

NCII Guided Pathways Resource Series #5:

Indicators Your Student Experience Has Been Transformed by Your Guided Pathways Efforts

Dr. Rob Johnstone & Priyadarshini Chaplot
National Center for Inquiry & Improvement
* With Support From AACCC, CCCSE, and CCRC

OVERVIEW

In this discussion guide from NCII & Friends, we share a set of indicators that your students' experience has transformed as a result of your guided pathways and other planning efforts. We do so to help colleges ensure that the impressive amount of planning activity and implementation structures are resulting in an optimized student experience at scale. It is only by producing these optimized student experiences that we can expect key progress and completion outcomes to improve...



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Indicators that Your Students' Experience Has Been Transformed by Your Guided Pathways Reforms



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Introduction

In our work with hundreds of colleges on the ground at various stages of guided pathways planning and implementation, we are struck by the range and depth of the conversations about guided pathways issues, and in many cases, design work around guided pathways. However, we've also noted that even at colleges rolling out guided pathways, it's not always clear how the student experience will change through these reforms. In fact, it is possible that the guided pathways activities / conversations have unintentionally taken the focus *off* understanding and optimizing the student experience and rather channeled it inward towards college design activities such as mapping programs or identifying and naming metamajors. For outcomes to markedly improve within a guided pathways context, the student experience itself will have to evolve significantly. To that end, we think that colleges might benefit from a centering (or re-centering) of their guided pathways work on improving the student experience as they move into and through the college.

To ensure that guided pathways efforts are student-centered, NCII and its partners offer the following set of student experience research questions. The intent is to focus colleges on quantitative and qualitative measures that would demonstrate the impact of guided pathways design work on the student experience. Please note that this list is not exhaustive; rather it offers some practical starting places to consider the student experience. We strongly suggest that the data be disaggregated to ensure that the benefits of guided pathways are being experienced equitably by different underserved populations.

As an organizing aid, we are using the four stages of the Loss/Momentum Framework¹ from *Completion by Design*, which helps to make key college guided pathways decisions across the full span of the student journey. Note that we are using a recently updated version of the four stages from the Community College Research Center (CCRC) that combines the Progress and Completion stages and adds Advancement as the new fourth stage.

Finally, we have divided the questions into two sets: (1) questions that can be answered with quantitative data that should be readily available at most colleges and (2) qualitative questions that would require data that are not as readily available. We acknowledge that the student experience research questions in the qualitative group might be harder to address, but they are no less important; most would require an intentional survey methodology while a handful require obtaining data from partners. We would suggest that obtaining these data would be worth the effort, but even in naming these questions alone would add value to understanding the student experience.

¹ Completion by Design's Loss/Momentum Framework: <https://www.completionbydesign.org/s/cbd-lmf>

Student Experience Research Questions at Stage 1: Connection

Quantitative Questions

- What percentage of students complete the application at our college but never enroll?
- What percentage of students complete a FAFSA?
- What percentage of students meet with an advisor prior to enrolling for classes?
- What percentage of students successfully enter and use the college's LMS / student portal and other online tools by their first day of classes?
- What percentage of students meaningfully explore potential careers and connect them to programs at the college by the first day of classes? By the end of the first term?

Qualitative Questions

- How accurate of a picture do students have of how much it will cost and how long it will take to complete their program?
- How confident are students that they can handle the financial commitment to completing their certificate / degree / transfer pathway?

Student Experience Research Questions at Stage 2: Entry

Quantitative Questions

- What percentage of students have made an informed choice of a program of study by the end of the first term?
- What percentage of students meet with an advisor and have on file an individualized, full-program plan by their second term?
- What percentage of students complete college-level math and English in their first year?
- What percentage of students take three program courses (including prerequisites) from a metamajor / focus area in their first year?
- What percentage of students enroll in classes and have completed zero units at the end of their first term?

Qualitative Questions

- How confident are students that they are making progress toward their goals at the end of their first term?
- What levels of engagement and connectedness do your students feel after their first four weeks at the college? Are these levels different for important subgroups (e.g., first-time-in-college students, students of color)?

Student Experience Research Questions at Stage 3: Progress / Completion

Quantitative Questions

- What percentage of students meet with an advisor in their third or fourth term?
- What percentage of students change their program / major after the third term?
- What percentage of students experience a structured applied learning experience in their pathway (e.g., internship, group project, field work, apprenticeship)?

Qualitative Questions

- Do students feel that the courses they take are relevant to their long-term transfer and career goals (especially general education / math / English courses)?
- Do students share that the college offers the courses they need to progress toward completion (a) in the terms they need them and (b) on days and times they can take them?
- Do students share that they are able to enroll in the classes they need on days and times they can take them?
- At the end of an advising session, how confident are students that they know what they need to do next?

Student Experience Research Questions at Stage 4: Advancement

Quantitative Questions

- What is the demographic breakdown of graduates from programs leading to high-wage jobs vs. programs leading to low-wage jobs?
- What is the average number of units taken by last year's graduates, disaggregated by program and race/ethnicity?

Qualitative Questions

- How confident are students that they understand the connection between their program at the college and their eventual career?
- How confident are students that they have the skills (discipline / general education / interviewing) to make the transition to workforce?
- How many units are being applied to junior status in a major at your students' transfer destinations? (This is a quantitative question but isn't readily available at most colleges—it requires working with your four-year partners to get transcript data on your students.)

Final Thoughts

If you have any comments or questions, please contact Dr. Rob Johnstone at rob@ncii-improve.com. We would particularly welcome other suggestions or examples of these types of student experience research questions that you have found or would find helpful in your work.

About NCII and A2I2

NCII focuses its work with colleges on guided pathways and student financial stability reforms. We work directly with colleges who are interested in working toward implementing guided pathways and student financial stability reforms at scale through our two-year Agency, Attitude, and Intensive Implementation (A2I2) cohort model. If you are interested in more information on A2I2, see <http://ncii-improve.com/a2i2-cohort/> or contact Dr. Rob Johnstone at rob@ncii-improve.com.