

Zane State College

Weaving Projects and Budgets Together to Support Student Success



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Overview of Guided Pathways Reforms at the College

Large-Scale Changes to Practices

One of the key lessons Zane State College President Chad Brown has learned from leading the college through numerous large-scale reforms (see the table on the next page for a summary and the Appendix for more detail) is the importance of weaving projects and budgets together. Reflecting on the college’s work, Dr. Brown commented, “What’s interesting is that these reforms don’t exist by themselves. To implement the volume of things we’ve done, it all has to articulate together.” At Zane State, guided pathways has served as a framework for bringing multiple changes together to support student success.

FAST FACTS

- Location:** Zanesville, Ohio
- Fall 2020 headcount enrollment:** 2,223
- Number of students by race/ethnicity:**
 - Asian – 0
 - Black – 32
 - Hispanic – 31
 - White – 1,951
- FY 2020 operating budget:** \$14.5 million
- Year started guided pathways reforms:** 2016

Overview: Guided Pathways at Zane State College

Key Practices Implemented at Scale

1. Clarifying paths to student end goals

- Identified critical courses by meta-major and eliminated under-enrolled courses that were not essential for program paths.
- Redesigned website to include better information on program requirements and links to transfer program major requirements at partner four-year institutions.
- Reduced number of credit hours required for degrees.
- Aligned math requirements with programs.

2. Helping students get on a program path

- Moved from group orientation sessions to one-on-one meetings with a faculty member in the student's field of interest.
- Redesigned the FYE course to increase student engagement, build students' confidence, and provide critical information when it is needed most.
- Switched from using placement test scores to high school GPA for developmental education placement.
- Eliminated the beginning levels of developmental education and implemented corequisite math and English. Corequisite math support is customized based on the math course (e.g., statistics, trigonometry, algebra) and the specific issues with which students are struggling. The Accelerated Learning Program model is used for English.

- Ensure that all students create an individual education plan.
- Extend program pathways into high schools by encouraging students to take a package of 12 or more credits that align with a college program.

3. Keeping students on path

- Assign success coaches by meta-major and require all new students to meet with a success coach at least once.
- Use an intake survey to identify students who may need additional support and enlist success coaches to conduct additional outreach to these students.
- Removed financial barriers by eliminating online course fees and the matriculation fee.
- Provide a food pantry and a clothing closet to address students' basic needs.

4. Ensuring that students are learning

- Provide a stipend to incentivize faculty participation in professional development over the summer.
- Enhance assessment of learning outcomes by developing course-level assessments.

Promising Trends in Student Success

- Increased the percentage of students completing both college-level math and English in their first year from 14% for the fall 2015 cohort to 29% for the fall 2020 cohort.
- Increased the rate at which entering students earned at least 24 college credits in their first year from 16% for the fall 2015 cohort to 32% the fall 2020 cohort.
- Increased the three-year completion rate for first-time, full-time students from 34% for the 2012 cohort to 54% for the 2016 cohort.
- Decreased the average number of credit hours taken by associate degree graduates from 78 in 2012 to 71 in 2021.

The college has placed particular emphasis on helping students enter and stay on a program path by connecting them to faculty and advisors called success coaches from the start. A focus on early engagement and onboarding is central to several of the college's major reform efforts, including the adoption of case management advising and the redesign of the college's first-year experience (FYE) course and new student orientation. Previously, students' first interaction with the college was an orientation dedicated to registration and logistical information they needed to enroll in classes, such as how to use the Blackboard learning management platform. As of spring 2022, the first thing that happens after a student applies is outreach from a faculty member in the field of interest the student selected on the application. The faculty member then helps the student register to ensure the program area and chosen courses are a good fit based on their interests. The content that had been previously covered during orientation is now part of the FYE course.

