

# INTEGRATED STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES IN ACTION

**A Guide to Implementing the Working  
Students Success Network Approach**

Produced by:  
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Achieving  
the Dream™

Community Colleges Count

## Acknowledgements

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# Preface

In 2014, Achieving the Dream took on an initiative that would not only broaden how community colleges look at strengthening student success, but also reflect a more holistic approach for our college-reform efforts. After a decade of work to catalyze transformation, Achieving the Dream learned, through the amazing work of our colleges, that isolated interventions, while well-intentioned, do not significantly help students persist and attain their academic goals. As a result, we shifted our focus to seeking intentional and integrated approaches to college reform and redesign efforts that can be connected and scaled. Our aim is to encourage more holistic supports that can get more students on a path into our colleges and keep them on the path to a certificate or degree.

This approach underpinned the Working Students Success Network (WSSN), launched with generous support from the Annie E. Casey, Lumina, W.K. Kellogg, Kresge, and MetLife Foundations. The three-year initiative involved 19 colleges in four states and used a combination of educational, career, and financial management strategies aimed in particular at helping low-income and first-generation students and students of color stay in school and earn certificates and degrees. Rather than seeking solutions to single problems, the colleges looked comprehensively at student needs—academic and nonacademic—and made deep, substantive changes in how to address them.

The colleges involved in the WSSN initiative were laboratories in which strategies for serving the needs of low-income students could be tested. Colleges identified how to be more strategic in determining students' needs, what services worked best to meet them, and how best to integrate those services, with additional resources in the community, and how to target services to large percentages of students who need them most.

In a laboratory, you learn new things, sometimes by trial and error. The WSSN initiative produced some consistent insights across the participating community colleges: large and small, urban and rural. These insights show how deploying integrated student support requires a campus culture change, increasing awareness among faculty and staff that we all have a stake in each student's progress whether the supports they require for success are academic or nonacademic.

The lessons learned from the WSSN can help leaders take a close look at their student-services model and consider enlisting the whole campus community in a new holistic, integrated approach to student success, while also creating and deepening partnerships with organizations that have the supplementary skills and resources to help students persist in college. The promise of this work is that it will give colleges, in partnership with their communities, additional tools and strategies for increasing the economic mobility of low-income students and their families.

Dr. Karen A. Stout, President and CEO  
Achieving the Dream

**For more background and information on the Working Students Success Network, please visit the Achieving the Dream website at: [www.achievingthedream.org/resources/initiatives/working-students-success-network](http://www.achievingthedream.org/resources/initiatives/working-students-success-network)**

## INTRODUCTION:

# Targeting the Needs of Low-Income Students

Two-thirds of the 6.9 million students who attend community colleges qualify as low-income, coming from families earning less than \$50,000, and more than one-third live below the poverty line.

Most students either full or part time. Many are raising children, supporting parents, or contributing to family expenses. Over one-third are the first in their families to attend college, and over half are people of color. Whether they are urban or rural dwellers, they likely live in communities suffering from high levels of unemployment, job migration, and wage stagnation. They look to educational institutions as an affordable stepping-stone to financial stability and a better life.

Clearly, their path to economic mobility can be a rocky one. Only two out of five students who begin at a public two-year college complete an associate degree, certificate, or bachelor's degree within six years. Being unprepared to delve into college-level work is not the only challenge. In fact, students more often say their personal finances are the biggest disrupter of their studies.

The array of challenges awaiting lower-income or first-generation students can be as unexpected as it is daunting. While community colleges are viewed as affordable, the typical community college student faces a daily struggle to pay for food, housing, child care, health care, and transportation along with tuition and fees. These "indirect costs" amount to 60 percent of the total cost to attend college. Moreover, recent analyses show grimmer realities about the lives of today's community college students: A recent Urban Institute study found that nearly 20 percent of households that were home to two-year college

students identified themselves as food insecure from 2011 to 2015. Another study, from the HOPE Lab at the University of Wisconsin, found that half of community college students said they were housing insecure, and one out of seven were homeless.

Students who are first in their families to go to college, recent immigrants, or adults who did not foresee college in their futures can find navigating the enrollment, financial aid, and registration processes formidable. They may be unaware that besides grants and loans, resources and public benefits are available that can spell the difference between sticking with their studies or giving up on their dreams.

Improving postsecondary attainment and economic opportunity requires colleges to systematically address the multitude of factors that undermine student persistence and completion. These factors go well beyond academic support, as important as that is, to encompass students' most basic need for financial stability.

# Approaching Student Success Holistically: The Working Students Success Network

The Working Students Success Network (WSSN) offers a systematic and integrated approach to helping low-income students succeed in college and establish a clear pathway toward career and financial stability. It applies a fresh, holistic framework for encouraging student success by addressing nonacademic matters, such as students' family and work responsibilities, financial needs beyond tuition, and the financial knowledge they need to sustain the other aspects of their lives as key components of academic success.

A college offshoot of the community-based Working Families Success Network (WFSN), the three-year initiative is a partnership of national and local foundations, community colleges, and community-based organizations. Achieving the Dream—a college-reform network committed to incubating new ideas, disseminating knowledge, and designing supports that lead to culture change and institutional transformation—has managed the WSSN initiative since 2014, overseeing the refining and scaling of the model at 19 colleges in four states. The WSSN initiative was funded by the Annie E. Casey, Lumina, W.K. Kellogg, Kresge, and MetLife Foundations.

