**Redesigning Community College Student Onboarding Through Guided Pathways**

**Part 3: Planning Exercises to Guide the Redesign Process**

This document presents a set of four planning exercises for colleges seeking to redesign their new student onboarding practices as part of [**larger guided pathways reforms**](https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/what-we-are-learning-guided-pathways.html). These exercises, which constitute Part 3 of CCRC’s packet on new student onboarding, are meant to complement the first two parts of the packet. Part 1 reviews research on why the conventional approach to student onboarding is often unsuccessful in helping students choose and plan a program of study, and it describes how some guided pathways colleges are rethinking and redesigning the onboarding process. Part 2 describes what students we interviewed said about onboarding as they experienced it at two Florida community colleges that have redesigned their onboarding practices using the guided pathways approach, and it presents lessons for improving onboarding practices based on these student perspectives. We encourage those who are considering onboarding reforms at their college to read Parts 1 and 2 of the packet before completing the following exercises. Part 1 (accompanied by short profiles of three colleges that have redesigned new student onboarding) and Part 2 are found are found here: [**https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/redesigning-community-college-onboarding-guided-pathways.html**](https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/redesigning-community-college-onboarding-guided-pathways.html).

**Who should complete these exercises?** We recommend that each college form a cross-functional team of individuals who will be responsible for exploring, planning, or overseeing a redesign of new student onboarding practices. This group of persons should work together to complete these exercises. In our national research on colleges implementing guided pathways reforms, we have found that cross-functional teams facilitate institutional knowledge sharing, which is essential to college redesign efforts. Ideally, cross-functional teams include faculty and academic administrators from program areas, and staff from admissions, marketing, advising, the registrar’s office, financial aid, and information technology, among others.

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| **Features of Onboarding Redesign From a Guided Pathways Perspective**In [**Part 1**](https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/redesigning-community-college-onboarding-guided-pathways.html) of the packet, we describe how colleges implementing guided pathways are redesigning the onboarding process to create a cohesive series of experiences starting from students’ first contact with the college and extending into the first term and beyond. The goal of such a redesign is to support students through the learning and discovery process that research suggests most students need in order to explore and choose a program that aligns with their interests and aspirations. We encourage teams to consider common design features that some colleges are integrating into their student onboarding activities:* Organizing and introducing programs by field of interest
* Improving orientation and new student advising
* Expanding career and transfer advising to all students
* Increasing engagement with programs from the start
* Designing dual enrollment as an on-ramp to college

Examples of how colleges are integrating such features are found both in[**Part 1**](https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/redesigning-community-college-onboarding-guided-pathways.html)of the packet and in accompanying onboarding[**profiles**](https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/redesigning-community-college-onboarding-guided-pathways.html)of the Alamo Colleges in Texas, Laramie County Community College in Wyoming, and Prince George’s Community College in Maryland. |

**What is the purpose of each exercise?** The first three exercises are organized around three goals of a redesigned student onboarding process as discussed in [**Part 2**](https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/redesigning-community-college-onboarding-guided-pathways.html) of the packet: (1) helping students to explore interests and programs, (2) helping students to gain experiences in a program, and (3) helping students with academic and career planning. For each goal, we encourage the teams undertaking this work to consider the following questions:

* What are we doing now to help our students with this goal?
* What would we like to do to help students?
* What would we need to change to better help all students achieve the goal?

To guide these discussions, Exercises 1 through 3 begin with a series of insights derived from student reflections on their onboarding experiences at Indian River State College and St. Petersburg College in Florida. These reflections are described in more detail in [**Part 2**](https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/redesigning-community-college-onboarding-guided-pathways.html) of the packet.

In Exercise 4, we provide a template that a team can use to develop a plan for implementing a redesign of its college’s student onboarding process over the next year and beyond.

