

# **PORTERVILLE COLLEGE**

## **GUIDED PATHWAYS COMMITTEE**

### **PC Guided Pathways Pillar 4: Ensuring Learning Plan**

**Draft 4/10/23**

#### **Overview**

This document reviews the significance of Guided Pathways Pillar 4 - ensuring learning is occurring with intentional outcomes - for the work at Porterville College to promote student success with equity, the goals proposed by the Porterville College Guided Pathways Committee for achieving success through this pillar, areas of focus proposed for strengthening our college's work in this area, and recommendations for achieving success in these areas of focus. Overall success is seen as deriving from a holistic approach, in which faculty work collaboratively across disciplines and instructional divisions and partnering closely with staff in instructional and student support services, respective areas of administrative leadership, and other areas of the college whose work aligns with these goals.

The recommendations included here will require the efforts of individuals in all employee categories of the college to implement successfully, and while the Guided Pathways Committee encourages individual initiative in the pursuit of these goals, we also seek to promote a cooperative and coordinated approach to avoid duplication of work and working in isolation, and focus instead on communication and mutual support. We consider this a living document subject to additional perspectives and revisions as needs, resources, and expertise on our campus change over time. Guided Pathways Pillar 4 is in many ways the most critical part of the Student Journey, and requires the focus of us all, working together, to support the success of our students in learning.

#### **General Goals:**

- Greater integration between faculty and student support services
- Increased utilization and classroom integration by faculty of support services
- Cultivating a view of student support as a partnership across the college
- Encouraging all staff to consider where they can contribute to improving student success in learning
- Encouraging all staff to have a personal plan for contributing to improving student success in learning

# Introduction: How Do We Ensure Learning?

The fourth pillar of the Guided Pathways framework under the California Community College system is ‘Ensure Learning is Happening with Intentional Outcomes’. But what does this statement mean? How do we *ensure* this across all courses and programs? Of all of the areas of Guided Pathways, ensuring that our students are learning would seem to be the most important, yet it is also the most difficult to measure. We can document that students complete assignments, we can assign them grades based on our assessment of their work, and we can collect data for defined student success metrics, transfer, and graduation rates. We can do everything possible to ensure that our pedagogy, assignments, and course designs will demonstrate to us that they have obtained the intended learning outcomes for the courses and programs, but does doing this ensure that students have learned what we intended for them to learn? We cannot know the contents of people’s minds, and so we must rely on proxy measures of our own devising. Ultimately, our work is rooted in the faith that learning is occurring through a combination of experience and expertise, quality course design, strong campus-wide support staff and programs, the use of assessment methods adopted across all programs that produce sufficiently comparable and consistent evidence that we can be confident that their evidence demonstrates what we think it demonstrates, and that students are learning with intentional outcomes – and opportunities for us to interact with students in meaningful ways that give them the opportunity to express what they have learned in multiple and diverse forms.

According to the American Association of Community Colleges in a 2017 document on Guided Pathways, the following are recommended practices to assess and enrich student learning:

- Program-specific learning outcomes
- Project-based, collaborative learning
- Applied learning experiences
- Inescapable student engagement
- Faculty-led improvement of teaching practices
- Systems/procedures for the college and students to track mastery of learning outcomes that lead to credentials, transfer, and/or employment

Although this area of Guided Pathways would also seem to fall clearly under the domain of faculty, the recommendations within this document also recognize the critical roles of other non-instructional faculty members of the college working in diverse capacities. Well-designed faculty and student support services and a campus-wide, team-based approach can help faculty by providing forms of support for students that fall outside the faculty direct classroom instruction area yet still support faculty and students. These collaborations increase communication, build trust and mutual understanding, and reduce barriers to student course and program completion. This document will outline where recommendations are specific to faculty, where they apply to other areas of campus, and where they require a collaborative approach across areas of the campus to implement.

In some cases, Porterville College is already doing well in providing the necessary support to students and faculty to help ensure learning is happening with intentional outcomes. In other areas, the support structure is there, but would benefit from additional resources. Other recommendations in this document include changes to existing processes and practices, or the creation of new processes and practices. It may not be possible to implement all of the recommendations included here, but we recommend implementing as many as possible and thinking holistically about our goals, because implementing some recommendations but not others may not resolve the issues these recommendations are intended to address.

