include a more substantial and supported rationale for their decisions. The program is gradually adding more critical thinking basics into other courses. This approach will allow strategies to be introduced at an earlier stage in the program so that future students will be able to practice and develop these important skills in greater depth.

The Corrosion Technology program redesigned two assignments to help students demonstrate proficiency as critical thinkers based on the performance descriptors outlined in AAC&U's Critical Thinking VALUE Rubric. One of the assignments is a case study activity that is completed in the capstone course of the certificate of completion program, while the other assignment is a troubleshooting activity that is completed in the capstone course of the associate of applied science degree program. The case study activity is an assignment in which students examine a pipeline scenario. One hundred percent of the students earned a successful score for this assignment, compared with only 91 percent in the previous year. Although there are no previous data to compare the results with, 100 percent of students earned a successful score on the troubleshooting assignment. The rubric that was developed for these assignments will be used to assess different course assignments further.

**Kilgore College is now better equipped to ensure students are learning in its workforce programs. The college has gained assessment experience, knowledge about rubric-based assessment, understanding of additional data sources to provide information regarding equity gaps, and strategies to improve teaching and learning.**

Future plans for the project include on-campus artifact scoring and incremental scaling to eventually encompass all workforce programs. The college has received student work artifact assessment scores from the VALUE Institute. The anticipation is that the results will reveal equity gaps. This information should inform the college of areas where potential efforts can affect improvement in learning. Data from two additional sources—on-campus artifact scoring and an institutional student survey designed to identify equity gaps—will be analyzed and used to correlate or complement information gleaned from the VALUE Institute results. The VALUE Institute scorer training that some instructors completed during the course of the project will be leveraged to conduct the on-campus scoring.

The Ensuring Students Are Learning project has afforded many opportunities for professional development with the Association of American Colleges and Universities, including the VALUE Institute scorer training, Institute on High-Impact Practices and Student Success, webinars, and project meetings. The college has gained assessment experience, knowledge about rubric-based assessment, and understanding of additional data sources that should provide information regarding equity gaps. A template for scaling up our assessment in the workforce programs has been established to identify equity gaps and to improve teaching and learning. Kilgore College is now better equipped to ensure students are learning in its workforce programs.

*Mario Cantu is an instructor of instrumentation and electrical technology, Ron Doss is lead instructor of process technology, Ursula Dyer is assessment coordinator and program director and instructor of radiologic science, Kelly Kaemmerling is assistant department chair of industrial technologies and lead instructor of industrial maintenance technology, Staci Martin is vice president of institutional planning, Alesha O'Steen is department chair of industrial technologies and lead instructor of instrumentation and electrical technology, and Kenya Ray is lead instructor of corrosion technology—all at Kilgore College.*



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**Miami Dade College**

## **Strengthening Guided Pathways in the School of Justice**

*Barika Barboza, Caryn Horwitz,  
and Zulfikar (Dennis) Kalam*

The Miami Dade College (MDC) mission is to change lives through accessible, high-quality teaching and learning experiences. A core value of the college is providing an environment that challenges students and empowers them to attain their academic and career goals.

MDC is a majority-minority institution that enrolls a larger population of Hispanic students than any other college or university in the country. Hispanic students represent 75 percent of the total student population, and Black non-Hispanic students make up another 15 percent. Nearly half (48 percent) of our students are non-native English speakers. The diversity of MDC's student population led to a five-year college-wide focus on helping students strengthen their written communication skills.

MDC's recent guided pathways project examined student learning outcomes from the Do the Write Thing: Writing for the Real World initiative in MDC's School of Justice (SoJ). SoJ student demographics include a higher percentage of African American students (24.5 percent) compared with the college-wide student population (15 percent). Therefore, this initiative was uniquely situated to serve a particular academic pathway while also informing future improvements to institutional practices.

The Do the Write Thing initiative included SoJ faculty and learning resources staff who focused on efforts to strengthen the culture of writing through planned professional development, coordinated teaching practices, embedded learning supports, high-quality assessment strategies, and dialogues about data. Alignment of the written communication learning outcome was examined at the project, program, and institutional levels.

The project was an implementation of a *mini* high-impact practice as a writing-intensive framework. The writing-to-learn framework disrupted dominant pedagogical practices within the curriculum, with management by faculty members and support from embedded writing coaches and tutors. Many SoJ faculty members expressed that they had a lack of skill or desire to "become a writing instructor," yet there was a strong commitment to improving the culture of writing within the discipline through collective dialogue and decisions. Ultimately, this project resulted in the collaborative design

of a common rubric and two specific relevant writing prompts. Feedback on the common rubric was provided by both the faculty member and the assigned writing support coach or tutor. The writing coaches worked closely with disciplinary faculty members, and the faculty members took the responsibility for educational outcomes and engaged in creative and innovative teaching practices. Overall, this project includes intentional and sustained efforts to engage students' workforce readiness through the development of writing skills.

The three goals of MDC's Strengthening Guided Pathways and Career Success by Ensuring Students Are Learning Project were to (1) examine the practices adopted to improve students' written communication, (2) analyze specific equity gaps in students' performance, and (3) make inferences about whether we were able to improve students' writing. To operationalize the project, we organized our work into the following four components: faculty focus groups, student surveys, student focus group interviews, and data analysis of students' written artifacts. During this pathways project, student artifacts were collected and scored by trained evaluators using double-blind scoring methods during both in-person and remote sessions. Although raters were not aware of whether they were scoring a first assignment or second assignment, the student artifacts represented a matched cohort sample, allowing for the examination of learning over time.

**The Do the Write Thing initiative included School of Justice faculty and learning resources staff who focused on efforts to strengthen the culture of writing through planned professional development, coordinated teaching practices, embedded learning supports, high-quality assessment strategies, and dialogues about data.**

In an effort to use the scoring data in a meaningful and actionable way, data dialogues using a collaborative inquiry model were conducted to better understand student performance and discuss ways to improve teaching processes. The practice symbolizes a cultural shift to put data at the center and cultivate a perspective of curiosity about student learning. Eventually, the approach allowed conversations to shift away from themes about college readiness to discussions about examining the system and how systematic changes could better facilitate equitable mastery of the student learning outcomes.

**So far, this pathways work has helped to refine a comprehensive approach to ensuring students are learning. Although this work is not completed yet, stakeholders now have a technique for unpacking components, observing changes in student performance, and improving student learning.**

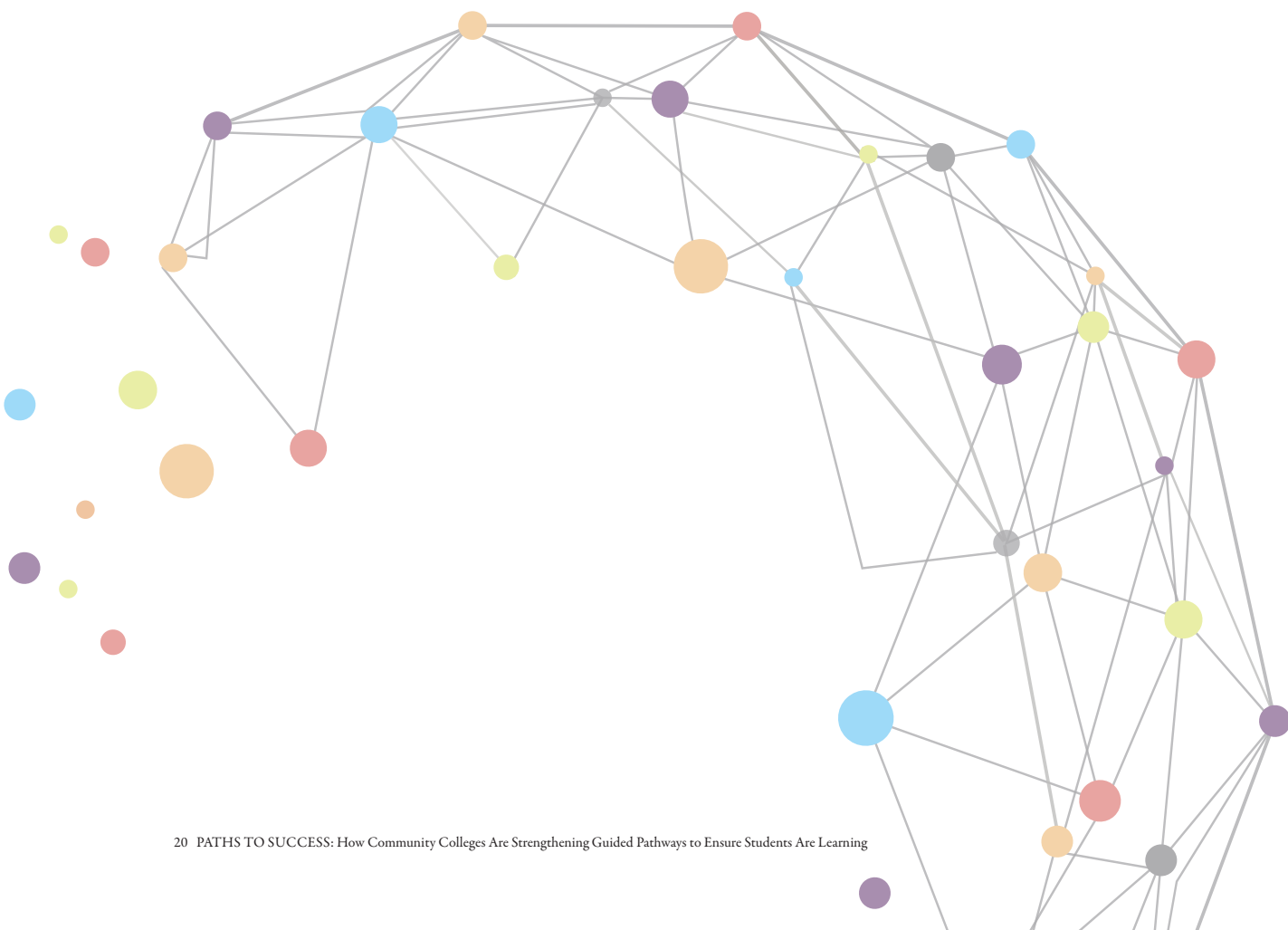
During the data conversations conducted throughout 2020, the Do the Write Thing project, and subsequent inquiries, the college promoted consensus building that led to collaborative action by the faculty members. The project had marked improvements for students' written communication skills, with 67 percent of SoJ students scoring proficient or exemplary in assessments of their second assignment compared with 51 percent of students who scored proficient or exemplary on their first assignment. SoJ faculty implemented this specific program to help students achieve their

academic goals, aligning with MDC's mission to increase academic effectiveness.