**Redesign Exercise 1: How to Help Students Explore Interests and Programs**

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| **CCRC research shows that incoming students appreciate:*** An overview of available meta-majors and programs, including information on the organization and purpose of meta-majors
* Information about career and transfer resources early on, as well as introductions to staff from those areas
* An online version of new student orientation that is as engaging as the in-person version
* Opportunities to engage with other incoming and returning students who have similar career and program interests
* Interactions with knowledgeable advisors and faculty who help with program decision-making by discussing how specific programs differ from one another, which programs might align with a student’s interests, and how results from career assessments can best be interpreted
* Access to career exploration activities, which can be modified for students who already have firm career goals

Our research also suggests that **new student orientation, career assessments, and student success courses** can be improved to help students explore interests and program options. |

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| 1. What are we doing now to help students explore academic and career interests and available program options? Which students currently benefit from these efforts?
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| 1. What would be our ideal process for helping all students explore academic and career interests and available program options?
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| 1. What would we need to change to do this at scale? (As a starting point, consider your college’s staffing and roles, training needs, policies and procedures, and information systems.)
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**Redesign Exercise 2: How to Help Students Gain Experiences in a Program**

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| **CCRC research shows that incoming students appreciate:*** Taking program-specific courses in their first year so they can earn program credits while becoming immersed in skills and knowledge essential to their academic and career goals
* Engaging in hands-on activities and career learning experiences such as internships embedded directly into their course requirements
* Networking with and learning from faculty and career professionals in their field of interest
* Having dedicated time, during class and through on-campus activities, to reflect on their academic and career goals

Our research also suggests that **program courses and** **on-campus events** can be improved to help students gain program-relevant experiences. |

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| 1. What are we doing now to help students gain meaningful experiences in a program? Which students currently benefit from these efforts?
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| 1. What would be our ideal process for helping all students to gain meaningful experiences in a program?
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| 1. What would we need to change to do this at scale? (As a starting point, consider your college’s staffing and roles, training needs, policies and procedures, and information systems.)
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**Redesign Exercise 3: How to Help Students With Academic and Career Planning**

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| **CCRC research shows that incoming students appreciate:*** Access to high-quality program maps during advising sessions
* Advisors and staff who provide accurate, up-to-date information about program and transfer requirements
* Encouragement to participate actively with an advisor in developing a full-program educational plan that shows what courses need to be taken and when and that is customized to a student’s interests, goals, and outside-of-college responsibilities
* Ongoing opportunities to discuss their program progress and long-term goals with an advisor and to modify the educational plan as needed

Our research also suggests that **one-on-one** **academic advising sessions** can be improved to help students engage in academic and career planning. |

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| 1. What do we do now to help students with academic and career planning? Which students currently benefit from these efforts?
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| 1. What would be our ideal process for helping all students with academic and career planning?
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| 1. What would we need to change to do this at scale? (As a starting point, consider your college’s staffing and roles, training needs, policies and procedures, and information systems.)
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**Redesign Exercise 4: Developing a Plan to Improve the Onboarding Process**

As a starting point for planning the redesign of onboarding, a team may use the table below to document the steps its college needs to take in order to undertake and scale the changes identified in Exercises 1 through 3.

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| **Helping Students Explore Interests and Programs** |
| What changes will be made to improve onboarding? | Who is involved? | What is the timeline for this work? | What are next steps for this work? |
| *Example: Integrate opportunities for peer-to-peer interaction into the online version of New Student Orientation* | *Example: VP of Student Affairs, New Student Orientation Staff (conceptualization and implementation); IR/IT (programming)* | *Example: Design: Spring 2021**Implementation: Summer 2021* | *Example: Solicit feedback from current students on interactions and activities that would be most valuable* |
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| **Helping Students Gain Experiences in a Program** |
| What changes will be made to redesign onboarding? | Who is involved? | What is the timeline for this work? | What are next steps for this work? |
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| **Helping Students With Academic and Career Planning** |
| What changes will be made to redesign onboarding? | Who is involved? | What is the timeline for this work? | What are next steps for this work? |
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