Early engagement was also a driving motivation behind the redesign of the FYE course. To promote student engagement, the college made significant changes to both the structure and content of the course. In response to low completion rates for the FYE course, the college changed the format from a one-week course during the first week of the semester to a semester-long course. The semester-long format creates more opportunities for students to connect with each other and allows critical information to be delivered when it is needed. (For example, support for spring registration is provided shortly before registration opens.) In addition, the redesigned course was modeled around C. R. Snyder's theory of hope to enhance students' sense of agency and increase their confidence in their ability to navigate a pathway to their goals. Retention is higher for this redesigned course, and course performance is predictive of success in other courses.

Under the new advising model, success coaches are assigned based on meta-major and take a holistic approach to providing academic, career, and financial advising to students. Students who are undecided work with a career coach to enter a program path as soon as possible. To make support unavoidable, students are required to meet with their success coach at least once in their first term. To provide students support tailored to their needs, the college recently started asking new students to complete an intake survey that assesses five indicators of success. Students are assigned a risk level based on their responses, and success coaches conduct additional outreach for students with higher risk levels.

Just as important as the college's work on onboarding and student engagement are its efforts to clarify pathways and remove structural barriers to entry onto a program path. By reviewing the alignment between courses and meta-majors, the college was able to eliminate under-enrolled courses and identify the courses that are critical to program pathways. Zane State also took several steps to strengthen math pathways, including analyzing data to determine which math courses are best suited for which programs, ensuring that all students take math during the first year, and aligning math requirements for programs within the same meta-major to make it easier for students to switch programs within a meta-major. Additionally, the college has made multiple reforms to developmental education. The beginning levels of developmental math were eliminated and replaced by corequisite courses, and the Accelerated Learning Program model was implemented for students placed into developmental English. Furthermore, fewer students now place into developmental education courses because the college switched from using test scores

for placement to using high school GPA after regression analyses revealed that this was unlikely to negatively impact their likelihood of completing a credential. Finally, Zane State is currently working on strengthening pathways from high school to college by encouraging College Credit Plus (CCP) students (those enrolled in the state's dual enrollment program) to take a package of 12 or more credits that apply to specific college programs.

Effects on Student Performance

Since implementing guided pathways reforms, Zane State has seen improvements in several key measures of student success.

- **College math and English completion.** The percentage of students completing both college-level math and English in their first year increased from 14% for the fall 2015 cohort to 29% for the fall 2020 cohort.
- **Credit momentum.** The rate at which entering students earned at least 24 college credits in their first year increased from 16% for the fall 2015 cohort to 32% for the fall 2020 cohort.
- **Credential completion.** The three-year completion rate for first-time, full-time students increased from 34% for the 2012 cohort to 54% for the 2016 cohort.
- **Average number of credits at completion.** The average number of overall credits (including developmental and college-level credits) earned by associate degree graduates from the college decreased from 78 in 2012 to 71 in 2021.

Strategies for Funding Guided Pathways Reforms

By being strategic in their use of grants and general operating funds and in realigning staff roles, Zane State has managed to implement a number of large-scale reforms without significant infusions of new money. To foster the collaboration that is central to the college's onboarding reforms, Zane State created a new dean position overseeing both academic affairs and student affairs: dean of the arts and sciences division and chief student affairs officer. The decision to combine responsibility for student affairs (including the success coaches and the career coach) with the arts and sciences division was intentional, as most of the courses that students take in their first year fall under arts and sciences. The college foundation provided three years of funding for the position, and the new dean received a \$50,000 grant for release time to transition into the new role from her previous position at the college. After the foundation funding expires, the college intends to fund the position through general operating funds.

Zane State took a similar approach of mixing grant funding and general operating funds and reassigning staff roles to fill positions for a success coach and an instructor for the FYE course. The college allocated general operating funds to create a full-time faculty position for the redesigned FYE course and then identified an existing employee, one of its three success coaches, to take on the role. Thus, part of this

person's role is covered through instructional budgets. The college also applied for and received a Title III grant that has supported a success coach who works with students in the college's online programs.