In addition to assessing student learning related to the main written communication learning outcome, the project also incorporated a holistic approach to gathering qualitative assessment data, including student, faculty, and support staff perspectives to fully clarify the quality of the educational experience of the learner. So far, this pathways work has helped to refine a comprehensive approach to ensuring students are learning. Although this work is not completed yet, stakeholders now have a technique for unpacking components, observing changes in student performance, and improving student learning. MDC intends to replicate the methodology for other pathways. At an institution as large as MDC, where the demands on faculty time are great and the need to innovate is immediate, having an established process that examines both student performance data and the assessment process as a whole is fundamental to long-term student learning success.

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*Barika Barboza is director of learning and program evaluation, Caryn Horwitz is professor of criminal justice, and Zulfikar (Dennis) Kalam is professor of criminal justice—all at Miami Dade College.*







## Middlesex Community College

# Ensuring All Students Are Learning through Critical Assessment

*Judith R. Hogan, Heloisa DaCunha, Ronald Brevard, Nathan Percival, Michelle Dobrin, Kathleen Sweeney, and Ellen Grondine*

The priority of Middlesex Community College (MCC) is to ensure that all students experience success. For its Strengthening Guided Pathways and Career Success by Ensuring Students Are Learning project, MCC chose to evaluate the quality and equity of student learning within the Criminal Justice, Early Childhood Education, and Information Technology Cybersecurity programs. Each program analyzed disaggregated assessment data to assess the learning of all students. Furthermore, all programs have embedded applied learning experiences.

MCC created an action plan, including a comprehensive inventory of high-impact practices (HIPs) and a subsequent gap analysis of missing practices in each program. HIPs were

**“Many students are not exposed to the field on their own, so we created that opportunity. The goal of this course was to bring together subject matter experts to provide the same learning environment for everyone.”**

**—Heloisa DaCunha, Criminal Justice Faculty Member**

assessed for equitable student learning. Professional development activities included immersion in implicit bias training and the impact of this bias on teaching and learning. An institutional research team presented data specific to the three programs and created a data dashboard outlining student statistics delineated by race on metrics such as program enrollment; graduation rates; course success rates; retention; and students’ Pell Grant eligibility, gender, and status as veterans.

### Student Engagement in the Criminal Justice Program

In an effort to use HIPs to improve student learning, Criminal Justice faculty developed a two-day, one-credit course in which students interacted with professionals in the criminal justice

field while exploring contemporary issues. Students attended sessions in a conference-style format that included presentations by professionals in law enforcement, courts, and correctional facilities. The course’s assessment resulted in eighty-three student work artifacts being uploaded to the VALUE (Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education) Institute for external assessment using VALUE rubrics.

“Our students come from diverse backgrounds and some may not have the opportunity to network, gain experience, and learn from professionals in the criminal justice system,” said Heloisa DaCunha, a Criminal Justice faculty member. “Many students are not exposed to the field on their own, so we created that opportunity. The goal of this course was to bring together subject matter experts to provide the same learning environment for everyone.”

Key outcomes included applying critical thinking to identify contemporary criminal justice issues and research local and national career opportunities, including requirements related to education and prior work experience. Assignments included students’ reflections on their experiences in the course. Successful completion of a four-part assignment ensured that students were learning. We analyzed data on student grades and compared the results with student demographics in the course. The data showed that 80 percent of Asian students received an A, 43 percent of Hispanic and White students received an A, and 23 percent of Black students received an A. The department will conduct an intensive study to determine deterrents to Black student success and alter the design of the course and assessment to improve student success rates.

### Transparent Assignments in the Early Childhood Education Program

For our guided pathways project, the Early Childhood Education program chose to examine an assignment and assess how well it aligned with program goals and outside accreditation and state requirements. Department faculty wanted to take full advantage of this opportunity to create a high-impact assignment that allows students to integrate and apply major concepts, principles, theories, and research related to child development that they have learned in their coursework. For the assignment, students observe and assess the development of a child between the ages of four months and five years.

Faculty redesigned the assignment to enhance students’ learning and engagement by explicitly defining the learning benefits to students—the purpose, skills practiced, content knowledge gained, tasks to be completed, and criteria for success—as described in the Transparency in Learning and Teaching (TILT) framework created by Mary-Ann Winkelmes, executive director of the Center for Teaching and Learning at Brandeis University. The revised assignment has been piloted across multiple sections within the department.

Related to student engagement, the education department project examined student satisfaction through comments students made in their reflections on the project:

“This observation project has . . . changed my thinking about child development because of all the knowledge I have gained about it. I now tend to find myself analyzing and interpreting certain things children do in a completely different way.”

“Going into this project, I did not realize how much it would affect me. I figured studying a child would be a bit complex, but not heavily impactful to my own life. . . . I now understand how I . . . was shaped into the person I am. Seeing the theories in action in this project, I was able to create new knowledge for myself no book could offer.”

“I now understand why different theorists created the theory they did.”

“I will likely refer to this project as needed throughout my career.”

#### **Writing-Intensive Projects in the Information Technology Cybersecurity Program**

The Information Technology Cybersecurity (ITC) program increased writing intensity in the Introduction to Information Technology course to improve student outcomes. Some course assignments within the ITC program had required students to conduct primary research and write a short report on their findings, but students were expected to complete these assignments outside of class with little to no formative assessment. They were graded only on the complete assignment and were not helped with the writing in the class. The program changed this practice to help students better complete the assignment and increase their ability to communicate in writing. Faculty members teaching the course incorporated more direction into the assignment and included a formative assessment of the students' work in order to improve understanding of the assignment, keep students on track to meet the learning outcomes, and ideally keep them engaged in the course.

Based on the grades from the assignment, students achieved a slight improvement in their grades across the board. There was no noticeable difference in grades between different ethnicities or genders. It is clear that the adjustment helped students succeed on the assignment. A higher percentage of students completed the course, so it is possible that the adjustment led to a greater completion rate. However, there are no data to support this, and the sample size was too small to make firm conclusions.

The student population in the ITC program is not significantly different from the population served by the college overall. However, when data were disaggregated by ethnicity

**MCC educators must continue to engage in critical conversations about equity, equality, and racial justice. Going forward, faculty mentors will share their methods for reviewing assessment data, help programs identify trends in their data, and suggest possible strategies to remedy student learning inequalities and inequities.**

and gender, White male students had the highest GPAs while Black male students had the lowest GPAs. Black women, who are one of the most underrepresented groups in cybersecurity, had the second-highest GPAs (tied with men who did not identify as either Black or White). These results reinforced the department's commitment to developing the talent needed to overcome traditional diversity challenges in the cybersecurity field. Future plans include analyzing all data on students who enter the program to identify patterns within different groups related to retention and academic success.

MCC educators must continue to engage in critical conversations about equity, equality, and racial justice. Going forward, faculty mentors will share their methods for reviewing assessment data, help programs identify trends in their data, and suggest possible strategies to remedy student learning inequalities and inequities. Ensuring equitable learning for all students in our programs is at the core of our college's strategic mission.

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*Judith R. Hogan is dean of business, legal studies, and public service; Heloisa DaCunha is professor of criminal justice; Ronald Brevard is professor of criminal justice; Nathan Percival is professor of information technology; Michelle Dobrin is professor of education; Kathleen Sweeney is dean of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics; and Ellen Grondine is dean of education and K-16 partnerships—all at Middlesex Community College.*



## Monroe Community College

# Institutionalizing Equity Consciousness through Collaboration

*Michael Jacobs and Kimberley Collins*

Monroe Community College (MCC) has embraced the Strengthening Guided Pathways and Career Success by Ensuring Students Are Learning project as a catalyst to integrate ongoing initiatives related to high-impact practices (HIPs), learning assessment, and institutional equity.

Prior to its participation in the project, MCC supported myriad programs and endeavors in these three interconnected areas. As is the case at many colleges and universities, these initiatives largely existed in silos, with different departments and divisions working independently to achieve overlapping goals. Through its participation in the Ensuring Students Are Learning project, however, the college has made significant strides in achieving cross-disciplinary and cross-divisional collaboration, thus streamlining and bolstering our efforts toward scaling HIPs, strengthening assessment, and ensuring an equity-minded approach to all areas of teaching and learning.

### The Impact of High-Impact Practices Collaboration

For decades, the college has offered a range of HIPs across disciplines—specifically writing-intensive courses, service learning, learning communities, and undergraduate

research—with each HIP overseen by its own faculty coordinator. MCC's participation in the Ensuring Students Are Learning project both coincided with and fostered the faculty-led establishment of MCC's High-Impact Practices Committee in 2019—a body comprising all HIP coordinators, the assistant director of assessment, and the dean of humanities and social sciences. This aligning of initiatives effected the transition from disparate coordination of the college's HIPs to a more effectual, collective approach to HIP course designation, assessment, scaling, and training. “We now have this group where we're pulling together different applied learning strategies, different high-impact strategies, and we're learning from each other,” said Maria Brandt, professor of English and coordinator of the undergraduate research HIP.

In just over a year, the High-Impact Practices Committee has already developed standard protocols for HIP course designation and assessment as well as meaningful professional development opportunities through the college's Winter Teaching Institute and Professional Development Week. A critical goal of these efforts is to create a more equitable educational experience for all students by cultivating the comprehensive adoption of HIPs among faculty. MCC's participation with the Ensuring Students Are Learning project has fortified its understanding that the noncognitive challenges faced by our students, which include work, familial, and personal responsibilities, often preclude them from registering for HIP-designated classes because they simply cannot fit them into their busy schedules. It is therefore clear that equity in this area can only be achieved if these opportunities are built into program requirements and learning outcomes rather than existing as an option for those students with the time and flexibility to take one of a small number of HIP offerings.