Anchoring the WSSN is an integrated service-delivery approach launched in experiments to intensely focus on helping low-income students find employment. What was started by the non-profit organizations Local Initiatives Support Corporation, United Way, and MDC found its way to individual community colleges seeking ways to help low-income students stay in school. The WSSN approach integrates services in three key areas:

## Education and career services.



WSSN helps students develop and follow an achievable career plan. It works with institutions to bolster career counseling, develop training on specific skills for targeted industries or occupations, and strengthen other career services.

## Income and work supports.



WSSN not only helps students with tasks like filing their taxes or filling out FAFSA forms, it ensures that students can tap into all the available resources that will improve financial stability for themselves and their families while they are working and pursuing further education. WSSN helps students pull together the pieces—such as child care, transportation, food, and housing—that make or break working students' ability to attain the credentials they seek.

## Financial services and asset building.



WSSN offers training, information, and tools for students to make informed choices about budgeting and using financial products such as loans and credit cards. It helps colleges partner with local financial institutions and provides intensive financial coaching. It even helps students save for the future through special savings accounts, often enhanced with matching funds from financial institutions.

Whether colleges are implementing guided pathways, expanding student-support services, or revisiting instructional practices, an integrated services approach brings coherence and impact to student-success efforts. Successfully implementing this approach demands the commitment and vision of strong leaders to draw the pieces together, a breaking down of silos between academic and nonacademic operations, buy-in from all who have the most consistent contact with students, especially faculty and staff, and an outreach plan to build and foster sustainable external partnerships.

The WSSN's integrated student support services approach is fundamentally aimed at creating an institutional culture committed to cultural and social equity, particularly for low-income, working students, first-generation students, and students of color. Taking a holistic approach—which supports the wide range of diverse needs of individual students—levels the playing field for underserved student populations and produces equitable results for all students. To achieve this overall goal, colleges work to:

- Support the affordable completion of certificates and degrees and prepare community college students for careers or transfer.
- Build students' financial health and address their financial insecurities so students can achieve income stability.
- Connect credentials to jobs that pay family-sustaining wages.
- Provide access to complementary, nonacademic services that meet the needs of students when and how they need it.
- Develop partnerships onsite and offsite that build capacity to deliver sequenced services.

Identifying the students most in need of integrated services, determining which services they need, and designing the right methods to deliver them within a college's budgetary parameters are crucial considerations. The design of the WSSN approach and this Guidebook is organized around six key practices.

**1. Delivering support through multiple, low-touch and high-touch modalities.** WSSN colleges provide high-touch services—intensive one-on-one advising, counseling, or coaching—and low-touch services—standardized services that reach a wider range of students, typically through large-scale orientations or first-year-student success courses. The low-touch services help staff to identify students who need high-touch services.

**2. Integrating and sequencing services.** At the heart of the WSSN initiative is the concept of integrated services—bringing academic services, such as advising and tutoring, together with many nonacademic services in carefully planned sequences that are logistically accessible to time-pressed students who can't afford additional steps in their day. These nonacademic offerings can supplement what the college offers and come from a range of sources, including public and private social-service and community-based agencies. A key goal is to see that service delivery is smooth, efficient, and part of the common student experience.

**3. Customizing services to meet individual need.** Based on what college personnel learn through orientations and other intake processes, introductory student-success classes, classroom interactions, or other nonacademic touch points, they can weave together services tailored to meet the needs of an individual student or group of students in a case-management approach.

**4. Fostering college culture change.** Changing the culture to focus on meeting the academic and nonacademic needs of low-income students requires executive leaders to strongly articulate that vision. It also requires faculty and staff to rethink their roles and how they engage with students. They are part of a mission-aligned approach to assuring equity and success for students by reaching them with services when, where, and how they most need them, even when the students don't recognize the need themselves.

**5. Strengthening external partnerships.** Developing partnerships with organizations that can offer or are already offering public or student services is built into the WSSN model. Forging strong alliances with workforce agencies, community-based organizations, government agencies, financial institutions, and local and regional businesses helps the college build its capacity to offer services that meet the needs of students, better understand labor trends, and help students shape successful careers.

**6. Using data to measure progress and improve services.** Collecting and analyzing data is essential for external accountability and internal growth and sustainability. Colleges must have a reliable system to collect baseline data, document service use and impact, and analyze what is and is not working to help students achieve their goals. Good data, widely shared among stakeholders (while protecting confidentiality), is key to fostering continuous improvement of the college's persistence and attainment goals.

When fully scaled, implemented, and sustained, integrated student services weave together the nonacademic services many low-income students require to stabilize income and navigate daily challenges so they can focus on school.

**These services aim to ensure:**

- 1) students' progression along a clear pathway toward their educational goals;
- 2) improved and enhanced completion of a certificate, degree, or transfer;
- 3) a sustainable financial education;
- 4) increased financial security over the long term and reduced debt; and
- 5) enhanced workforce placement and/or next-level educational achievement.