Another aspect of financing reforms that has enabled Zane State to continue implementing innovations with a limited budget is crucial: While some reforms cost the college money, others have resulted in cost savings. For example, by eliminating the lower levels of developmental education and reducing the number of credits to a degree, the college is losing tuition money. However, the college freed up \$1 million from the operating budget by eliminating courses that were not critical to programs or were under-enrolled in an effort to better map courses within meta-majors. This decreased the need for adjuncts and full-time faculty overloads.

Leaders at Zane State stressed that promoting faculty and staff buy-in is critical in obtaining the support necessary to sustain funding for reforms over time. Leaders promote buy-in in several ways, including taking the time to explain why reforms are important, having conversations about return on investment, and intentionally sharing the key pieces of data that everyone should be aware of. Additionally, like the other two colleges in this study, Zane State encourages faculty and staff to participate in professional development that enhances their ability to enact reforms. For example, a number of faculty participated in math pathways institutes offered by the Ohio Association for Community Colleges (OACC) for free.

Zane State's investment in change management has played an instrumental role in embedding guided pathways reforms throughout the college and in enabling the college to secure designated funds for guided pathways within the general operating budget. Chief Financial Officer Terri Baldwin commented, "As far as guided pathways, it's part of our general funds. It is built in, and we're not planning to take it out anytime in the future."

Appendix: Details on Guided Pathways Innovations and Funding Strategies

In the following, we provide more detail on the innovations Zane State College has implemented under the four guided pathways practices as well as how the college covered the costs of these reforms.

1. Clarifying Paths to Student End Goals

Innovations the college implemented at scale

- **Identification of essential courses by meta-major.** After realizing that they were offering numerous courses with low enrollment (not uncommonly with as few as three students) that did not align well with specific programs, Zane State made a concerted effort to identify the critical general education courses that apply to most programs within each of the college's meta-majors. As part of this process, the college held a speed-dating-style event during which general education faculty had the opportunity to pitch courses to program faculty and explain how their courses contribute to specific programs. The college ended up eliminating 13 general education courses with a combined total of 97 sections, freeing up \$1 million that the college could spend more productively. Students have benefited from the better alignment of courses to degrees, as it allows them to switch programs more easily within a meta-major without losing credits.
- **Website program information.** The college is rebuilding its website to include better information about program requirements and links to major requirements for transfer programs at key transfer partner institutions.
- **Math pathways.** To determine which math courses to recommend for which programs, Zane State analyzed students' performance in math by program. As a result, the college built program pathways using the math courses in which students in each program are most likely to succeed. STEM students take algebra and calculus, while students in other programs take either quantitative reasoning or statistics, depending on the results of the program analyses. Additionally, Zane State ensures that all students take math within their first year to meet benchmarks set by Ohio's performance funding model.

How the college funded these innovations

The main costs for most of the efforts to clarify program paths have been personnel time. Zane State received a grant from OACC to use Ad Astra scheduling software to identify essential courses and under-enrolled courses. The grant covered the cost of purchasing Ad Astra Platinum Analytics, a software program that combines historical course registration data with degree audits and predictive analyses to determine which courses should be offered and how many sections to include, and of integrating Ad Astra Platinum Analytics with Jenzabar CX, a student information system. OACC also provided related professional development at no cost, and Ad Astra offered webinars. The college is losing tuition dollars as a result of the reduction in credit hours because students are taking fewer courses, but the college also saved \$1 million by eliminating under-enrolled courses.