MONROE COMMUNITY COLLEGE



Current efforts include the expansion of HIPs as well as the widespread adoption of collaborative and applied learning approaches. To this end, the High-Impact Practices Committee hosted an institution-wide conference on applied learning in spring 2021.

### **Equity and Learning Assessment**

MCC's participation in the VALUE (Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education) Institute, in which trained external scorers evaluate student work artifacts using VALUE rubrics, will undoubtedly prove to be a transformative experience as the college develops more effective and equitable assessment models at the course, program, and institutional levels. Moreover, the college's approach to the VALUE Institute serves as a model for cross-disciplinary, assessment-focused, and equity-minded collaboration. Members of the High-Impact Practices Committee, which represents five distinct academic disciplines, worked closely with members of the Biology faculty to develop common assignments for participating classes. An integral feature of this assignment was the implementation of the Transparency in Learning and Teaching (TILT) assignment design framework developed by Mary-Ann Winkelman, executive director of the Center for Teaching and Learning at Brandeis University. Following this framework, MCC faculty clearly explain the goals, tasks, and assessments for each assignment, including the learning outcomes and criteria outlined in the Critical Thinking VALUE Rubric. "If students are engaged and understand why things are important," explained Tori Matthews, assistant professor of biology, "they typically glean more from the class."

The success of MCC's VALUE Institute project has catalyzed the development of an interdepartmental and interdisciplinary general education assessment process for the entire college—one that will ultimately yield a more coherent and equitable educational experience for our students. MCC's participation in the VALUE rubric scorer certification program, which seven members of the faculty and staff have completed, has also inspired a more equity-conscious approach to assessment. "The rubric scorer training, which emphasized a real asset-based approach to looking at students' work, was really valuable," said Catharine Ganze-Smith, associate professor of English and faculty liaison to the Schools of Arts & Humanities and Social Sciences & Global Studies. "And the asset-based approach is definitely an equity-aligned approach."

Additionally, assessment guidelines have recently been rewritten to emphasize equity-minded policies and practices. Accordingly, faculty are now encouraged to provide multiple means for students to demonstrate their learning. A workshop on equity and assessment, facilitated by the Teaching and Creativity Center (TCC) in spring 2021, allowed faculty to examine assignments for bias to make them more equitable and inclusive. The TCC is the college's central office for

faculty professional development and frequently provides programming that promotes equity in pedagogy, assessment, and curriculum development.

### **Moving Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion from the Periphery to the Center**

In recognizing the need to address systemic racism, bias, and inequity in all its forms, MCC has made significant strides to create a more diverse, inclusive, and equity-conscious campus culture. In addition to establishing the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) and hiring the college's first chief diversity officer, MCC has supported departments, committees, and workgroups endeavoring to educate the college community on identifying both barriers and opportunities to achieving what the Association of American Colleges and Universities calls "diversity and inclusive excellence." As this important work continues, the college has recently launched an initiative to renew its focus on centralizing DEI within the most fundamental component of its institutional mission: teaching and learning. Consequently, Andrea Wade, provost and vice president of academic services, has charged a diverse group of faculty, staff, and administrators to facilitate a broad augmentation of MCC's curriculum so that DEI is largely reflected in institutional, program, and course learning outcomes.

While the work of this workgroup is in its nascent stages, it is informed by established, ongoing efforts from previously independent committees, projects, and offices that have been integrated. Moreover, its purview is not only curriculum but also pedagogy, assessment, and course delivery. "We're not only looking at what faculty are teaching or what the students are learning," Wade said. "We are also evaluating classroom practices that might unintentionally create barriers to success or, conversely, mindfully provide equitable experiences to foster student achievement."

To this end, the workgroup will continue progress already made by both the Teaching and Creativity Center and the Ensuring Students Are Learning project (as part of its participation in VALUE Institute assessment) to scale the college's use of the TILT framework in multiple areas of pedagogy and assessment. This includes upcoming, campus-wide workshops on TILT and VALUE rubrics. In a more comprehensive sense, the goal is to position DEI as ubiquitous within the broader academic activity of the institution. Thus, as stated by Amy Burtner, professor of English and acting coordinator of the Teaching and Creativity Center, "My sense is that everyone is committed to and understands the necessity of making DEI part of everything that we do from now on."

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*Michael Jacobs is dean of humanities and social sciences, and Kimberley Collins is associate vice president of academic services—both at Monroe Community College.*





## Northeast Wisconsin Technical College

# Connecting Learning, Equity, and Employability through Written Communication

*Trista Loritz, Joanna Spice, Matthew Spindler, Beau James, and Kathryn Rogalski*

Established in 1912, Northeast Wisconsin Technical College (NWTC) is a two-year technical college with three campuses, five regional learning centers, and several specialty centers throughout a nine-county district. Serving over twenty-four thousand students annually, the college offers programs in over two hundred high-demand career fields. Ninety-one percent of NWTC graduates are employed within six months of graduation, and the college is nationally recognized for its diversity and student success, winning numerous awards and distinctions. Additionally, hundreds of alumni continue their education through NWTC's transfer agreements with over forty other colleges and universities. NWTC, home of the Eagles, believes everyone—no matter where they are in their personal and professional journeys—can soar higher.

### Ensuring Students Are Learning

NWTC's seven employability skills, which cut across disciplines, were embedded into course assessment practices in 2010–11. Opportunities for guided pathways to strengthen the student attainment of these employability skills emerged through conversations with community partners and informed the college's 2018–23 strategic goal that “every student will be sufficiently competent to be an effective communicator (written, oral, and digital).” To align with those goals, NWTC's Strengthening Guided Pathways and Career Success by Ensuring Students Are Learning project leveraged and enhanced existing practices to develop students' written communication skills within the associate's degree in nursing and evaluate whether high-impact teaching and learning strategies (especially service learning and reflective writing) have the efficacy needed to scale up the practices.

### Key Outcomes of the Project

The Ensuring Students Are Learning project developed a framework to shift from individual interpretations of the seven employability skills to an institutional interpretation in which outcomes are intentionally scaffolded into pathways to strengthen student attainment of the skills (see fig. 1). At the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) Institute on High-Impact Practices and Student Success, the

project team leveraged research on the role of high-impact practices (HIPs) in deepening student learning to develop an action plan to scale up the college's use of service learning. The consistent use of service learning as a graduation requirement in the Nursing program, and the program's plethora of written communication assignments, made it a great fit to pilot a framework to strengthen existing experiences and assignments.

Through a deep dive of the program's baseline assessment practices, which included an examination of applied learning, student engagement, HIPs, and equity, the project team identified the clinical courses within the associate's degree in nursing as milestones to the attainment of both technical and employability skills. These clinical courses require students to practice the skills they learn in the classroom at a community partner site and meaningfully reflect on the connections between theories and real-life experiences, as well as their growth in meeting student learning outcomes outlined by the American Nurses Association, as they progress through the pathway. For added impact, all students on the Green Bay campus are required to complete a four-hour service-learning activity in their second year of the program.

**The Ensuring Students Are Learning project leveraged and enhanced existing practices to develop students' written communication skills within the associate's degree in nursing and evaluate high-impact teaching and learning strategies (especially service learning and reflective writing).**

Through a collaborative partnership between Nursing faculty and the college's teaching and learning center, the project intentionally aligned service learning to a “philosophy of nursing” essay assignment in the fourth-semester capstone clinical course. Enhancements were made to help instructors more clearly communicate the service-learning requirements and the philosophy of nursing paper to create a stronger, more direct link between the experience and how it forms students' philosophy of nursing. Further adaptations were made in summer 2020 as the team engaged in professional learning to incorporate equity considerations related to students' field of study.

While direct assessment results were not yet available at the time of writing, faculty have anecdotally noted that students' reflections on equity and the new alignment with the service-learning activity “have really improved the quality

and insightfulness of these essays.” An early quantitative analysis of the average word count in student essays shows that they increased from 620 words in fall 2019 to 859 words in fall 2020, suggesting that, with more explicit instruction about connecting the service-learning experience to their personal philosophies, students had more to write about.

Although the first pilot provided insights into a possible framework that could be used to scale up the teaching and learning practices, the project team sought to validate the results through a second pilot to further strengthen written communication within the Nursing pathway. A Nursing instructor and a general studies English composition instructor revised additional assignments for Nursing students. This second pilot also provided an opportunity for members of the project team, who had attended rubric scorer training with AAC&U’s VALUE (Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education) Institute, to conduct their own scoring of student work artifacts using institutional rubrics.

### Lessons Learned

The Ensuring Students Are Learning project team learned several lessons from the two pilot programs. First, a teaching, learning, and assessment framework relies on a carefully woven support network that connects faculty, the college’s teaching and learning center, and academic leadership. Small

dyads of faculty collaborated, conversations with teaching and learning center staff prompted further ideas, and the participation of academic leaders allowed for continuous improvement and scaffolding of ideas.

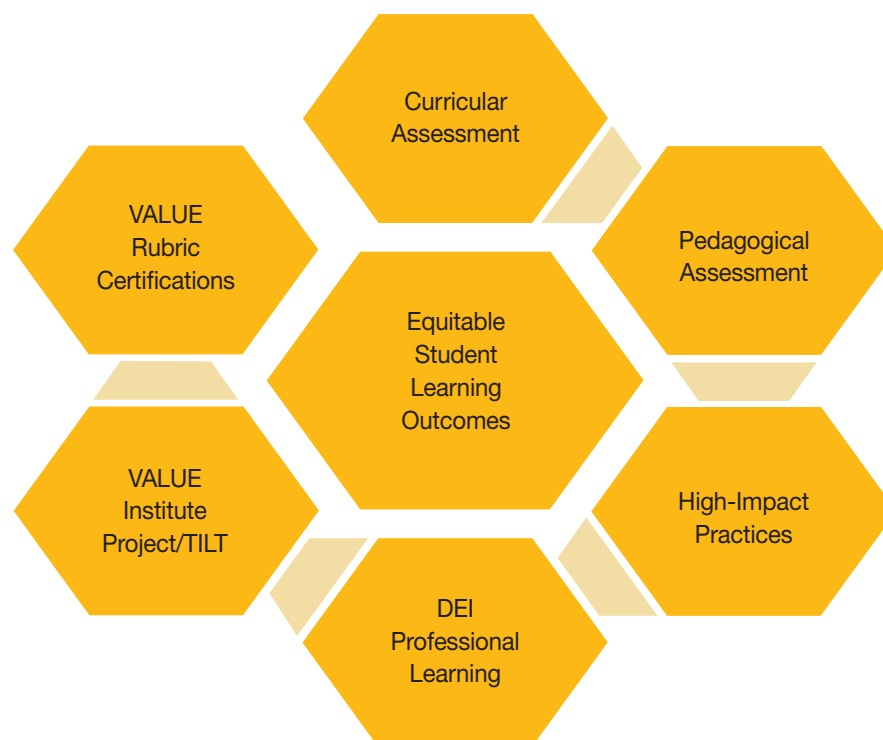
Second, more opportunities exist to further define and connect HIPs to maximize their benefits to students. Ensuring HIPs are done well will require large, focused efforts to contextualize experiences like service learning and provide students with clear goals while they are engaged with community partners. Faculty have noted their desire to further strengthen the connection between HIPs and student learning outcomes.