# Areas of Focus

## 1) Faculty Areas

### 1A) Faculty Peer Support

- **Develop new approach to new faculty orientation, increasing current faculty role & responsibilities toward new faculty (full-time and adjunct)**

In a recent survey of faculty, the need to provide stronger support to new full- and part-time faculty was apparent for those new to the geographic area, new to teaching, or just new to the institution. The current two-hour new faculty orientation is not sufficient to address the many areas identified in the survey. In discussions between the current Academic Senate President and Vice-President of Instruction, the idea was developed of dividing responsibilities into different areas, with the Academic Senate and CCA potentially taking responsibility for some areas to be overseen by faculty, the Office of Instruction overseeing some areas, and Student Services some areas. Although some instructional divisions or individual faculty take responsibility for helping their new instructors, some areas may be better addressed through a coordinated effort to ensure consistency and equal access to information and support. In addition, while some of this may be provided for new faculty in the week prior to the start of classes, other areas may need to be introduced earlier than that, and forms of support may need to continue well after the start of classes to ensure faculty do not have experiences that impact the success of their work, their job satisfaction, and their ability to support their students.

- **Develop faculty mentoring program to support full-time and adjunct faculty**

One area noted in the faculty survey and other campus conversations was instituting a regular, structured faculty mentoring program. A faculty member with a longer history at the college might be assigned or volunteer to mentor a new full- or part-time instructor, such as through regular check-ins or meetings to address concerns and be a confidante outside of the evaluation process. This support is particularly important for adjunct instructors who spend less time on campus, are not part of many other campus conversations, and have less access to and awareness of resources available to them.

- **Increase faculty interactions and learning exchanges**

Although the work of faculty in the classroom is often individual, structured and unstructured interactions with peers can produce unexpected innovation and creativity, and may lead to greater job satisfaction as well. The intentional planning of physical spaces and diverse forms of interaction may in turn lead to classroom innovations and enthusiasm that in turn will translate to greater student engagement and success.

- **Develop a faculty common space for meetings and informal gatherings**

PC has no common 'faculty lounge' in which faculty from different instructional areas can congregate informally and socially. As a result, many faculty use smaller common spaces closer to their offices, which affects with whom they communicate, and others may simply stay in their offices. A dedicated faculty common space would encourage more cross-college, interdisciplinary interaction and could be a place that houses common resources

for faculty as well. Pre-COVID, the college Guided Pathways leads had planned a 'faculty learning space' that was abandoned during the pandemic closure period, which would have housed a special library of teaching-and-learning books and related resources. This concept could be revisited while seeking a potential location on campus for such a common space.

- **Encourage faculty 'norming' in grading/assessment methods**

The process of norming, or calibration, encourages faculty to assess work in a more consistent way across all faculty in an area, whether a single course or discipline, or across disciplines. Encouraging greater discussion toward developing a culture of norming of assessments for a variety of assignment types, such as essays, portfolios, capstone, speeches, etc. While remembering to also recognize academic freedom and different teaching styles and personalities, courageous conversations about grading and assessment standards may lead to greater mutual respect and understanding among faculty, and greater confidence among students in understanding what to expect when completing assignments and local academic standards, and reducing sources of inequity that create barriers in the student journey. Existing discussions about areas such as outcomes assessments, and group activities that encourage such discussions, such as the current Outcomes Fests, if extended to a wider scale, might reduce disagreements about methods of assessment and rigor and help build such a culture of norming.

- **Data coaching instruction, improving data access and training Data-driven Comparative Approaches Toward Instructional Equity**

Currently, only division chairs have regular access to the databases maintained by the Office of Institutional Research, and training in using data is limited. Not all division chairs are equally versed in data-driven strategic decision making, and many divisions have multiple disciplines where the chair may not have experience. Democratizing access to data and increasing training in the types of data available, how to interpret data, and how to make data-driven decisions may improve not just scheduling, but also identify equity gaps in programs and classes that can drive closer examinations of instructional decisions to improve student success.

In addition, differences in student success rates across faculty in the same courses suggest the need for a larger community discussion. Greater individual access to faculty data may lead to challenging but needed conversations. In a culture of mutual support, these conversations need not be avoided, and when the focus is on students and not instructors, and the goals remains on methods and practices that will improve student success, experimenting with instructional changes in search of collective improvement can help ensure faculty stay focused on the larger goal of helping students.

## **1B) Rethinking Faculty Practices**

- **Office hours**

The pandemic working conditions changed how faculty interacted with students, but also created new ways in which to do so. Because of this, traditional 'office hours' are now a bit outdated as a concept and may produce inequities in student access to their instructors outside of class time – particularly with the increase in online and asynchronous classes. This is a good time to rethink college expectations for faculty availability to students, and for faculty to develop innovative solutions to ensure their availability to students meets the needs of students with diverse schedules and often significant limitations to their ability to meet with faculty. PC's Director of Institutional Research recent solicited faculty feedback on office hours, and we await the results of that study. The implications of rethinking office hours for the CCA contract and faculty evaluations should also be considered.