Students' need for some services is almost universal, and colleges can meet it broadly and systemically—for example, through mandatory orientations or financial education courses and workshops. Other services are a critical need for a subset of students, such as financial coaching or access to emergency loans. After consulting with individual students, colleges can combine and provide these services according to their personal situations. Still, students' need for other services can arise unpredictably—either because of emerging demands or an unexpected crisis or an escalating problem that becomes unmanageable.

The essence of the integrated student support services approach is a culture shift in which the college intentionally designs and offers services broadly and systemically that equitably address all student needs and reach students when they most need them. The approach recognizes that students often do not know what they need, yet with timely education and coaching, they not only can deal with short-term challenges, but also build confidence in their life skills for the long term.





# How to Use this Guidebook

This Guidebook is based on the lessons learned from the WSSN initiative and aims to help colleges design, organize and implement an integrated student-support-services approach to better serve low-income students. One universal lesson from each campus is the importance of careful planning upfront to consider how an integrated service model fits with the college's mission and aligns with institutional priorities, who can benefit, and how to bring the whole campus along. This requires strong leadership and college-wide buy-in to support students in a more holistic way.

It is organized around the fundamental principles the colleges applied to construct their design or redesign efforts. It offers descriptions, rationales, voices from the college, key takeaways, and lessons learned about the challenges faced and the unique responses colleges made along the way.

Each section also features practical tools, resources, and materials to help colleges interested in adapting the WSSN (or other integrated-services) approach to boost student-success activities. A College Readiness Assessment tool accompanies each principle to help colleges assess or evaluate their capacity to implement the basic design principles.

While the public often talks about community colleges as a single segment of higher education, there is incredible institutional diversity within the sector—in size, student demographics, location, etc. An important value in the lessons learned from the WSSN initiative is that the institutions involved represent the great range of community colleges in the United States. This Guidebook was assembled to reflect that diversity. Rather than showing a single model of what must be done, this Guidebook offers a set of design principles and implementation strategies to help college leaders, faculty, and staff think through how best to redesign their programs to fit their institutions' particular make-up as well as how to integrate this work with other efforts to redesign students services and create a more understandable, efficient, and valuable college experience for students.

Here is an overview of each chapter.



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Integrated student services will have little impact if students, your college personnel, and your community are unaware of them. This chapter looks at how to develop an efficient outreach and marketing plan to get the word out and promote the important work your college is doing.

A close-up photograph of a person's hands counting a large stack of US dollar bills. The person is wearing a dark blue t-shirt. The bills are fanned out, and the focus is on the hands and the money. The person's left hand, which has a ring on the ring finger and a black cord bracelet, holds a smaller stack of bills. The right hand is counting the larger stack. The background is blurred, showing a wooden surface.

# Chapter 1

# CHAPTER ONE:

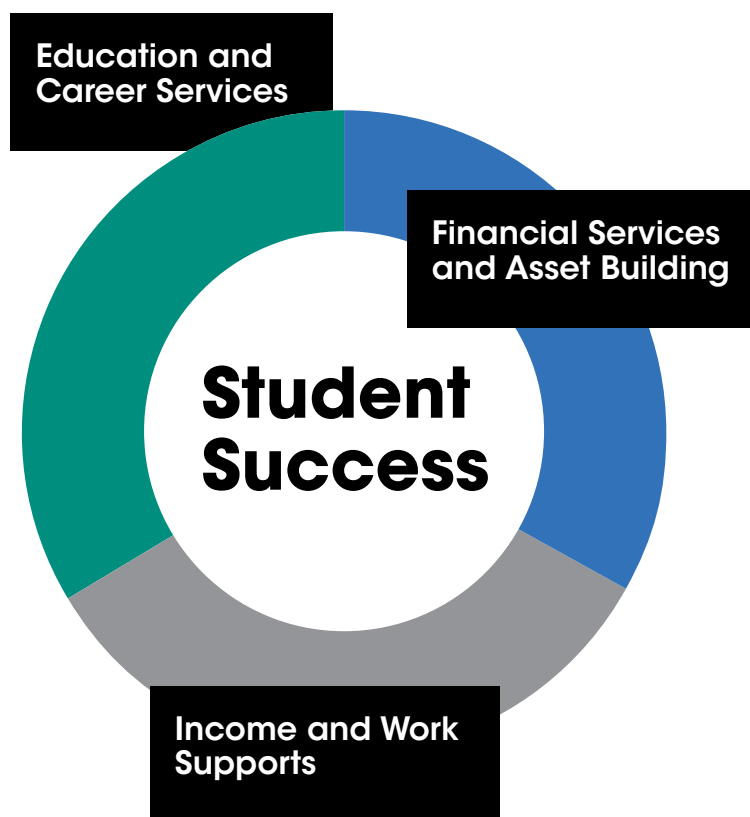
# Key Concepts and Components Underpinning the WSSN Approach

While the WSSN approach will look different from college to college given each institution's unique characteristics—student demographics, location, institutional organization, and so on—certain concepts briefly outlined in the Introduction underpin the approach. Below is a more detailed description of those key concepts and components that will be used throughout the Guidebook.

While some might describe this as an integration of “academic” and “nonacademic” services, the WSSN

## CONCEPT ONE: The Expansion and Integration of Services

Fundamental to the WSSN approach is the integration of three pillars of services to meet the needs of low-income students.