Finally, continuous improvement doesn’t have to be broad but can be found in discrete elements such as single assignments. One instructor noted that ensuring students are learning “doesn’t simply mean students are successfully completing the assessments. . . . Instead, it means that they are able to take those skills and then apply them beyond the assessment and classroom to other classes, their careers, etc.”

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*Trista Loritz is a project manager in the Learning Division, Joanna Spice is an assessment coordinator, Matthew Spindler is an instructional design consultant, Beau James is a learning high-impact practices coordinator, and Kathryn Rogalski is vice president of learning—all at Northeast Wisconsin Technical College.*

Figure 1. Framework for the Ensuring Students Are Learning Project





## Palo Alto College

# Curation, Creation, and Self-Critique in Reflective ePortfolios

*Elizabeth Tanner, Suzel Molina, and Edlyn de Oliveira*

Integrative and reflective ePortfolios ask students to begin thinking and writing about their experiences, to make sense of their diverse learning, to share their work with others, and to clearly articulate the development of their ideas. As a creative, versatile platform that appeals to many students, ePortfolios can be a fast track to students owning their own learning trajectory.

In Palo Alto College's Strengthening Guided Pathways by Ensuring Students Are Learning project, faculty members chose to use ePortfolios as the structure that would best support reflective and integrative learning. The intended goals of the project were for students to (1) recognize and articulate the development of their knowledge and skills; (2) create an evolving repository of their academic work and experiences; (3) develop a resource for future curricula vitae; and (4) understand and clearly describe the evolution of their educational pathways and career goals.

"We use [ePortfolios] to help us drive our own educational journey. My dream was to be a writer. I wrote a book last semester. I am now a published writer," said Jonathon Rodriguez, a student in the English field of study. "I have cerebral palsy. I never had a voice. Now I do."

The project began with implementation of ePortfolios within Learning Frameworks, a three-credit-hour course required of all first-time-in-college students. Students' engagement with the ePortfolio consisted of ongoing self-analysis and reflection that eventually led to a statement of their personal mission and the initial declaration of their chosen educational pathway. "ePortfolios as a learning journey through self-expression . . . allow my students to be creative in a way that meets their needs, preferences, [and] learning styles, and engages all levels of learners," said Yolanda Reyna, an associate professor of the Learning Frameworks course.

The early implementation became a more structured first-year pathway designed to reinforce students' feelings of legitimacy as members of the college, formalize their goals, and help them map their future academic and career pathways. This first-year pathway consisted of six milestones for students:

1. Create a Portfolium (the ePortfolio platform) profile, upload a photo, create a tagline and brief introduction, and post their first project.
2. Create a personal mission statement (who they are, what they want to achieve, and what they want to contribute).
3. Connect with their peer advisor.
4. Schedule a conference with their certified staff advisor and build their educational plan.
5. Complete their semester-by-semester individual success plan.
6. Register for the upcoming semester.

Table 1. Student Engagement with ePortfolios at Palo Alto College

Data points	187,059	Total number of data points collected for users in this network.
Total users	3,579	Total number of users in this network.
Activated users	2,583	Total number of users that have completed onboarding.
Skills showcased	20,907	Total number of skills being showcased by users in this network.
Total views	113,450	Total number of profile and project views of users in this network.

**Students wrote willingly and at length. The curation of their self-image and the opportunity to publish their work before a community of peers and employers seemed to drive the engagement. Faculty created the structure, provided advice and feedback, and then simply tried not to get in the way.**

English, Business, Music, Drama, Integrated Reading and Writing, and Student Development faculty were early adopters of the ePortfolio. As the college held faculty workshops to help instructors learn about ePortfolio pedagogies, the use of the ePortfolio began to grow across other disciplines.

“In addition to reaping the benefits of more authentic assessment in my courses, one of the unexpected joys of incorporating ePortfolios has been the window it has opened into my students’ lives,” said Melissa Elston, an associate professor of English. “I feel like I get to see more of the whole person when I read their profiles and provide feedback. It keeps the bigger picture in focus: their goals, their journey.”

What faculty saw in their first experiences with ePortfolios was an unexpectedly robust level of student engagement and

enthusiasm. Students wrote willingly and at length. The curation of their self-image and the opportunity to publish their work before a community of peers and employers seemed to drive the engagement. Faculty created the structure, provided advice and feedback, and then simply tried not to get in the way. “I am so glad that two of my professors were adamant about not only creating a professional site . . . but also publishing my projects and essays,” said Italia Barboza, a student in the Social Work field of study. “It has also helped build my confidence when it comes to my own pieces of work.”

Engagement with ePortfolios is rapidly expanding across campus. As of June 2021, more than 3,500 student users have uploaded over 6,000 projects to the Portfolium platform. These projects have helped students make a wide array of connections across campus and in their future professional fields. Students using ePortfolios have reported finding work or experiential learning opportunities at more than two thousand jobs and internships (see table 1).

“Using [ePortfolios] has made an impact on my educational journey by opening doors for my art,” said Roberta Ramos, a sophomore in the Music field of study. “I’m able to . . . make connections with some really talented people. It’s taught me organization skills and time management. I love Portfolium!”

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*Elizabeth Tanner is vice president of academic success, Suzel Molina is a professor of kinesiology, and Edlyn de Oliveira is an instructor of music—all at Palo Alto College.*







## Salt Lake Community College

# Disaggregating Data, Mapping Outcomes, and Redesigning Assignments

*Michael Young, Emily Dibble, and Mark Jarvis*

For its Strengthening Guided Pathways and Career Success by Ensuring Students Are Learning project, Salt Lake Community College (SLCC) developed an action plan focused on signature assignments and reflection in ePortfolios that students create in their general education courses. Developed during the Institute on High-Impact Practices and Student Success hosted by the Association of American Colleges and Universities in 2019, the action plan's goal is to

**The intent is to improve the learning experience in general education courses by having students engage in stronger reflection about signature assignments that are directly tied to our general education learning outcomes.**

strengthen the ePortfolio assignment to better integrate SLCC's menu-driven general education program in a high-impact manner. A secondary goal of the plan is to develop more focused assignments and reflections that would be more usable in the assessment of student learning. In an attempt to better address equity at the college, we have attempted to disaggregate assessment data to see how various demographic groups experience the ePortfolio assignment.

### Disaggregating General Education Assessment Data

In our attempts to study equity gaps in 2019 and 2020, we learned that there are very few glaring inequities in learning outcomes attainment across the sample we studied. This conclusion stands to reason, as we sampled students who successfully completed their education at SLCC. The small gaps we saw could have several causes, including course delivery, a lack of focus on the ePortfolio within the course, a lack of student or faculty engagement in the signature assignment, and problems with the reflection prompts in general education courses. We are confident that future studies like this are not likely to produce actionable data.

Going forward, our focus at SLCC will be on students who are not achieving success by looking at the D, F, and withdrawal rates in general education courses compared with the distribution of A, B, and C grades in those same courses. Given SLCC's investments in developing data dashboards for faculty and administrators, we are now able to disaggregate data instantaneously at the course level. This will efficiently allow us to visualize equity gaps and work to make the necessary structural, curricular, and pedagogical changes to reduce and eliminate them.

### The General Education Mapping Project

The focus on mapping is intended to align signature assignments and reflection prompts to our general education learning outcomes. The goal is to create a pool of signature assignments that faculty can incorporate when teaching general education courses.

This college-wide project has rolled out in three phases to create and distribute maps for deans, associate deans, and faculty within our thirteen general education designations. As part of phase one, we asked the deans, associate deans, and faculty to identify at least three learning outcomes that should be included in signature assignments. In phase two, a larger body of faculty reviewed the maps and provided input and suggested changes to arrive at a consensus of what should be included in a signature assignment. For phase three, we conducted assignment design charrettes in the summer of 2021. Faculty will now use the maps to exchange ideas, revise existing assignments, and create a library of signature assignments that other faculty can use in general education courses.

The intent is to improve the learning experience in general education courses by having students engage in stronger reflection about signature assignments that are directly tied to our general education learning outcomes.

### ePortfolio Redesign

Professor Mark Jarvis piloted a redesign of the ePortfolio project in a Lifespan Human Development course beginning in January 2020. With a focus on the critical thinking learning outcome, forty-eight preintervention student ePortfolios from 2019 (a control group) were compared with forty-eight postintervention ePortfolios from 2020, for a total of ninety-six student work artifacts. The pilot project centered on making the ePortfolio requirement and signature assignment more transparent to students by explaining why SLCC requires the ePortfolio and why it is considered a high-impact practice. Below, several students comment on the learning experience.

"I have been completing ePortfolio assignments at SLCC for years but did not fully appreciate some of the aims and benefits. . . . The portfolio helps students see how all of their work is connected. Putting all of your capstone projects from all of your various courses in one place helps you see the

value in a well-rounded education, and how it is a foundation for developing within your major.”

“This assignment should be a requirement for ALL professors every semester. This has helped me better understand the ePortfolio process in better detail than I have previously learned, and I will now be able to better enhance my ePortfolio. . . . By really putting your time into the ePortfolio, it gives you a better opportunity for higher success moving forward to a university.”