- **Equitable Syllabi Development**

Course syllabi are a required feature of courses, but are not typically an area of instructional training or emphasis, and one of the first aspects of a course that students experience are especially important for creating the tone and expectations of an instructor for their students. Currently at PC there are few guidelines for course syllabi, and extensive variation in what faculty create, but there is evidence from research that syllabi can create inequities and recommendations for how to ensure that all syllabi are student-friendly, equitable, and a useful resource. The increased reliance on Canvas for courses also creates opportunities to ensure course online syllabi are clear and accessible. While some of this has been included in online instruction training, ensuring that the knowledge and skills are easily available and the awareness of their importance is widespread will bring additional benefits to students.

Ensuring that the syllabus embodies equity-minded principles and is the product of careful instructor self-reflection and consideration of the diverse perspectives of student understanding will help lay the foundation for a relationship that is supportive and student-centered in its expression and philosophy. The college could provide recommendations and resources to faculty, as well as workshops, and encourage faculty to share and discuss approaches to disseminate ideas in this area.

- **Student-centered scheduling**

Improving access to courses for student populations with diverse scheduling needs is essential to achieving learning success with equity. Although faculty also face restrictions on their ability to offer face to face courses at different times due to factors such as enrollment and classroom space, as well as in many cases limited numbers of faculty in certain disciplines, there may still be room to improve overall scheduling through increased, cross-divisional dialogue in a venue such as Enrollment Management committee, increased discussion about draft schedules with counselors and Student Services staff, increased soliciting of student feedback on scheduling needs, and increased awareness of habits in scheduling that may have an adverse impact on students. Starting earlier and making strategic scheduling decisions in the context of whole-college feedback and shared planning may produce stronger schedules without sacrificing instructional divisional authority.

- **Faculty Advising**

PC formerly had a program that allowed instructional faculty to participate in the student advising process as faculty advisors. In recent years, there has been discussion about bringing such a program back, and allow faculty who are interested and are trained to provide limited advising to students in their program/discipline/division. If implemented thoughtfully, such a program would reduce the burden on counseling faculty while increasing the understanding of advising issues among instructional faculty, and strengthening the relationship between counseling and Student Services in general with instructional faculty and their academic divisions.

- **Embracing Evidence-Based Instructional Practices**

There is now an extensive body of research and evidence of success from colleges nationwide in support of instructional practices associated with greater student success, particularly for students who enter college with the greatest disadvantages and who are at the greatest risk for failure in completing programs and reaching educational goals. Among those recommended by PC faculty and staff are the following:

- **High-Impact Teaching Practices:**

High-Impact Teaching Practices, also known as High-Impact Teaching Strategies, are evidence-based instructional approaches that are associated with greater student engagement and success, such as service-learning, capstone projects, research opportunities, and learning communities. As these may not have been

part of faculty instructional experiences, providing opportunities to become familiar with them and consider how their adoption might benefit students over more traditional instructional approaches through optional workshop or trainings, may lead to greater student success.

- **Equitable Grading Practices**

Many grading practices (inflexible deadlines, homework that affects grades rather than being used as ungraded practice, points for attendance and participation, relying on assessment tools that work for some learning styles but not others) might disadvantage the specific student populations we want to be helping, and opportunities to learn about more equitable alternative practices might provide students with more opportunities.

- **Student-Centered Curricula and Pedagogy**

Research has shown that students have greater success in connecting to content that is presented through examples that are meaningful to their own cultural backgrounds and can see themselves in the course content. The contributions of women, people of color, LGBTQ+, and the economically disadvantaged in particular tend to be erased or underrepresented in course content. When making pedagogical decisions in their courses, faculty should also consider the unique needs, including learning styles, life circumstances, and diverse past cultural experiences and expectations of the students when designing courses. Investing the time to develop this understanding and adapt their pedagogical approaches accordingly requires faculty engagement and understanding of how the student experiences and perspectives of today may be different than their own experiences and those common in the past, and the benefits to students from the investment made by faculty in these areas.

Having greater local expertise in these areas and with stronger professional development support will help ensure they become embedded in everyday practice and the culture of teaching in the institution.

