Classifying Community College Programs by Post-Completion Success in Transfer and Workforce

INQUIRY GUIDE: PROGRAM ENROLLMENT TOOL

UNLOCKING OPPORTUNITY
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Inquiry Guide: Program Enrollment Tool

The questions in this inquiry guide are designed to assist you in understanding your program enrollment data as entered into the program enrollment tool. Specifically, these questions are derived from a Community College 3.0 perspective that centers on post-completion success.

Teams will get the most use out of this inquiry guide if:

- Team members familiarize themselves with the taxonomy for program classification (see Appendix)
- Institutional research staff develop and share a presentation on:
    - How the categories were developed
    - How each program is organized within these categories
    - How enrollments in (term and year) were then categorized
    - A visualization of Tab 3, including an explanation of what is shown

Three broad questions frame the tool:

1. What programs are students currently enrolled in, generally (Tab 1), and by program area, as represented by the academic division that oversees the given program (Tab 2)?
2. How many students are enrolled in programs that lead to high post-completion value in terms of immediate job prospects (i.e., that enable graduates to secure jobs that pay at least a living wage) and/or further education (i.e., transfer with no excess credits to a bachelor's degree program in the student's major field of interest)? What is the distribution of enrollments in programs by their post-completion value for employment or transfer (Tabs 3 and 3a)?
3. Which students are enrolled in which programs, and what do those enrollment patterns reveal about disparities in enrollment and completion in higher- and lower-value programs for students of different backgrounds (Tabs 4a to 4d)? Are there differences by program in how many students are on an educational plan (Tab 4e)?

Use the questions on the following pages to delve deeper into these broad questions.

Examining Patterns in Program Value
Use the information on Tab 3 to summarize what you learned from the enrollment analysis tool (see Appendix for taxonomy as needed): ● Which programs have high value for immediate job advancement and/or transfer? ○ Workforce/career and technical education (CTE) ○ Non-workforce/CTE ● Which programs have low or unclear post-completion value for employment or transfer/bachelor's attainment success? ○ Workforce/career and technical education (CTE) ○ Non-workforce/CTE (include "undecided" or "undeclared") Are your programs classified correctly? Are some programs listed as "high value" that might not be? If so, what information do you need to confirm the classification or reclassify these programs?

Examining Patterns in Student Enrollment by Program Value
Use Tabs 3 and 3a to consider: ● How many (and what percentage) of your students are enrolled in high-value programs compared to low-value programs? ● How many (and what percentage) of your students are in programs or pathways that do not have clear job or transfer outcomes? *Note*: This category includes "unclassified" and "competitive admissions pre-selection" students. Use Tabs 4a through 4d to consider: ● Are any student groups (by race/ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, age, or other factors) underrepresented in high post-completion value programs/pathways? ○ Which student groups? ○ Which programs/pathways? ● Are any student groups (by race/ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, age, geography, or other factors) overrepresented in low post-completion value programs/pathways or programs/pathways with unclear post-completion value? ○ Which student groups? ○ Which programs/pathways?

Examining Patterns in Educational Planning
Use Tab 4e to consider: • Among all students, how many have educational plans? • How many students enrolled in **high- and medium-value** workforce and technical education (CTE) programs have educational plans? Are there disparities by programs/pathways? • How many students in **high-value** non-workforce/CTE programs have educational plans? Are there disparities by programs/pathways?

Implications for Reform

Considering your responses in the previous sections, reflect on the implications for reform:

- **Challenges:** What patterns do you find in your program enrollment data that concern you or may point to a priority for reform?
- **Opportunities:** Where are opportunities to expand access and success in programs with high value for employment and transfer for students overall? For students from underrepresented groups?
    - Where are opportunities to redesign programs classified as low value?
    - Where are opportunities to shift enrollment out of low- or unclear-value programs into high-value programs?
- **High-value programs:** How can academic divisions and programs collaborate with one another and with college recruiters, admissions staff, advisors, and institutional research to recruit and onboard students into high-value programs? To recruit and onboard *underrepresented* students into high-value programs?
- **General studies:** Which divisions oversee students in the AA in general studies (or equivalent) programs? Are there opportunities to move students from general studies into high-value programs?
- **Competitive admission pre-selection pathways:** What steps can be taken to expand and diversify enrollment in high-value competitive admissions pre-selection tracks? What can the college do to guide students who are unlikely to be selected into high-value competitive admissions programs into other existing or new program tracks leading to living-wage jobs in healthcare and other fields of interest to students?
- **Dual enrollment:** How can the college motivate and guide dual enrollment and other high school students who do not have a plan for college to pursue high-value postsecondary pathways at the college and elsewhere after high school?
- **Educational planning:** How can the college scale educational planning for students on high-value pathways? We recommend using Tab 4e alongside the *Strengthening Community College Program Maps and Educational Plans for Post-Completion Value: Practical Guide*. This guide helps colleges assess and strengthen program maps and also provides suggestions for how those maps can be used to help students develop educational plans that will help them achieve strong post-completion outcomes—either through transferring to a bachelor's program or securing a job with a living wage.