“I honestly have never liked doing my ePortfolio. I have always thought it was pointless and did not know why I had to do it. . . . I can now see that my classes go together and they intertwine with each other. I also now know that it is just as good for the professors as it is for the students. They are able to see in our reflections if we were able to understand what they were teaching.”

“The biggest thing that stood out to me was that it provides feedback to your professors. If you write an effective reflection, then it helps to give the professors insight into how the students experienced the course.”

In addition, the redesigned project scaffolded reflection practice with students at key points throughout the semester,

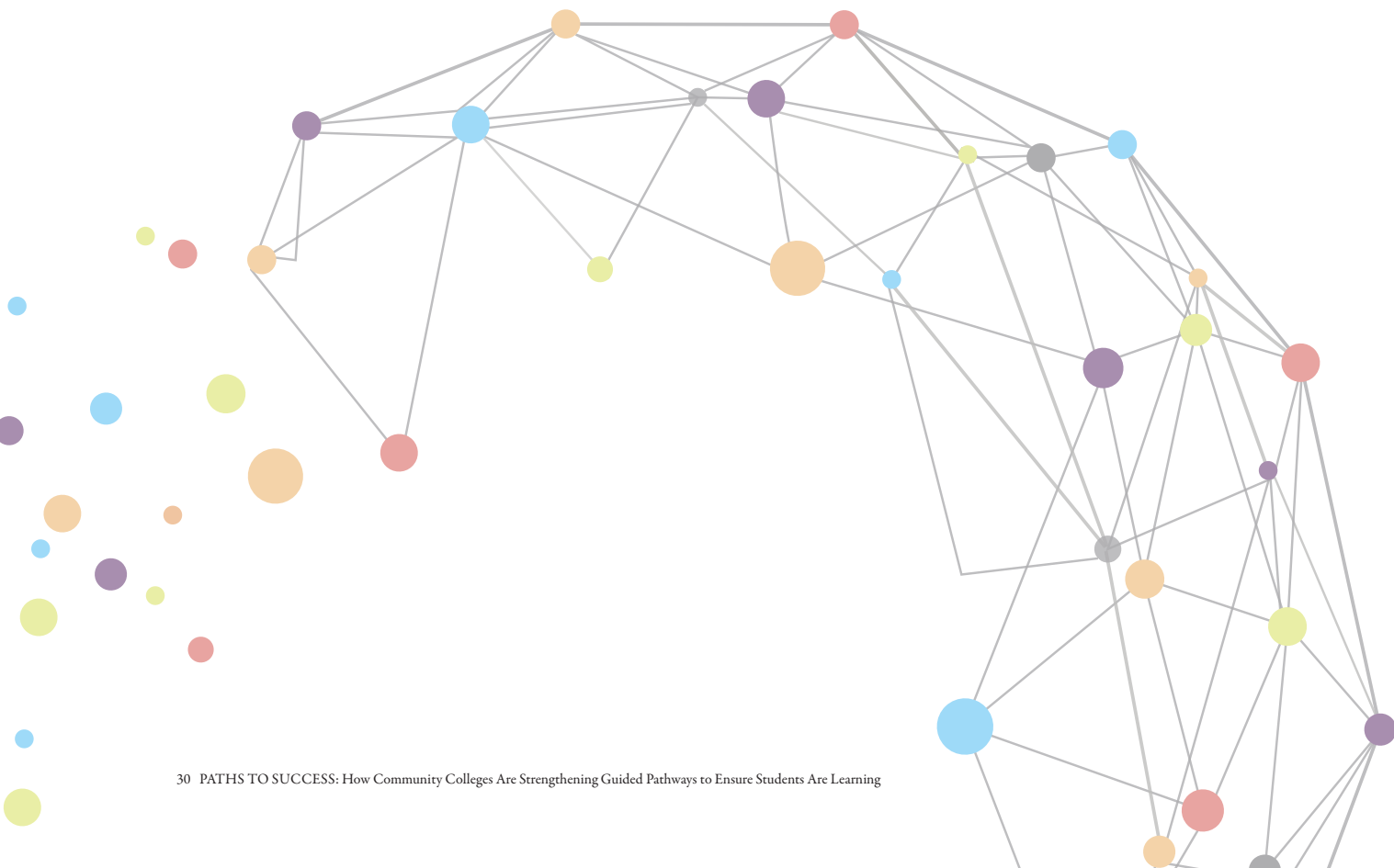
which they would then add to their ePortfolios. This was key to making the ePortfolio more functional and effective for students in the learning process. Instead of the ePortfolio being a mere “add-on requirement” to the course, the process encourages changing students’ perceptions about what it is and why we use it. Additionally, and more importantly, scaffolding keeps the students grounded in the learning outcomes throughout the semester as they periodically assess and reflect on their progress and build on their prior learning. It is our hope and intent to use the information learned from this piloted course to provide further pedagogical and curriculum training on scaffolding the ePortfolio in our general education courses.

### Conclusion

The SLCC team appreciates the opportunity to disaggregate our assessment data, map our general education learning outcomes, and pilot an ePortfolio redesign project. We are excited to see the results from this work by implementing changes in our pedagogy, closing equity gaps, and using our signature assignments to ensure that students are learning.

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*Michael Young is associate dean of general education, Emily Dibble is ePortfolio coordinator, and Mark Jarvis is associate professor of family and human studies—all at Salt Lake Community College.*





San Antonio College

## Refining Institutional Processes to Improve Student Learning

*Rosalind Ong, Jolinda Ramsey,  
Julie Razuri, and Francisco Solis*

At San Antonio College (SAC), a community college in the Alamo Colleges District (ACD) in Texas, continuously improving strategies to ensure all students are learning is key to achieving our mission of helping students reach their full potential and preparing them to graduate, transfer, or enter the workforce.

The college's recent work to improve guided pathways aligns with ACD's Alamo Institutes initiative. Each year, regional employers who elect to serve as advisory members for the institutes identify essential skills that students should possess upon graduation in order to enter the workforce or transfer to a four-year college or university. At SAC, these core competencies are known as *marketable skills*.

Over the past several years, SAC has implemented processes to further support the alignment of outcomes within guided pathways. Using frameworks such as guided pathways to inform our processes has ensured that we have a consistent vision driving reforms across the college. In addition, our institution-wide commitment to using data to inform decision-making has led us to review aggregate and disaggregate data about student learning and engagement. During our semi-annual institutional assessment event, SAC Scores, data on student learning outcomes (from eLumen) are analyzed at the faculty/staff, discipline/departmental, and institutional levels. In addition to using data on student learning from the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE), faculty and staff also review key performance indicators such as retention rates; productive grade rates (A, B, or C in the course); and graduation rates from the Office of Institutional Research. In the fall of 2019, the college added equity to its priorities. While we use the data to inform us about student equity, we also go beyond these numbers to try to understand the needs of our students.

Recent collaboration between the Offices of Academic Success, Student Success, and Integrated Planning and Performance Excellence (IPPE) through the Strengthening Guided Pathways and Career Success by Ensuring Students Are Learning project resulted in engagement from faculty and staff, support from campus leadership, and a commitment to collect and evaluate student work. Intentional communication and conversations about the continuous improvement

of assessment and teaching practices, along with professional development to support our goals, were critical to success.

### Supporting Learning Outcomes Achievement

Marketable skills are embedded in core curriculum courses by aligning and mapping them with the courses' student learning outcomes. At SAC, we assess student learning outcomes for every course, every course section, and every semester. Reviewing AAC&U's Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) rubrics and their alignment to our marketable skills facilitated discussions on the attainment and achievement of these skills within students' academic areas of study.

In the 2019–20 academic year, SAC's Marketable Skills Assessment Committee (MSAC), led by academic faculty and supported by IPPE, reviewed student self-assessment data generated by the CCSSE student survey, faculty assessment of students' work within the eLumen software platform, and faculty assessment of work from recent graduates (also in eLumen) who completed SAC's core curriculum. As seen in figure 1, most students either met or exceeded our

**Our institution-wide commitment to using data to inform decision-making has led us to review aggregate and disaggregate data about student learning and engagement.**

benchmark achievement score for each marketable skill, but there were still areas for improvement. Closer analysis of the data showed that (1) students' self-assessment of their achievement often did not align with faculty assessment data, and (2) many students had an unclear understanding of the marketable skills learning outcomes. Although student achievement of marketable skills has improved over time, a disconnect still exists between student and faculty perceptions.

To close the gap between faculty and student perceptions of achievement, a committee of cross-campus faculty discussed potential ways to make marketable skills more accessible for students. The committee reviewed the questions on marketable skills that were included in the CCSSE survey, updating them for future assessment cycles. In fall 2020, SAC also launched the Marketable Skills Blitz Week. In a dedicated week each semester, faculty focus on marketable skills and how they align with each faculty member's course. Using a portfolio of resources that includes PowerPoint presentations, talking points, video trainings, and faculty forums, faculty developed individual plans to get their students engaged in developing the skills.

## Improving Teaching Practices

Defining high-impact practices (HIPs) was key to our Ensuring Students Are Learning project. Faculty across disciplines and modalities partnered to incorporate learning experiences such as collaborative assignments, undergraduate research, and ePortfolios into their curricula, all while aligning these practices to the marketable skills. Recently, our focus has shifted to the intentionality of HIPs on the student journey and the assessment of student artifacts. Incoming SAC students experience HIPs via a first-year student orientation course that includes reflective ePortfolio assignments. This early introduction to metacognition is intentional. As more faculty adopt ePortfolios in their courses, we have identified a need to provide discipline-specific ePortfolios to sustain student engagement and lead them to completion.

SAC's Teaching and Learning Center provided a central location for faculty to engage in HIPs training. The center's web page provides a place for faculty to access resources, sign up for training, and submit existing practices to add to SAC's HIPs inventory. The web page also provides access to learning assessment resources, tying together teaching and learning outcomes assessment practices.

SAC also established faculty professional development sessions for faculty across all disciplines to align their assessments with the marketable skills. Practices are unique across disciplines, so we developed a documentation process that provides an overview of commonalities across disciplines while still allowing for independent ownership of each discipline's process.