### Education and Career Services

Services that provide students with the skills they need to get and retain good jobs and advance in their careers including career and academic advising, job training, job search and placement, and developing an education and career plan.

### Financial Services and Asset Building

Services that build students' financial knowledge, increase access to savings and wealth-retaining financial products, and promote meeting short- and long-term financial goals including training, information, tools, and financial education and coaching to guide students in making informed choices about budgeting and use of financial products such as loans and credit cards.

### Income and Work Supports

Services that help students access public benefits, financial aid, and other income supports that increase student and family economic stability and promote college retention and completion. Services include free tax preparation; support with FAFSA or scholarship applications; and help accessing child care, transportation, food, and housing assistance.



approach doesn't emphasize those distinctions. It views services traditionally considered "nonacademic" as fundamental to a student's academic success. For example, a student who has difficulty attending classes regularly because of transportation problems or a lack of affordable child care needs services to address those problems so that she or he can succeed academically. Similarly, a student who is struggling to manage his or her personal finances may need financial coaching to address those issues to stay enrolled. In short, the WSSN approach assumes that colleges must address students' needs more holistically to improve their ability to persist and complete. This key concept means that colleges need to expand the services they are able to provide students and integrate those services so they are all seen as a normal part of attending college.

Normalizing services that might be typically seen as nonacademic or nontraditional is critical to overcoming the stigma that community college students may have about using them. For example, students may hold a negative perception of public benefits, not fully grasping that they can be the answer to stabilizing their lives and making attending and succeeding in college possible. Making these services a regular, integrated, and institutionalized part of campus life can help overcome those perceptions and ensure that students get the services they need.

## **What to remember about each core service area:**

Most community colleges already offer help in the Education and Career Services area. Therefore, the challenge for colleges is to think about how to enhance existing services and more effectively integrate them with other core service areas to provide the most support to students.

Services in the Income and Work Supports area may require developing a partnership with a community-based organization, bank, or business, or even state and federal agencies, to access information and offer help.

Financial Services and Asset Building has traditionally been the area where colleges have the least number of programs. Colleges often offer financial education through an established student-success course, specialized workshops, or online curricula. You'll find more explanation under the financial-coaching section to come.



## CONCEPT TWO:

# Multiple Modes Of Service Delivery

A second key concept of the WSSN approach is that services need to be offered in multiple modes to reach as many students as possible and customize services to meet individual student needs. To that end, the WSSN approach uses “low-touch” and “high-touch” modes of service delivery.

Low-Touch Services	High-Touch Services
<b>Definition</b> Core services designed to reach a broad range of students via group settings such as orientation or student-success classes, or through technology or other approaches. They provide information and, in some cases, skills for students.	<b>Definition</b> One-on-one interactions that provide a specific service or set of services to a targeted number of students whom the college has identified as needing more intensive support. High-touch services are often accompanied by short- and long-term goal setting with the student.
<b>Examples</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>financial education in student-success courses</li> <li>use of new financial services such as Aid Like a Paycheck</li> <li>benefits-access information in orientation classes or workshops</li> </ul>	<b>Examples</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>financial coaching</li> <li>career planning (not student advising)</li> <li>working with an individual to secure a specific public benefit</li> </ul>
	<b>Short-term goals</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>establishing an emergency-savings reserve</li> <li>securing affordable, quality child care while in school</li> <li>gaining employer-based work experience to test career assumptions</li> </ul>
	<b>Long-term goals</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>securing a job post-college that pays a family-sustaining wage</li> <li>graduating from college with less debt</li> <li>building a positive credit history</li> </ul>

These modes of delivery are not meant to operate independently, but rather should be integrated and complement each other. For instance, colleges may use low-touch services to identify students in need of high-touch services. For example:

- Student-success courses where financial education is embedded could include a self-assessment that helps the student or faculty identify the student’s need for more intensive financial coaching.
- Homework assignment on how to use a public-benefits screening tool may identify students in need of individualized support in applying for Medicaid or SNAP benefits.

At the same time, a college might identify a particular set of services that a large percentage of students are requesting through individual advising. To respond, it may create a more generalized low-touch mechanism for making that service available to all students.

## CONCEPT THREE:

# Sequenced Service Delivery

Connected closely to the first two key concepts in the WSSN approach is thinking strategically about how to sequence services to minimize barriers for individual students and respond to the needs of larger targeted populations. Simply offering an assortment of somewhat random core services is not enough. Students are often overwhelmed or ill-prepared to take advantage of the services that may support them the most. Colleges must design their services to be intentional, timely, and seamlessly meshed into the student's experience. Delivering services in a consistent and organized way builds students' confidence and increases the likelihood that students will take up more services that support persistence.

Adopting a holistic, integrated student-services-delivery approach requires thinking about how and when services are delivered. Colleges designed two similar practices in their delivery of services to students.

**Predetermined Service Delivery** is the practice of sequencing a prearranged set of low- and/or high-touch services tied together to reach a targeted population. This predetermined set of services is usually repeated each semester for additional groups of students.

**Customized Service Delivery** is the practice of integrating low- and/or high-touch services uniquely tailored or customized to meet the needs of an individual student or a selected group of students or cohort. Customized Service Delivery is flexible, responsive, and timely in its design and meets short- and long-term goals of the students throughout their college experiences.