## **2) Areas of College Support to Faculty**

- **Support increased access to year-round professional development opportunities**

Currently, the faculty professional development contractual obligation is met through three days of programming known as 'Flex days'. Many colleges incentivize faculty participation in planning and meeting their professional development requirements by providing robust and year-round opportunities on their campus, as well as allowing the requirement to be met through off-campus activities that related to one or more of the areas defined by the CCCC as fulfilling professional development needs. The PC Academic Senate has engaged in extensive discussions of this topic and is dedicated to developing a system to allow this approach for our faculty, but it requires a record keeping system and a process for ensuring that activities credited toward the contractual professional development requirement are in place.

- **Increase/invest in local faculty leadership role in professional development**

Providing increased opportunities for faculty to take a leadership role in on-campus professional development will incentivize innovation and create more options for other faculty. This may include supporting campus faculty leaders to attend off-campus workshops, trainings, or other experiences, as well as their role leading the on-

campus events, such as through receiving additional 'Flex' credit, and stipends for their time spent creating and conducting events (if available).

- **Revive Staff Development committee, revise charge and role**

The Staff Development committee has not met since 2019 and recent discussions have shown an interest in reviving the committee and updating its' charge and membership, potentially making it the central coordinating body on campus for developing local professional development opportunities, linking employees to off-site professional development opportunities, and finding and raising awareness of funding in support of professional development across all employee groups.

- **Increase faculty use of new course design and classroom instruction approaches**

PC lacks a faculty instructional design specialist and has a vacancy in a key non-instructional position in the former Educational Media Design Specialist and now Assistant Director of Academic Technology and Professional Development. Most faculty have no training in these areas as part of their regular education, and may only have attained any skill or knowledge through individual initiative. By filling the existing management vacancy and considering having a dedicated faculty specialist in academic technology and instructional design for them to partner with (perhaps as a reassigned time coordinator), faculty as a whole might enjoy an instructional environment that keeps them informed of new technology, new research in education, new evidence-based teaching practices, new educational legislation, and new topics of discussion pertaining to education state- and nation-wide.

- **Incentivize post-tenure faculty investments in teaching and developing a faculty culture of continuous self-improvement and peer support**

Under the current CCA contract, faculty after receiving tenure are required to do little other than share goals and accomplishments and receive adequate student evaluations. Even without a contractual requirement, it is essential for our students who may be working with post-tenured faculty and long-time adjunct faculty for as much as a few decades in their teaching careers that they work in an environment that supports efforts to constantly self-evaluate, self-improve, and be engaged in college service, disciplinary expertise, and changes in instructional methods and pedagogy. This might be accomplished in part by supporting individual faculty innovation and initiative at the institutional level, and in part by institutionalizing the support itself through things like a robust professional development program, offerings like certificates for completing new trainings, or a 'Master Teacher' program to support mid-career investments in teaching-and-learning.

### **3) Support Services Areas**

- **Expand tutoring, PASS leaders, and mentor programs to more disciplines**

The use of students as a form of faculty and student support cultivates student leadership and engagement, provides other students with a less-intimidating form of classroom support, and builds a bridge between faculty and students through students leaders who can give struggling students a voice and help they might not themselves seek. Currently, the use of these program is limited to a small number of disciplines, but in increasing the areas represented, it will create more opportunities for student participation, more opportunities for reaching

students in the classrooms, and provide more equity for students across the college in having access to support programs – while also reducing the demands on faculty to meet student support needs on their own.

- **Increase integration of Library services into course design & assignments**

The library, library services, and library staff can provide essential support for faculty, and more structured and regular integration of the library can support faculty innovation and student engagement. In addition, by encouraging a greater embrace of the resources and expertise of faculty and staff in these areas, instructional faculty may reduce their own burden of effort and improve student success through a more team-based approach to instruction that relies on the value of the staff and resources in these areas.

- **Improve faculty use of and student response to Early Alert**

The Early Alert system is a useful method to assist faculty with students showing signs of struggling in their classes, but Student Services has considered changes to improve its effectiveness. By ensuring students develop stronger personal connections with counselors and educational advisors early in their student journey, they may be more responsive to efforts to contact them because the contact is someone they know and trust. This also requires restructuring how Student Services staff divide the work of responding to faculty Early Alert reports. Responses may need to be divided by Academic and Career Pathway to link students in those pathways to support staff they may know from prior interactions, such as orientation or regular check-ins.

- **Develop case management approach to counseling to create stronger student connections, ensure regular student check-ins and the receipt of timely advice during the student journey**

The case management approach for student counseling and advising has been successful at other colleges, and has been part of recent discussion and planning in Student Services at PC. The increased contact with students and increased student engagement through having specific individuals they know are there to assist them is also associated with greater student persistence and success. Implementing this approach fits with the goals of Guided Pathways and will improve equity for student access to these support services.