2. Helping Students Get on a Program Path

Innovations the college implemented at scale

- **Orientation.** Rather than introducing students to the college through group orientation sessions primarily focused on general college information and first-term registration, Zane State has arranged for students to meet first with a faculty member in their field of interest. As soon as students apply, a faculty member in the field of interest they selected on their application reaches out to schedule an individual meeting. During the meeting, the faculty member discusses programs within the field and helps the student register. Students who are undecided or unsure about a program are referred to a career coach. Additional content that was previously covered during orientation is now covered on the first day of the FYE course.
- **First-year experience course.** To increase student engagement in the FYE course, Zane State changed the format from a week-long course during the first week of the semester to a semester-long course. Zane State also adopted Snyder's theory of hope as an organizing framework designed to build students' confidence in their ability to achieve their academic and career goals.
- **Revised placement for developmental education.** After analyses of the college's data revealed that high school GPA is a better predictor of success in college-level math and English than placement test scores, Zane State revised the placement process for both subjects. Based on their overall high school GPA (regardless of the length of time since completing high school), students are placed either directly into college-level math and English or into college-level courses with corequisite support. The results of the data analyses were used to determine the cutoff GPAs, which were set at 3.0 for math and at 2.75 for English.
- **Corequisite math and English.** Zane State replaced the lowest levels of developmental education for math and English with a corequisite model. Since adopting the corequisite approach, the college has been continuously assessing its effectiveness and making changes to further increase student success. The corequisite math content was initially standardized, but the college quickly realized that students needed more customized support. Consequently, the college redesigned the course to provide just-in-time support for students based on the particular math course they are taking (e.g., algebra, statistics, quantitative reasoning) and the specific issues with which they are struggling. As a result of better alignment between corequisite support and course content, success rates in math have increased. In place of developmental English courses, Zane State has implemented the Accelerated Learning Program model. Thus far, success rates have not increased, so the college is trying different strategies for improving the course. For example, they have started to develop sections of the course in which readings are structured around a theme.
- **Individual education plans.** Faculty members currently create individual education plans with students by hand, either on paper or in Excel. Zane State is in the process of implementing a student information platform that includes a student planning module.
- **Dual enrollment pathways.** Zane State is deeply committed to developing a high-quality infrastructure for dual enrollment (CCP) that extends college program pathways to high schools. CCP students comprise 50% of Zane State's total headcount

and roughly 44% of full-time equivalent students. One of the college's main objectives this year is to increase the number of students who earn 12 or more college credits through CCP. To encourage students to take more courses, the college is working on packaging courses that align with college programs.

How the college funded these innovations

Because general education faculty have always been required to do advising, there were no additional costs associated with involving faculty in new student intake and registration.

Redesigning the FYE course was accomplished without release time for the faculty involved.

The reforms to developmental education to implement corequisite support involved a number of upfront costs, including faculty release time and the cost of bringing in an expert to provide professional development. While some of these costs were absorbed in the general operating budget, Zane State also used grants from OACC and from the National Science Foundation (NSF) to develop the corequisite courses. In addition, OACC provided professional development at no cost, and the NSF grant included money for an embedded tutor in STEM math classes. Finally, some of the upfront costs were recouped through gains in performance funding as a result of increased student success rates in math.

CCP requires a significant amount of administrative staff time for Zane State. The college's CCP office has three full-time staff and one additional staff member who devotes a portion of their time to it. Even though the majority of CCP courses are taught on high school campuses by high school instructors, CCP also involves a significant amount of faculty time. Faculty are responsible for overseeing specific courses and are given paid release time for observations at the high schools. In addition, Zane State provides professional development for all CCP instructors and covers the cost of textbooks for CCP students who take courses at the college. Because the amount of money provided by the state does not cover Zane State's CCP costs, the college uses existing revenue streams for the remainder. This year, Zane State set a goal of generating \$200,000 in surplus from CCP by encouraging students to take more courses (including more courses online) and thereby increasing the amount of tuition and performance funding the college receives.

3. Keeping Students on Path

Innovations the college implemented at scale

- **Providing case management advising.** Professional advisors called success coaches are assigned by meta-major and focus on providing holistic academic, career, and financial support, particularly during students' first year. Each success coach works with students in multiple meta-majors, and one works exclusively with students who are fully online. All students are required to meet with their success coach at least once in their first term, and success coaches conduct additional outreach to students whose responses to an intake survey indicate they may need greater support. To incentivize students to attend subsequent meetings with their advisor after the first term, the college recently created a Tiger Points program

through which students can earn points to purchase things like gift cards by meeting with their advisor and participating in other college events. Success coaches are also highly involved in the FYE course.