Distinguishing predetermined from customized services helps colleges design and deliver services in scalable and sustainable ways. The concepts are similar but different enough that studying the characteristics of both delivery methods is helpful.



The table below is designed to show the similarities and differences of these two practices.

Predetermined Service Delivery	Customized Service Delivery
<b>Definition</b> Delivering a predetermined combination or package of services most likely to be used by a targeted group of students. Services could be from more than one area of the core services of Education and Career Services, Income and Work Supports, and Financial Services and Asset Building.	<b>Definition</b> Intentionally weaving together core services, either standalone services or in conjunction with a predetermined sequence that is intended to mitigate barriers students face. It involves the systemic and intentional integration of academic and nonacademic student services based on the ongoing assessment of students' needs to create a web of support that helps move students toward completion of a credential and a family-sustaining job or transfer to a baccalaureate program.
Characteristics	Characteristics
An intentional combination of low- and/or high-touch services	A combination of low- and high-touch services that can be customized and stand alone and/or a bundled, predetermined set.
Usually designed as mandatory or opt-out	Services are generally an opt-in choice, but not always. Flexible, timely, and relevant to students' needs
Generally, more fixed in timing and location	May, but does not have to, include a predetermined bundle of services along with others that meet students' needs
Does not include any standalone services	Services are tailored to the student's needs and take place over the entire lifecycle of the student's college experience.
Services may be offered in one semester or over the course of several semesters depending on the targeted population.	Services are designed to meet emergency and immediate needs of students in a coordinated response—to minimize reactive, one-off responses.
Not intended to respond to students in crisis	Integrated services from diverse but interrelated providers—both on and off campus
Services can be provided by external partners, but they usually take place on campus.	Involves coordination of design of service, staffing, and technology

## KEY COMPONENTS

In addition to these concepts, the WSSN approach uses a set of key components as part of an integrated student-support strategy that address the wide variety of student needs that must be met to improve success.

**Financial Coaching:** This is a collaborative solution-focused, result-oriented, and systematic process in which coaches work one-on-one with students to establish trust, build confidence, and partner with them to find their own answers to improving their lives, attaining their goals, and owning their decisions.

**Financial Products and Services:** These are developed by financial-services providers or the college, and they intend to help individuals manage their daily financial lives.

**Internal Partnerships:** This refers to departments within the community college that work together to deliver integrated services. Internal partners could be different departments, such as financial aid, student services, continuing education, and academic advising. Strong internal partnerships are critical to this approach, which seeks to break down service silos within the college and give students a sense of a community of professionals working in concert to meet their needs.

**External Partnerships:** Any partner that is not a part of the college. External partners could be community-based organizations, government agencies, financial institutions, businesses, faith-based organizations, or community-action agencies. External partnerships could involve both:

- **On-site partners:** Those from the community who are performing services for students on campus or at dedicated spaces, which house these services at the respective campuses.
- **Referral partners:** Those who perform services for students but are not located at the campuses, requiring students to travel for these defined services.



# Baseline College Readiness Assessment

The following assessment is a simple inventory-taking instrument to determine which concepts and components of the WSSN approach your college already uses, which ones need strengthening, which ones your college will need to consider implementing to better integrate services to serve low-income students, and which ones you are planning to scale up and reach the maximum number of students.

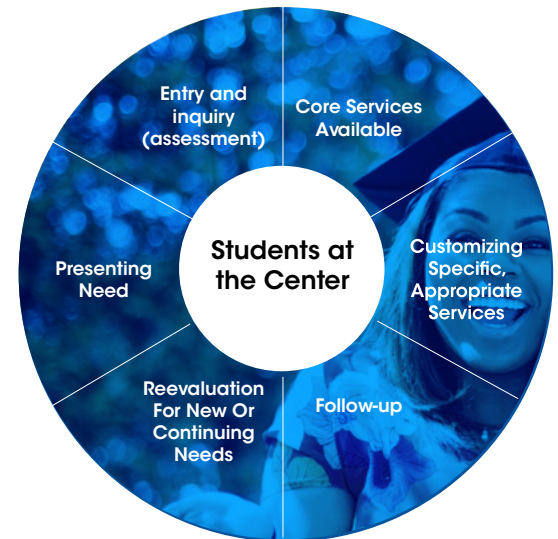
	Concept/ Component	Already Implemented	Need to Strengthen	Need to Develop	Need to Scale Up
Education and Career Services	Academic advising				
	Career advising				
	Integration of career and academic advising				
	Job search and placement assistance				
Financial Services and Asset Building	Financial-health education				
	Financial products and services to help students manage personal finances				
	Financial coaching				
Income and Work Supports	Financial-aid assistance				
	Access to public benefits on campus				
	Partnerships with other agencies to provide public benefits off campus				
Services integrated and offered through "low-touch" approaches					
Services integrated and offered through "high-touch" approaches					
Services sequenced to match student needs					



## Chapter 2

## CHAPTER TWO:

# Principles for Assessing and Addressing Student Needs Through Integrated Support



Successfully applying the integrated student support services approach requires a shift in mindset about why and how we serve students. In the past, our colleges offered an open door, affordable tuition, and a broad range of academic options and services from which students could choose in a “cafeteria-style” way. Today, the open door admits many students who are low-income, working, first-generation, non-native English speakers, or nontraditional in other ways. Colleges are keenly aware that randomly offering an assortment of core services to students is not enough. Students often are overwhelmed or ill-prepared to take advantage of the services that may support them the most. Colleges must design their services to be intentional, timely, and seamlessly meshed into the student’s experience.