Appendix

Post-Completion Program Value Category	Definition*
Workforce high value	Programs leading to credentials that enable completers to secure jobs paying, on average, a living wage as defined by a college for its service area using methods and data outlined in section 2.2 of the classification guide. *Common examples: Associate Degree in Nursing, AAS-Industrial Mechanics/Maintenance Technology, Long Certificate-Line Worker, most community college bachelor's degrees in career fields*
Workforce medium value	Programs leading to credentials that (1) enable completers to secure jobs that, on average, pay more than the prevailing wage for low-skill work but less than living wages and (2) provide opportunities for learning and advancement on the job that, together with further education/training, can serve as stepping stones to living-wage jobs in the same field. *Common examples: Long Certificate-Licensed Practical Nurse, Long Certificate-Welding, Long Certificate-Emergency Medical Technician, "fast-start" short-term, career-ladder training programs in high-demand, high-paying fields like construction, energy technology, advanced manufacturing*
Workforce low value	Programs leading to credentials from which completers are generally only able to secure jobs that, on average, pay the prevailing wage for low-skill work and that do not provide opportunities for advancement in the same occupational field without extensive further education or training. *Common examples: Certified Nurse Assistant, AAS/Certificate-Culinary, AAS/Certificate-Cosmetology, AAS Veterinary Tech*
Workforce upskilling	Programs that help completers develop and document skills of value in the labor market (such as through industry certification) but may not by themselves (i.e., absent degrees or job experience) enable students to secure or advance to better-paying jobs. *Common examples: Short Certificates-MS Office, Short Certificate-Project Management, micro-credentials or badges*

Competitive admission pre-selection (for enrollment analysis only)	Program tracks in which students seek to satisfy special requirements and compete for admission into selective, limited-access programs, such as nursing, respiratory therapy, and surgical tech. Typically, most students on these tracks will not be admitted into their program of choice and are not guided into alternate program paths that lead to living wage jobs or transfer in a major and bachelor's attainment. *Common examples: Pre-nursing, Pre-respiratory therapy*
Transfer high value	Associate degree programs that enable students to transfer all or most of their credits toward a bachelor's degree in a specific major field. Students are often assisted in entering and completing such programs by efforts to ensure that they have an individualized plan based on maps created in consultation with four-year institutions (or community college bachelor's programs) that enable them to transfer and apply their community college credits toward a bachelor's in their major field of interest at the receiving institution without retaking courses for the given major. To ensure that program maps and individual plans lead to strong bachelor's attainment rates, examine available data to assess the rate at which students, by program, transfer to four-year colleges and universities and, among those who transfer, complete bachelor's degrees at relatively high rates. *Common examples: Associate Degree in Nursing; AS-Biology; statewide pre-major transfer associate degrees, such as California's Associate Degrees for Transfer, Ohio's Guaranteed Transfer Pathways, and Washington's Associate in Science-Transfer; and field-specific Direct Transfer Agreements (but not the general studies DTA)*
Transfer low value	Associate degree programs whose completers are often not able to transfer all or most of their credits to their specific major fields (as opposed to elective credits), resulting in students who transfer having to take or retake more courses or credit hours than required for a bachelor's in their major field of interest. These programs typically do not have program maps enabling efficient transfer in a specific program of study. To confirm that these programs lead to weak bachelor's attainment rates, examine available data to assess the rate at which students, by program, transfer to four-year colleges and universities and, among those who transfer, complete bachelor's degrees. *Common examples: AA-general studies**, AA-general business*

Other low value	Programs leading to credentials that do not clearly enable completers to advance to better jobs, build workforce or academic skills, or advance efficiently (or at all) to a bachelor's degree program. *Common example: Certificates in general studies*
Dual enrollment	*Students concurrently enrolled in credit-bearing courses at the community college and a local high-school*

***Note:** The post-completion labor market value of selected credentials will vary based on the labor markets and cost of living in a college's service area. The program examples used above were based on a tool CCRC developed using IPEDS data to monitor awards given annually by public 2- and 4-year institutions along with their associated earnings (to reference, see Tab 2: "Awards and Earnings by Program").*

*** Note**: In this classification taxonomy: "general studies" refers to catch-all programs for students who do not have clear transfer or career goals. At some colleges, this is also called "liberal studies," which should not be confused with distinct liberal arts tracks connected to specific majors that are part of strong transfer pathways.*

A final consideration for the taxonomy above: While we recommend that colleges not deviate from the definitions provided for each category, they may want to alter the names of categories. In testing, some college leaders found that renaming categories with words such as "opportunity" (e.g., workforce high-opportunity) or "outcomes" (e.g., transfer low-outcomes) rather than "value" (e.g., workforce low-value) reduced concerns among staff, faculty, and administrators that their programs were being harshly judged. In other colleges, leaders addressed these concerns by carefully explaining the goals of program classification, highlighting its economic focus, and emphasizing the student-centered objective. In short, college leaders should carefully consider how communications around each category—including the name—may be viewed by college faculty and staff.