By incorporating the alignment of disciplinary assessment practices formally into our institutional assessment process,

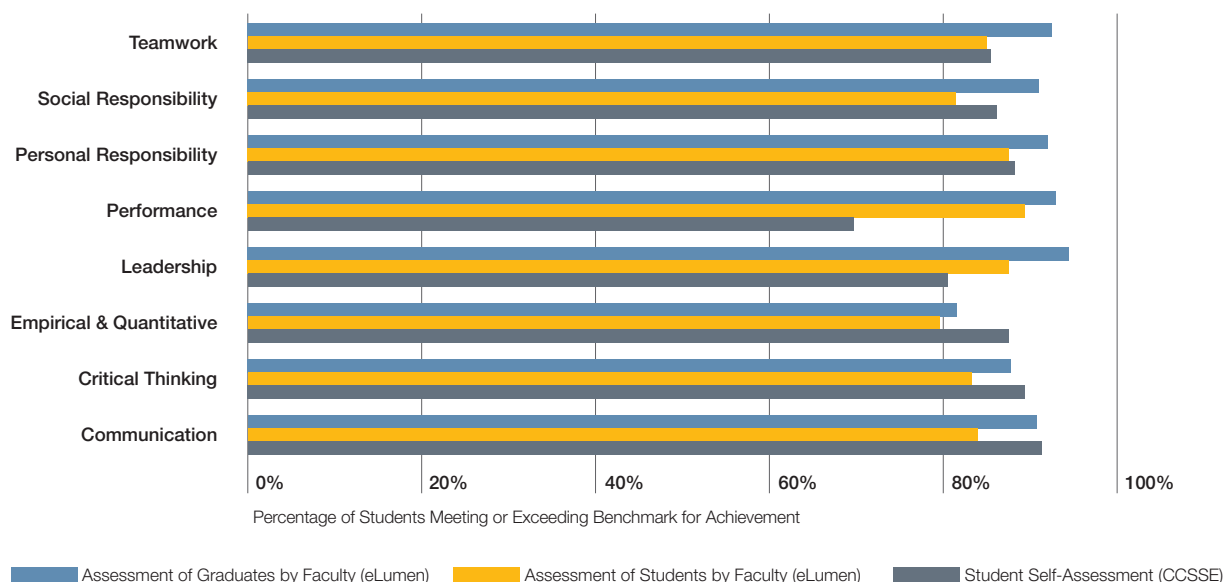
we are able to engage more faculty in continuous improvement. Each discipline is responsible for aligning its assessment methods with its courses and documenting that process. Disciplines submit information about their processes during the semi-annual SAC Scores institutional assessment event. Data that faculty commonly share include (1) a review of assessments, outcomes, curriculum mapping, and backward design methods; (2) documentation of meeting procedures; and (3) a description of how faculty take action on findings. This has led to institutional dialogue on cycles of improvement and professional development to support disciplinary assessment processes.

## Moving from the Project to an Institutional Process

Participating in the Ensuring Students Are Learning project resulted in the creation of sustainable resources and processes that will support efforts to scale our work institutionally. The ongoing improvement of assessment processes, the inventory of HIPs used across campus, and professional development such as Blitz Week will continue to propel us to our goal of ensuring that all students are learning at San Antonio College.

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Figure 1. Achievement of Benchmarks for Marketable Skills in Core Curriculum Courses, 2019–20







San Jacinto College

## Rubric Revision, Data Access, and Continuous Improvement of Learning

*Chris Duke and Michelle Selk*

San Jacinto College's work on the Strengthening Guided Pathways and Career Success by Ensuring Students Are Learning project focused on improving learning in academic pathways while developing a plan to scale those practices up across all college programs. Faculty and leaders in the Medical Imaging and Child Development programs collaborated with assessment specialists and members of the project team to implement improvements to assessment methods, the accessibility of student learning outcomes data, and ongoing improvement processes. Results of the work provide a model for scaling up practices to ensure students are learning.

### Improving Assessment Methods

The Medical Imaging and Child Development programs rely heavily on rubrics to assess student learning in the pathways. The project team worked with assessment specialists and faculty leaders to evaluate the rubrics used for assessment and improve them as needed. Revisions improved the wording of rubric criteria descriptors for each level of performance by requiring specific examples of student performance that faculty or other evaluators could explicitly identify in a sample of student work.

The more explicit descriptors improved the rubrics' quality and reliability as assessment instruments to help students organize their work and understand the expectations of assessments. For example, when revising a rubric based on standards from the National Association for the Education of Young Children, childhood development faculty worked with the project team to modify descriptor language from "describes the child and family background" to "provides a complete reflection that sufficiently measured development and learning," a more concrete expectation that better informs students and the faculty evaluating the work (see table 1).

### Improving Student Learning Outcomes Data

Following the review and revision of assessment rubrics, the project focused on improving each program's access to data about student learning in the pathways. Prior to the grant, the college relied on a common "annual assessment process" for the review of data. Faculty reported their data at the end of each semester, results were compiled at the end of each academic year, and faculty reviewed their program's data to develop prospective continuous improvements to instruction.

Ensuring students are learning in pathways, however, requires more on-demand opportunities for faculty to use student learning outcomes data.

The project team and faculty in the pathways worked to enhance the college's use of the online learning management system (LMS) by (1) using each program's learning outcomes to create students' learning "goals" within the LMS; (2) implementing revised rubrics with appropriate alignment to the learning outcomes; and (3) accessing on-demand reports about student learning following an assessment.

For example, the Medical Imaging program's learning outcomes were made available within the LMS to support the alignment of rubric criteria with appropriate outcomes. Immediately after an assessment was completed—even if it was conducted across multiple course sections and taught by multiple faculty—program-wide reports of student attainment of learning outcomes were available to faculty and leaders.



FRESH SPLASH

The LMS “goals report” provided a summative, high-level perspective of the extent to which students were learning outcomes in the pathway; the immediacy of the data made it possible for program faculty to focus efforts not on collecting data (which used to take multiple weeks of effort) but on student learning in pathways and the continuous improvement of instruction. The reports included a variety of metrics to facilitate the analysis of the assessment and support faculty revisiting course content such as students’ written responses, goals of the course, or academic coaching.

### Enhancing Continuous Improvement Processes

The Ensuring Students Are Learning project significantly contributed to the college’s goal of moving beyond “annual assessment processes” to real-time availability of pathway-specific learning outcomes data in order to foster immediate instructional improvements. Using recent assessment data, faculty or programs initiated an instructional improvement process documented in reports that follow a “plan-do-check-act” model. For example, based on student learning data from two different cohorts, Medical Imaging faculty planned and implemented changes to the language and images used in the assessment. In the “check” phase of the improvement, the program faculty noted that students’ “low success rate could

not be attributed to poor question verbiage or image quality,” which they had originally considered. The assessment results following the change did not achieve the program’s desired goals, so the “act” section of the report indicated the next steps “to develop a review and practice exam specific to image evaluation” with the intent of improving student retention in the pathway and learning of that specific outcome. A subsequent report was developed to document the second effort to improve student learning. The series of reports provided information about both in-depth course-level improvement and high-level programmatic improvements, thereby fundamentally documenting the college’s efforts to ensure students are learning in their academic pathways.

Overall, the model developed through the college’s Ensuring Students Are Learning project provides a scalable approach for all programs to implement improvements to assessment methods, access to student learning outcomes data, and continuous improvement processes.

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*Chris Duke is assistant vice chancellor of accreditation, institutional research, and institutional effectiveness, and Michelle Selk is manager of academic and technical program effectiveness—both at San Jacinto College.*

Table 1. Revised Language to the Childhood Development Rubric

Grading Rubric for TECA 1354 Assignment: Infant Observation	Does Not Meet Expectations	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
<b>Original</b>			
NAEYC Standard 3: Observing, Documenting, and Assessing to Support Young Children and Families 3c. In a responsible way 3d. In partnership with families and other professionals, to positively influence the development of every child.	Document does not describe the child and family background. Document applies little knowledge in using the assessment strategies in a responsible way in partnership with families to positively influence children’s development and learning.	Document describes the child and family background. Document provides explanation in using the assessment strategies in a responsible way in partnership with families to positively influence children’s development and learning.	Document clearly and thoroughly describes the child and family background. Document thoroughly provides in-depth explanations in using the assessment strategies in a responsible way in partnership with families to positively influence children’s development and learning.
<b>Revised</b>			
NAEYC Standard 3: Observing, Documenting, and Assessing to Support Young Children and Families 3d. Knowing about assessment partnerships with families and with professional colleagues to build effective learning environments.	Student provided an incomplete reflection that minimally measured development and learning; reported on a few individual characteristics of the child based on the Denver developmental screening; professional recommendations for families and colleagues were not documented.	Student provided a complete reflection that sufficiently measured development and learning; reported on most of the individual characteristics of the child based on the Denver developmental screening; some professional recommendations for families and colleagues were documented.	Student provided a thoroughly complete reflection that clearly measured development and learning; reported on all individual characteristics of the child based on the Denver developmental screening; all professional recommendations for families and colleagues were well documented.



South Texas College

## Revising Our Guided Pathways Reform Efforts

*Christopher Nelson*

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When South Texas College (STC) applied to participate in the Strengthening Guided Pathways and Career Success by Ensuring Students Are Learning project, our proposal was fairly straightforward: three academic programs would radically revise their learning outcomes assessment processes based on the analysis of learning outcomes assessment data. The three programs targeted would be the associate of arts in business degree, the associate of science in mathematics degree, and the associate of arts in philosophy degree. As our thinking went, if the college could get these three programs—which were not seen as “fans” of learning outcomes assessment—invested in the process, then the movement toward such revisions could become contagious. Funds from the project grant would be used to entice the faculty of these programs to participate.

After officially joining the national Ensuring Students Are Learning project, STC sent a team of five faculty and staff members (working in advising, learning outcomes assessment, institutional effectiveness and assessment, professional and organizational development, and the Division of Liberal Arts) to the 2019 Institute on High-Impact Practices and Student Success hosted by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U). Thanks to interactions with the institute faculty and teams from other participating institutions, the focus of STC’s project started to shift. The project team recognized that the assessment of new high-impact practices would not be realized until a year or two after the initial implementation(s). To offer a quicker yield of assessment data, the STC team turned its attention toward integrating engaging pedagogies and assessment processes within an existing high-impact practice in an area seen as “discipline agnostic.” The direction of the project narrowed to focus on the implementation of new high-impact practices within the college’s first-year Learning Framework seminars. Faculty in both the Education and Psychology departments (which managed and taught these courses) would be only too willing to participate. Consequently, the project was, quite literally, rewritten on the spot.