Colleges recognize that intentionally delivering services in a consistent and organized way builds students’ confidence and increases the likelihood that they will take up more services and persist. The stakes and barriers are higher for students as they navigate through unfamiliar terrain and, given student demographics and enrollment trends, the stakes are higher for colleges, too. For reasons of practicality and equity, our goal is to produce more degrees or certificates and to plant more students on a path to life success.

To be truly student-centered and committed to equity requires rethinking how to provide not only academic services, but also a whole host of supporting services. The more we address the distinct interests, aspirations, cultural backgrounds, and life complexities of individual students and groups of students, the better their outcomes.

Colleges that participated in the WSSN initiative used an integrated student-support approach to focus on the “how to” of becoming more student centered: how to substantively improve low-income students’ performance and the overall well-being of their families in a meaningful way and how to fundamentally change the way students experience college.

Three design principles guided the process of shaping the college culture to be more student-centered.

- 1. Know who your students are.** This requires a deeper dive than just gathering demographic data. You need to know about their work, family, and community lives outside of school because of how significantly they affect their lives in school.
- 2. Understand how students experience your school.** What are the obstacles they face at your college (internal hurdles or requirements)? What are the challenges they face at home, work, or in the community (external impediments or limitations) that affect or interfere with their ability to get an education?
- 3. Focus on building trusting relationships,** including the personal—between students and faculty/staff—and operational—between the predetermined and customized services the college provides. This requires bringing faculty and staff into the circle of knowledge and gaining their buy-in to a new way of connecting and listening to students. Strengthening communications among service providers is also part of the picture.

# The Design Principles

## PRINCIPLE ONE:

### Know Your Students

Who are your students? What are their demographics? What are the challenges they face at home, work, school, or in the community? With answers to these questions, your college community can better understand students' financial circumstances and commit to making equity the cornerstone of your student-success strategy.

You can use the College Readiness Assessment on the following page to begin evaluating the extent of student need on your campus. If you have trouble answering these questions, you're not alone. Most colleges haven't designed systems to get at the financial aspects of their students' lives beyond financial aid. But there are tools that can help you gain a better understanding of your students and their needs.

#### KEEPING STUDENTS ON THE ROAD TO PERSISTENCE

When WSSN participant Patrick Henry Community College went through this self-examination and assessment process, it found that transportation in its rural Virginia environs was a major challenge. Many students did not have a car they could use or money for gas. The public bus service was limited and often difficult for students to navigate. PHCC officials took that information and devised a solution—to provide students with emergency transportation assistance as part of the WSSN Education and Employment service pillar. PHCC provided bus tokens, gas vouchers, and minor car repairs to 160 students in the second year of the WSSN grant—a significant increase from the 13 students served in year one.

#### They include:

**Focus groups**—Gatherings of small groups of students (6-10) in a nonthreatening environment who participate in guided discussions on a focused topic. A focus group can provide perceptions and insights useful in themselves or that can be helpful in framing or designing surveys.

**Surveys**—They collect specific information from a broad group of randomly selected people who reflect the diversity of the population being surveyed. The Center for Community College Student Engagement has a strong instrument for surveying students on their financial health.

**Assessments**—Tools to collect information from individual students, with reassurance given and measures taken to protect confidentiality. The information can be gathered at any service intake point, during orientation, in the financial-aid office, before the start of advising or coaching, for example. This chapter includes one example of an intake instrument, a tool suitable for an one-on-one interview.

- Sample Entrance Interview from East Arkansas Community College

After analyzing results, you can determine the types of services and resources that you're already offering, what you need to add, and what you need to structure differently to smooth students' access to support. (See Chapter 3)

## College Readiness Assessment: Understanding Students' Financial Situations

Questions for Your College	Under 10%	11-25%	26-50%	51-75%	76-100%	Don't Know
1. What percentage of students work more than 20 hours a week?						
2. What percentage of students have children?						
3. What percentage of students receive or are eligible for Pell Grants?						
4. Of those who receive Pell Grants, what percentage live below the poverty threshold for a family of four?						
5. What percentage of students say they live paycheck to paycheck?						
6. What percentage of students struggle to feed themselves or their families?						
7. What percentage of students have unstable living situations?						
8. What percentage of students are being flagged for additional services?						
9. What percentage of students feel they are carrying too much debt?						
10. What percentage of students could benefit from additional supports, e.g. a campus food pantry, emergency services, tax preparation, child care, transportation and housing assistance, etc.?						

## **ACTIVITY:**

# **Identify Target Populations to Serve**

As you take steps to better understand the students you will be serving and their needs, it is critical to identify the population you intend to reach and how they might fit into cohorts—demographically, socioeconomically, first-generation, ESL, and so on.

## **Here are questions to begin the process:**

1. Have you identified your target population of underserved students?
  - a. If so, how have you identified them? Does the college know what barriers this population faces?
  - b. If not, what are the first steps you'll take to determine your target population and identify the barriers?
2. What data sources are you drawing from to determine the appropriate services and level of intensity (low- or high-touch) that your identified population will need to receive?
3. Who are the key people/departments on campus that can identify how low-income students typically access services?
  - a. What services do key people/departments on campus provide?
  - b. How much collaboration (frequency), if at all, is there between these people/departments, and how is the coordination of services expected to occur?