- **Rethink approaches toward Academic Integrity and Behavioral intervention**

The current system at PC for dealing with violations of the college Academic Integrity policy or incidences requiring behavioral intervention addresses problems after they occur, and could benefit from more preventative approaches. The system also creates confusion, with faculty who report being unclear what, if anything, has been done after an incident. While information is posted on the website regarding policies, more may be needed to ensure a culture that values integrity and appropriate behavior to ensure a campus climate in which students and faculty both feel safe and respected. A revamped student orientation could devote more time to these matters to increase student awareness, and faculty trainings in preemptively avoiding the conditions in which such issues may occur would also help (see sections in this document on faculty professional development).

- **Increase Attention to the Importance of Mindfulness & Wellness**

The roles of mindfulness and wellness in the lives of students and college employees have become a larger part of the discussion of education nation-wide, but for smaller, rural colleges with limited staff and resources, providing consistent support and awareness has been a challenge. The recent COF appointment of a Wellness Counselor is



an important first step, but the work is too large for a single staff person, and would benefit from a 'train the trainer' approach to greater knowledge and awareness of resources and needs, and build a culture of greater respect, understanding, mutual support, and caring for others to reduce the impact of students, faculty, and staff when mental health challenges occur.

## **4) Administrative Area**

- **Develop a culture emphasizing faculty support**

At many colleges, administration is viewed adversarially by faculty due to their authoritative role and separate campus culture, separate physical spaces, and separate experiences in education. But while their roles may differ and some aspects of this separateness are unavoidable, there are also opportunities in their areas of authority and expertise to provide critical support and advocacy, and to assist in the building of support structures. Improving communication and mutual understanding and respect can help lead to a more supportive, mutually beneficial working relationship.

- **Develop incentives for faculty achievement beyond the evaluation process**

Although there are limits on what can be required of faculty by administrative leaders due to the faculty contract, there may be ways to incentivize faculty achievement and support a culture of faculty ambition and continuous improvement, as described elsewhere in this document.

- **Ensure financial resources needed to support efforts**

Administrative leaders are often the most knowledgeable about financial resources, sources of funding, and the bureaucratic processes for obtaining and using them. Communicating about opportunities and processes with all faculty will help ensure that those who might seek support for areas of improvement understand what is possible.

## **5) Whole College Areas:**

- **Develop a new student orientation with more structured introductions to faculty and support staff in student areas of interest to promote stronger relationships and student persistence**

The Guided Pathways committee has already engaged in discussion and planning for creating a new student orientation, following the CCRC recommendation that students have more opportunities early in their student journey to interact with faculty in their areas of interest, as well as professionals in line with their career goals and faculty and staff at transfer institutions. Recent discussion at PC in College Council, Flex Day, and the Academic Senate have promoted the idea of using the Friday before the fall semester begins as a 'Welcome Day' for students for the new semester, allowing all faculty to be present (and partially fulfilled their Flex obligations) and organizing events for students by Academic and Career Pathway in which they can meet faculty in their areas of interest as well as support staff, while also seeing the campus and locating their classrooms and other important places outside of the hectic first week of class.

- **Develop a designed first-year experience to build a peer community and ensure students take a class in their area of interest in the first semester**

Following CCRC recommendation, the Guided Pathways committee has discussed a more intentionally designed first-term experience in which students would be assured of taking classes in their area of interest, increasing their motivation to persist to the second semester, meeting faculty and students in their area of interest at the same time. Coursework would be supported by planned events or activities relating to their Academic and Career Pathways, in addition to completing a recommended Student Success course tailored to students within their pathway.

- **Ensure committee meetings are action-oriented and agenda items are approached in relation to student success**

As our focus is on achieving student success with equity, work within committees should be framed in relation to these goals also. Ensuring committee meetings are productive and focused on action through the lens of how the work will lead to greater student success with equity will help meeting stay focused, avoid unnecessary tangential discussions, and lead to achievable objectives.

## **General Questions**

- Which areas require changes to existing processes?
- Which changes can be implemented immediately?
- Which areas require cross-college collaboration?
- Which areas lack staffing, expertise, or resources on campus to address?

## **Conclusion**

Achieving success with these goals will for some require a change in habits, a change in mindset, or a change in work relationships. All change requires effort, and the easiest thing is always to continue to do what we have been doing. But if we keep students as our focus, we hope that the benefits to students from these recommendations is clear, and that any reluctance, skepticism, or resistance to change will be overcome by a commitment to helping achieve student success with equity.

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