- **Removing financial barriers.** To decrease financial barriers that can block or delay student progress, Zane State has taken several steps to reduce and eliminate fees. The college eliminated all fees for online classes five years ago and eliminated the matriculation fee this year. In addition, most classes use open educational resources (OER) to reduce textbook fees.
- **Addressing basic needs.** To prevent basic needs insecurity from negatively impacting students' ability to succeed, Zane State opened a food pantry and a clothing closet.

How the college funded these innovations

The position for the success coach working with online students is currently being funded through a Title III grant. The other three success coaches are funded through general operating funds. Since one of these coaches teaches the FYE course, that person is covered through instructional budgets.

By eliminating online course fees, Zane State lost several hundred thousand dollars, but the college is committed to continuing to reduce and eliminate fees when possible because it believes it is the right thing to do for students.

The college used some general funds to renovate the physical space for the food pantry, but otherwise, the pantry and the clothing closet operate entirely through donations.

4. Ensuring That Students Are Learning

Innovations the college implemented at scale

- **Professional development for faculty.** Zane State has taken a number of steps to enhance teaching and learning at the college through professional development for faculty, including encouraging faculty to attend virtual trainings provided by the Association of College and University Educators (ACUE) and OACC and bringing in an Achieving the Dream (ATD) coach to address equity. The college also paid for faculty members to attend several conferences virtually, including annual conferences held by the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD), ATD, and the NSF Advanced Technology Education (NSF ATE) program. Additionally, to incentivize faculty participation in professional development over the summer, the college created professional development accounts for faculty and provides a daily stipend. Finally, Zane State is engaging faculty in efforts to improve the assessment of learning outcomes. Whereas most assessment work at the college previously focused on program-level outcomes, the assessment coordinator at Zane State is currently working with faculty to develop course-level assessments.

How the college funded these innovations

Most of Zane State's professional development work has not required new money. OACC offers training at no cost, and the costs for attending national conferences were reduced

because faculty attended them virtually. Zane State received a grant from Ascendium Education Group to bring in the ATD coach. The work on course-level assessments is being facilitated in-house by an existing staff member. The college offers faculty \$250 a day for the summer professional development stipend but has found that stipends are more cost effective than giving faculty release time during the regular academic terms.

Management and Infrastructure for Guided Pathways Reforms

Innovations the college implemented at scale

- **Administration.** Reassignment of staff roles—including the creation of the new dean position overseeing both academic and student affairs and the transition of a success coach to a full-time faculty role for the FYE course—has been critical to the success of Zane State’s pathways work.
- **IT system upgrades.** Zane State is in the process of implementing Jenzabar One, which includes a customer relationship management system as well as an education planning tool. Jenzabar One will enable the college to automate a number of processes for managing student records and financial information that are currently done manually.
- **Marketing.** As part of its involvement in the Education Design Lab’s BRIDGES Rural initiative, faculty recently participated in professional development designed to create strategies for marketing individual programs to different types of students. Targeted marketing of programs has the potential to become a crucial piece of recruitment efforts to increase enrollment.

How the college funded these innovations

Zane State’s foundation provided the first three years of funding to create the joint position of dean of the arts and science division and chief student affairs officer. The individual in this position also received support for release time to transition into the role from a previous position at the college. At the end of the three years, the position will be covered through general operating funds. The college also allocated general operating funds to create the full-time faculty position for the redesigned FYE course. And it used a three-year Title III grant to hire a success coach to work with students in online programs.

Zane State also used funds from the Title III grant to purchase and implement Jenzabar One. The grant covers part, but not all, of the staff time required for implementation. Two project managers have a portion of their time covered by the grant, but they spend far more time on implementation than the grant covers. In the long run, however, the college anticipates that efficiency gains from the new system will make up for some of the upfront implementation costs.

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