## Resource:

# Success Network Coaches' Student Survey

Sample Student information intake form from East Arkansas Community College

### EDUCATIONAL INFORMATION

1. What type of degree do you plan to earn from EACC? (select one)
  - a. Associate's degree
  - b. Certificate
  - c. Certificate and Associate's degree
  - d. None of the above
  - e. Undecided
2. Do you currently attend EACC: (select one)
  - a. Full time (4 or more classes per semester)
  - b. Part time (1 to 3 classes per semester)
3. What is your major or program? (select one)
  - a. Allied Health such as Nursing, Rad Tech, Medical Coding, etc.
  - b. Law Enforcement or Criminal Justice
  - c. Teacher Education
  - d. General Education Transfer to a four-year college or university
  - e. Undecided or other
4. Upon earning your degree or certificate from EACC, do you plan to: (select one)
  - a. Attend a 4-year college/university full-time
  - b. Work full time
  - c. Work while attending a 4-year college/university
  - d. None of the above
  - e. Undecided
5. If you plan to complete a 4-year bachelor's degree, what school(s) are you interested in transferring to (select all that apply):
  - a. Arkansas State University – Jonesboro
  - b. University of Arkansas Pine Bluff
  - c. University of Arkansas at Fayetteville
  - d. An online college such as Phoenix, SNHU, Strayer, or other
  - e. Other college or university not listed here
6. Have you previously attended any colleges or universities other than EACC? (select one)
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
7. If you previously attended a college other than EACC, what school(s) did you attend (select all that apply; skip this question if you have not previously attended another college or university):
  - a. Arkansas State University – Jonesboro
  - b. University of Arkansas at Fayetteville
  - c. Another community college in Arkansas
  - d. An online college such as Phoenix, ITT, SNHU, Strayer, or other
  - e. Other college or university not listed here

8. Do any of the following apply to you? (select all that apply)
  - a. First semester in college
  - b. Undecided college major
  - c. Undecided career plans
  - d. Failing grade(s) in previous college coursework
  - e. No school for five or more years

### DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

9. What is your ethnic background? (select one)
  - a. African American
  - b. Caucasian/White
  - c. Hispanic or Latino
  - d. Native American or Asian/Pacific Islander
  - e. Other
10. Are you currently employed: (select one)
  - a. Full time
  - b. Part time
  - c. Seasonal
  - d. Unemployed
  - e. Other/not sure
11. Do you qualify for Pell? (select one)
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
12. Do you receive Pell or other Financial Aid? (select one)
  - a. Pell
  - b. Loan
  - c. Other financial aid
  - d. Combination of the above
  - e. I receive no financial aid
13. If you qualify for Pell or other aid, but do not receive it, why? (select one)
  - a. Academic Probation
  - b. Academic Suspension
  - c. Other
14. How many dependents (children or adults) do you support? (select one)
  - a. None
  - b. 1
  - c. 2
  - d. 3
  - e. 4 or more
15. Do any of the following apply to you? (select all that apply)
  - a. SNAP recipient
  - b. Medicaid recipient
  - c. Current TEA
  - d. Former TEA
  - e. WorkPays



16. Did either of your parents  
(or custodial or legal guardians):
- a. Earn an Associate's degree
  - b. Earn a Bachelor's degree
  - c. Earn a Master's degree or higher
  - d. Attend college but not earn a degree

### NEEDS NOT BEING MET

17. Do you face any of the following obstacle(s) or challenge(s) in completing your academic or career goals? (select all that apply)
- a. Locating reliable childcare
  - b. Paying for reliable childcare
  - c. Child support problems
  - d. Other single parent issues
  - e. None of the above
18. Do you face any of the following obstacle(s) or challenge(s) in completing your academic or career goals? (select all that apply)
- a. Physical health issues relating to yourself
  - b. Mental health issues related to yourself
  - c. Physical health issues relating to a child or other dependent
  - d. Mental health issues related to a child or other dependent
  - e. None of the above
19. Do you face any of the following obstacle(s) or challenge(s) in completing your academic or career goals? (select all that apply)
- a. Locating reliable transportation to school
  - b. Paying for reliable transportation to school
  - c. Housing/living environment that is unsafe
  - d. Housing/living environment not conducive to good study or work habits
  - e. None of the above
20. Are you challenged by inadequate finances in any of the following areas? (select all that apply)
- a. Food
  - b. Housing
  - c. Transportation
  - d. Dependent expenses
  - e. None of the above

### HELP OR ASSISTANCE OPPORTUNITIES

21. I could use help in the following areas:  
(select all that apply)
- a. Reading Skills
  - b. Math Skills
  - c. Writing Skills
  - d. Science Skills
  - e. None of the above