The 2019 fall semester was spent explaining and rallying support for this initiative back home in South Texas. The participants were locked in, the project ideas were solicited and documented, and administrative support was secured—with

the caveat that STC would not require all first-time-in-college students to take a Learning Framework course. (It would be too difficult to carve out the for-credit real estate within a sixty-credit associate’s degree.)

The spring 2020 semester began with the college’s first-ever academic affairs “data summit.” Every academic program on campus was invited to look at its data (including learning outcomes assessment data) and collectively design targeted high-impact practices to address areas of concern. Held on Valentine’s Day—and comically featuring free buttons reading “I ♥ Data”—the event was a success, according to faculty feedback. Meanwhile, the Education and Psychology departments were preparing for the Ensuring Students Are Learning Project: faculty were being prepped and coached on launching their high-impact practices and scaling up assessment and professional development.

Then, COVID-19 happened. Everything not absolutely “mission-critical” was placed on hold (whether formally or informally) as the entire college scrambled to do what every college was scrambling to do: move their courses online. The postponement also affected AAC&U’s national Ensuring Students Are Learning grant, which was extended (finishing in fall 2021 rather than fall 2020).

Hindsight will tell whether this postponement was a necessary evil or a blessing in disguise. But for the STC project, the spring semester of 2020 was lost—and with it, the summer session of 2020—as the college scrambled to pivot to online learning. And as the fall 2020 semester approached, no one on campus was entertaining innovative projects. The question was, rather, what else to cut in order to survive.

By the time the college hosted its second annual data summit (the first to be held fully online) in spring 2021, the project’s focus had officially shifted again. Originally conceived as a scattered implementation of high-impact teaching and learning practices—as well as the assessment and professional development practices that would be determined later—the project now entails the full-scale revision of learning outcomes assessment. Nevertheless, seeds from the original project remain: the inventorying of existing high-impact practices in the seminar courses coupled with the collaborative creation of discipline-agnostic professional development offerings. The faculty designing and teaching the Learning Framework courses will deliver the high-impact practices and professional development offerings as samples of strategies that are adaptable to any program that wants to improve learning outcomes and processes. Were it not for this journey, the college would probably be where it was two years earlier: namely, looking for a good idea with which to solicit funding and resources. The college would like to thank AAC&U for its encouragement and patience.

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*Christopher Nelson is dean for liberal arts at South Texas College.*





St. Petersburg College

## Building a Stronger Foundation for Standardized Assessment

*Jason Nicholson and David Monroe*

The guided pathways work at St. Petersburg College (SPC) has divided students' disciplinary learning into ten career and academic communities. Each community has defined learning milestones related to academic and student support activities that address barriers or accelerators to student progression. The teams designing these activities for each community are led by a faculty member, an academic advisor, and a learning resources staff member. The work of these “triad” teams is supported at all levels of the college. Ultimately, the high-impact activities within the pathway communities serve as common intellectual experiences for students. Traditionally, SPC has assessed these events and activities by taking simple counts of participants and administering follow-up surveys. Prior to our recent guided pathways work, we had not formally used VALUE (Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education) rubrics to assess specific events or activities.

For SPC's Strengthening Guided Pathways and Career Success by Ensuring Students Are Learning project, the project team intended to assess the impact of these events in a much more meaningful way. Specifically, we sought to measure the effect of applied learning by assessing the extent to which students are attaining learning outcomes by participating in designated out-of-class activities. We partnered with faculty who teach courses on ethics to incorporate our project work into their annual Goree Memorial Ethics Lecture. Our planned guest for the event was Todd May, a philosophy scholar and noted author who served as a philosophical advisor to NBC's sitcom *The Good Place*. We planned to offer the event both face-to-face and streamed to online participants. Each instructor for PHI 1600: Applied Ethics was making attendance at the lecture mandatory for one of their course sections, and the students would receive a short, standardized assignment to complete. From this pool, we would pull one hundred student work artifacts—fifty written by students who attended face-to-face and fifty written by students who attended remotely. By using this approach, we hoped to gauge the effectiveness of the high-impact practice across both modalities.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic changed everything. SPC canceled all on-campus events starting on March 16, 2020; coincidentally, that was the date of the ethics lecture. The event was rescheduled for October 5, 2020, but the project team decided not to wait until then to assess students'



ethical reasoning at an out-of-class event. With the team, funding, and faculty support all in place, we just needed another event and a new assignment prompt.

On April 15, 2020, SPC's Institute for Strategic Policy Solutions hosted “Closing the Resilience Gap,” a panel discussion on mitigating rising sea levels. The panel included an economist, a scientist, and an applied ethicist who discussed related issues in their respective fields. The discussion took place on Zoom, and a moderator fielded questions from participants to help facilitate the dialogue.

In light of the event change, the assignment instructions and questions were modified. Applied Ethics faculty designed the assignment's critical thinking and ethical decision-making model, which is based on major learning outcomes for the course. These faculty already had experience using the Ethical Reasoning VALUE Rubric as a standardized metric of student competency and were able to seamlessly align the rubric with SPC's critical thinking outcome without modifying the rubric.

Because the panel discussion took place later in the term, many faculty members decided not to require the assignment. However, a significant number used it as a substitute for holding a final exam, and some offered it as a substantial extra credit opportunity. As a result, the potential pool of student work artifacts was much smaller than anticipated. Furthermore, because all events and instruction had shifted to an online environment, there was no option to pull student work artifacts created by face-to-face participants. This meant the comparison across modalities was no longer possible. Student papers in participating course sections were made

anonymous and assigned a number. Using a random number generator, one hundred papers were selected and prepared for submission to the VALUE Institute for assessment.

While we awaited the results from the institute, we shifted the remaining grant funds from the Ensuring Students Are Learning project to professional development, with the goal of moving this work forward in other academic departments. We are approaching this in a few different ways. First, we participated for a second time in the Institute on High-Impact Practices and Student Success hosted by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U). We sent a team focused on building a writing across the curriculum initiative. The faculty and academic leadership selected to attend are the key individuals needed to build this program and shepherd it along. The team also included key faculty and chairs from many of the general education disciplines that are incorporated into the work. The topics covered during the institute, along with the opportunity to discuss ideas with recognized experts, are greatly assisting the team in building a holistic design that incorporates assessment.

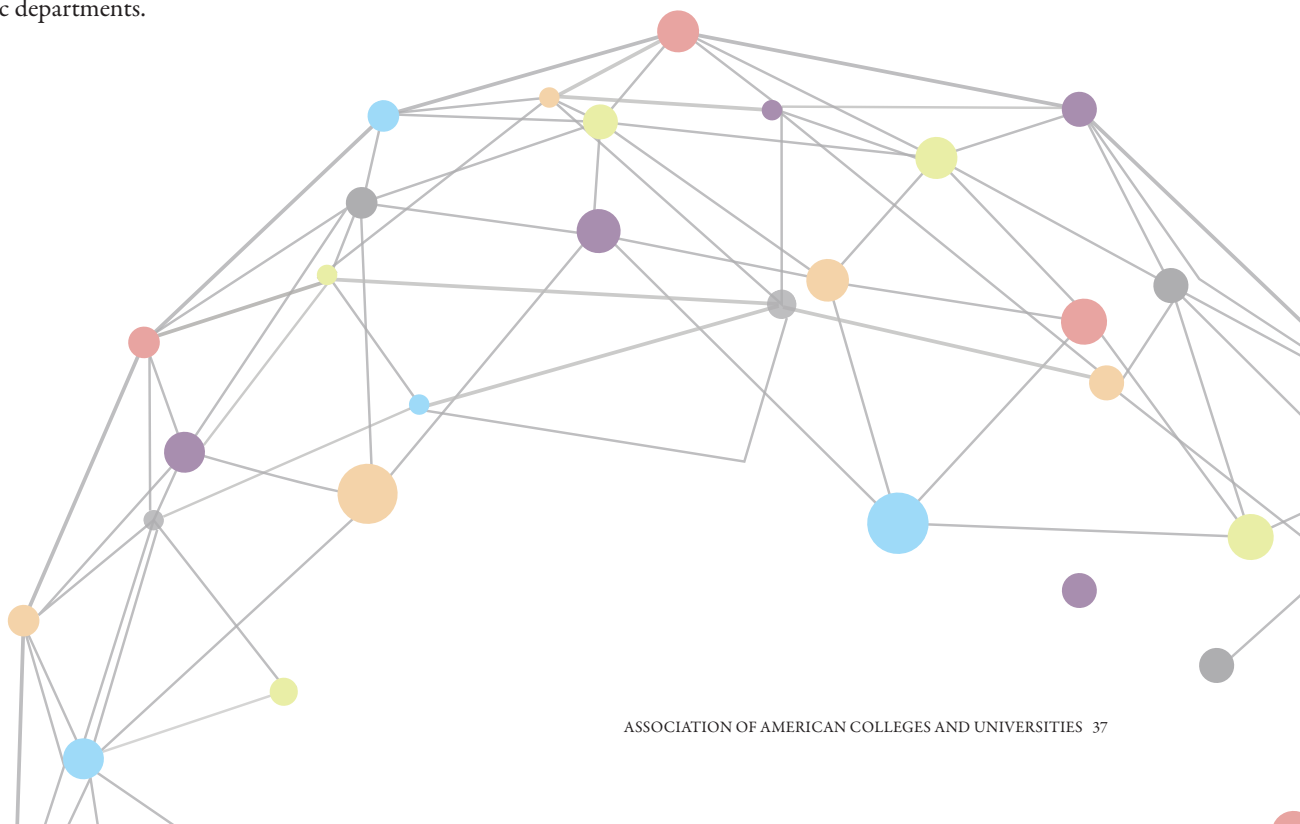
We also participated in AAC&U's 2021 Institute on General Education and Assessment. Our focus during the institute was a spiritual next step following our work on this project. We sent a team that included a faculty member from each of our general education disciplines. Led by a key faculty member from the Ensuring Students Are Learning project to capitalize on the knowledge gained there, the team's overall focus is on incorporating standardized, VALUE-based assessment into the structure of our pathways in other career and academic communities on campus. By adopting similar assessment structures within our practices and events, we can begin to do more in-depth comparisons across academic departments.

**Using VALUE (Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education) rubrics, the team's overall focus is on incorporating standardized assessment into the structure of our pathways in career and academic communities on campus.**

Finally, members from the triads and other college staff attended the one-day AAC&U Summer Institutes Symposium. This symposium brought together campus teams who aspire to bring high-impact practices, general education reform, increased equity, and meaningful assessment strategies to scale at their institutions. This will allow for deeper discussion between symposium participants and our institute teams as they move forward with our pathways work. Together, these professional development opportunities will ensure the spirit of this work will continue long after the Ensuring Students Are Learning project ends.

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*Jason Nicholson is student life and leadership coordinator, and David Monroe is professor of ethics—both at St. Petersburg College.*







## Waubonsee Community College

# Building Faculty Understanding of Equitable Teaching Strategies

*Janette Funaro*

When Waubonsee Community College joined nineteen other community colleges in the Strengthening Guided Pathways and Career Success by Ensuring Students Are Learning project, our team was excited to help answer important questions about our students' learning in their academic pathways.

The first pillar of our college's strategic plan is to enhance student equity and success. Thus, efforts to achieve equitable outcomes for our students have become a central focus of what we do, from our Council on Access and Inclusion, which has a mission to create an inclusive campus environment and provide opportunities for equity-focused organizational learning, to Association of College and University Educators training for faculty, which focuses on inclusivity and transparent teaching strategies that support all students.

Waubonsee's recent work has included important efforts by our faculty to outline program maps for students. By honing the focus of student programs and creating detailed

pathways for each academic area, the faculty played an important role in clarifying the academic journey for students. Based on these maps, which the college features prominently on its website, college staff strategically identified courses that needed to be "guaranteed to run" no matter what so that students could rely on the schedules they planned for their pathways. The college's assessment team also worked with faculty on modified versions of the VALUE (Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education) rubrics, recently completing a pilot assessment using the rubrics.

In addition, our counseling and advising team is hard at work redesigning student support processes. Realizing that sometimes the students who need support the most are not the ones coming through our advisors' doors, the redesign team made two significant transformational changes. First, it shifted from a passive walk-in service model to a proactive case management model in which new students are assigned an academic and career advisor who follows them from their first semester to graduation. Enhanced outreach creates more equitable student services at a higher level. Second, the project integrated academic and career development support into a holistic Office of Academic and Career Advising so that career exploration and planning techniques are infused throughout the students' education. Because of its proactive nature, the redesign supports improvement of student retention and equity.

Building from this ongoing work, the college's goals for the Ensuring Students Are Learning project were to measure student learning in the English, History, and Biology pathways,



PHOTOS: WAUBONSEE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

in which instructors were using high-impact practices and were adept at assessing student learning consistently. We also planned to increase the awareness, understanding, and use of inclusive teaching strategies among our faculty through quality, intensive training. Our overarching goal throughout would be to foster improved and equitable outcomes in learning.

During the intensive Institute on High-Impact Practices and Student Success hosted by the Association of American Colleges and Universities in July 2019, our team of faculty and administrators decided we would implement our own on-campus faculty institute focusing on equity and high-impact assignments. We wanted instruction to come from faculty as much as possible and to focus on small, high-impact changes first. Our Equity and High-Impact Practices (E-HIPs) Institute in fall 2019 was cofacilitated by colleagues from another community college and a four-year transfer partner.

The first day of the E-HIPs Institute focused on developing inclusive syllabi and teaching practices. This session began with a discussion of diversity, equity, and inclusion in teaching and then explored practical strategies for improving course syllabi, classroom climate, and the integration of students' voices in the classroom. On day two, instructors who facilitate Oakton Community College's faculty credential in high-impact practices instructed our faculty on writing-intensive courses, problem-based learning, and ways to embed academic skills in coursework. They then helped faculty to brainstorm and workshop their own high-impact assignments guided by the criteria associated with high-impact practices, career-readiness competencies identified by the National Association of Colleges and Employers, their courses' learning outcomes, and the college-wide learning outcomes. These assignments, which were used in spring 2020 courses, could be more easily and quickly incorporated into faculty members' existing courses.

The shift to online learning in spring 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic was very challenging for our students and faculty. Faculty who had planned high-impact assignments needed to make significant adjustments in order to implement them or modified versions of them. The pandemic and its human and economic toll, which were experienced so inequitably, as well as the social upheaval the country experienced in response to the murder of George Floyd, had us moving our focus to offering more support for our students and colleagues and intensifying our efforts to understand what makes equity essential to a community college's mission. Our response to the pandemic has also taken our teachers and learners to new learning modalities. But with vulnerable student populations finding it more difficult to remain enrolled, the need for equity-based practices has never been more apparent and more urgent.

As we move forward with our Ensuring Students Are Learning project, we realize that continued work is needed at the individual instructor and course level, as well as in campus-wide structures. Our team's discussions are focused



on how to support equity-based and high-impact learning, both in our new pandemic-affected environment (exploring ways to provide this learning remotely) and as we return to on-campus learning. The participating faculty are working with the college's Office of Faculty Development and Engagement to give faculty the space to support, discuss, and collaborate with one another on collaborative, project-based, and applied learning. We continue to look for ways to interact in meaningful ways to support this type of learning, such as hosting book discussions and working more intensively with guest speakers during faculty development sessions. Our goals today are to continue developing cross-disciplinary, practical, and useful strategies to support student learning, as well as to create new ways to engage with existing student support projects.

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## Participating Institutions

AAC&U has partnered with community colleges selected to participate in the Strengthening Guided Pathways and Career Success by Ensuring Students Are Learning project to promote student success and build institutional capacity to ensure students are learning.

In 2019, twenty community colleges were selected through a competitive process to participate in the Ensuring Students Are Learning project.

Amarillo College  
Chattanooga State Community College  
Community College of Baltimore County Foundation, Inc.  
Crafton Hills College  
Finger Lakes Community College  
Houston Community College  
Indian River State College  
Kapi‘olani Community College  
Kilgore College  
Miami Dade College  
Middlesex Community College  
Monroe Community College  
Northeast Wisconsin Technical College  
Palo Alto College  
Salt Lake Community College  
San Antonio College  
San Jacinto College  
South Texas College  
St. Petersburg College  
Waubonsee Community College

With support from project funders and in partnership with the Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCCSE), the participating community colleges have engaged in sustained efforts to build institutional capacity, promote and scale equity and quality, and strengthen student learning for lifelong success.

More information on the project can be found at <https://www.aacu.org/strengthening-guided-pathways>.

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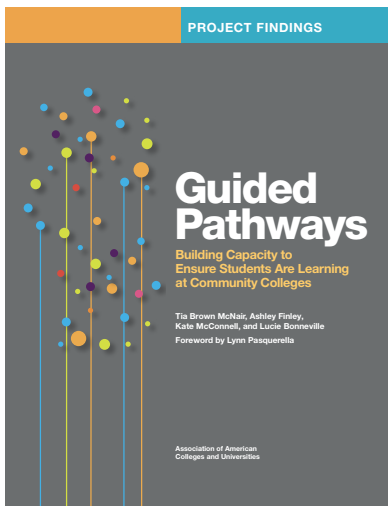


Ascendium Education Group is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization committed to helping people reach the education and career goals that matter to them. Ascendium invests in initiatives designed to increase the number of students from low-income backgrounds who complete postsecondary degrees, certificates, and workforce training programs, with an emphasis on first-generation students, incarcerated adults, rural community members, students of color, and veterans. Ascendium's work identifies, validates, and expands best practices to promote large-scale change at the institutional, system, and state levels, with the intention of elevating opportunity for all. For more information, visit <https://www.ascendiumphilanthropy.org>.



*Coming Fall 2021*

## New Resources from AAC&U's Strengthening Guided Pathways and Career Success by Ensuring Students Are Learning Project



*Guided Pathways: Building Capacity to Ensure Students Are Learning at Community Colleges* will feature several articles informed by project participant interviews and evaluation survey analysis that highlight the multiyear project goals, activities, findings, and recommendations for future work. The report will also feature articles about the forthcoming Teaching-Learning-Assessment Framework and the campus teams' participation in AAC&U's VALUE Institute. The research report will be available as a downloadable resource on AAC&U's website.



AAC&U's Teaching-Learning-Assessment (TLA) Framework will be a practical, web-based tool to help institutions build capacity to ensure students are learning. Organized into five key phases and featuring elements such as campus spotlights, campus videos, guiding questions, and team activities, the TLA Framework will offer strategies for how to successfully implement and scale the fourth pillar of the guided pathways model, ensure students are learning. The TLA Framework will be openly available as an interactive, web-based tool located on AAC&U's Office of Diversity, Equity, and Student Success web page.

**For more information on the forthcoming project resources, please contact Tia Brown McNair at [mcnair@aacu.org](mailto:mcnair@aacu.org) or Lucie Bonneville at [lbonneville@aacu.org](mailto:lbonneville@aacu.org).**







## About AAC&U

AAC&U is the leading national association dedicated to advancing the vitality and public standing of liberal education by making quality and equity the foundations for excellence in undergraduate education in service to democracy. Its members are committed to extending the advantages of a liberal education to all students, regardless of academic specialization or intended career. Founded in 1915, AAC&U now comprises more than 1,000 member institutions—including accredited public and private colleges, community colleges, research universities, and comprehensive universities of every type and size.

AAC&U functions as a catalyst and facilitator, forging links among presidents, administrators, faculty, and staff engaged in institutional and curricular planning. Through a broad range of activities, AAC&U reinforces the collective commitment to liberal education at the national, local, and global levels. Its high-quality programs, publications, research, meetings, institutes, public outreach efforts, and campus-based projects help individual institutions ensure that the quality of student learning is central to their work as they evolve to meet new economic and social challenges. Information about AAC&U can be found at [www.aacu.org](http://www.aacu.org).



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