22. I could use help in the following areas:  
(select all that apply)
- a. Choosing a Major
  - b. Choosing a Career
  - c. Assistance accessing Public Benefits
  - d. Assistance in finding a job
  - e. None of the above
23. I could use help in the following areas:  
(select all that apply)
- a. Time Management
  - b. Stress Management
  - c. Goal Setting
  - d. Parenting Skills
  - e. None of the above
24. I could use help in the following areas:  
(select all that apply)
- a. Debt Reduction
  - b. Financial Management
  - c. Creating a Budget
  - d. Exploring salaries of different careers
  - e. None of the above
25. I could use help in the following areas:  
(select all that apply)
- a. Motivation
  - b. Math Anxiety
  - c. Test Anxiety
  - d. Self-Esteem
  - e. None of the above
26. I could use help in the following areas:  
(select all that apply)
- a. Test Taking Skills
  - b. Note Taking Skills
  - c. Study Skills
  - d. Attendance Issues
  - e. None of the above

We want to help! Is there anything else that a mentor or coach could assist you with in order to help you complete your educational, financial, or career goals? Please contact Jodi McClain, [jmclain@eacc.edu](mailto:jmclain@eacc.edu), or 870-633-4480 ext. 291, or stop by the EAST lab in Classroom Building 1, Room 106. Success Network Coaches are available to Forrest City, Wynne, or Online students.



## PRINCIPLE TWO:

# Design With The Student's Experience In Mind

How do your students experience your college's environment? What are the obstacles they will face at your college (internal hurdles or requirements)? What challenges do they face at home, work, or in the community (external impediments or limitations)? Taking all these elements into consideration as you design the delivery of integrated services is critical to how students will experience the environment they encounter on campus.

## Think of Students' Lives in their Entirety

A good way of analyzing your students' challenges and possible solutions for them, is in terms of locus of control—that is, home, work, college, and community. Within each category, there are various strands of possible services that either the college provides directly, in collaboration with others, or through referrals, with a "warm hand-off" from the college to an external partner or governmental agency:

Potential Challenges Students Face	
Home	Work
Essential needs: housing, food, and transportation insecurities	Full-time vs. part-time schedules
Dependents: single parenting; caring for other family members including those who are elderly, sick, or infirm	Multiple jobs
Competing demands: child care, effects of generational poverty	Shift-change volatility
Possible Service Solutions and Sources	
College	Community
Academic and career coaching supports, including tutoring, supplemental instruction, college readiness, practical-skills application programs, etc.	Working with organizations that deliver complementary services (health care, housing support, food banks, child care providers, transportation services, social services)
Campus community identity and sense of belonging (e.g., orientation, freshman seminars, direct-benefits services, etc.)	Private-sector partners (car dealers, banks, credit unions, credit-recovery services, small businesses, in-kind partners)
Education, career, and financial planning for long-term stability	Local and state government agencies (assistance with visas, residency, access to public benefits, etc.)
Emergency-aid (loan or grant) services	Pro bono support and skilled volunteer services (organizations like VITA [Volunteer Income Tax Assistance], Red Cross, Goodwill, United Way, Catholic Charities, etc.)
Accelerated "college to work" certificate and degree programs	
Counseling and coaching services	
Targeting risk and providing intervention services	

As you can see, the lists of challenges students face in their lives and the possible ways to support them are extensive and varied. Designing solutions is definitely not a “one size fits all” proposition. The strength of the integrated-services concept is that it allows for a diverse, unique, and institution-specific ingenuity in the design of core services in each area to meet the needs of students.

Understanding student mindsets in relation to their specific needs is essential for designing programs, services, and processes around the student experience. Then, couple the design with coaching, engaged faculty and staff, intentional braiding or customizing of services (high- and low-touch), and ongoing follow-up. When you are designing the student experience, remember that local and regional needs are a factor, so build flexibility into the approach.

## Determine Whether It Is Best to Have Students Opt-Out or Opt-In

Once you know who your students are and the types of services they need, the next step is designing how your students take up or receive services. Will you give students the choice to “opt-out” of services or “opt-in”? While some colleges have found that the opt-out approach (defined below) can be most beneficial, others have found that the opt-in approach (also defined below) works best for their students.

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**Opt-out:** Colleges can determine whether there are services that are widely beneficial to students and therefore make them mandatory and integrated into their normal college-going activities.

For example, when a college identifies cohorts with similar needs—TRiO, Foster Youth, College Promise, and so on—intentionally sequencing services or resources through a pre-determined service delivery approach works well. (See page 13) Students automatically receive these services as members of the cohort. They can opt out if it is appropriate, but the college manages that on a student-by-student basis.

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You can vary the services offered in a bundle depending on the overall needs of the cohort or targeted population. Consider these students “in” the program unless they take action to opt out.

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**Opt-in:** This is when the college does not make the use of services mandatory. The college markets services, such as a food pantry or tax-preparation assistance or a financial-information series, and students must take action to opt-in.

Some services clearly are not relevant or beneficial to all students but are essential for many. The opt-in approach makes the most sense in these cases and can give students a feeling of ownership because they have chosen to participate, but there are challenges to consider.

Students must take more initiative, and it requires more outreach from the college than the opt-out model, especially for students who are not in a cohort.

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Students are sometimes embarrassed to let others know they cannot pay for books or child care or are homeless or hungry.

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Students may feel overwhelmed and think they don’t have time for one more thing in their day. Because these students have to opt in, your marketing must speak to their needs and emotional reservations.

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Students should feel that a service is a normal part of the college experience, making them more likely to return and take advantage of all the services that will benefit them.

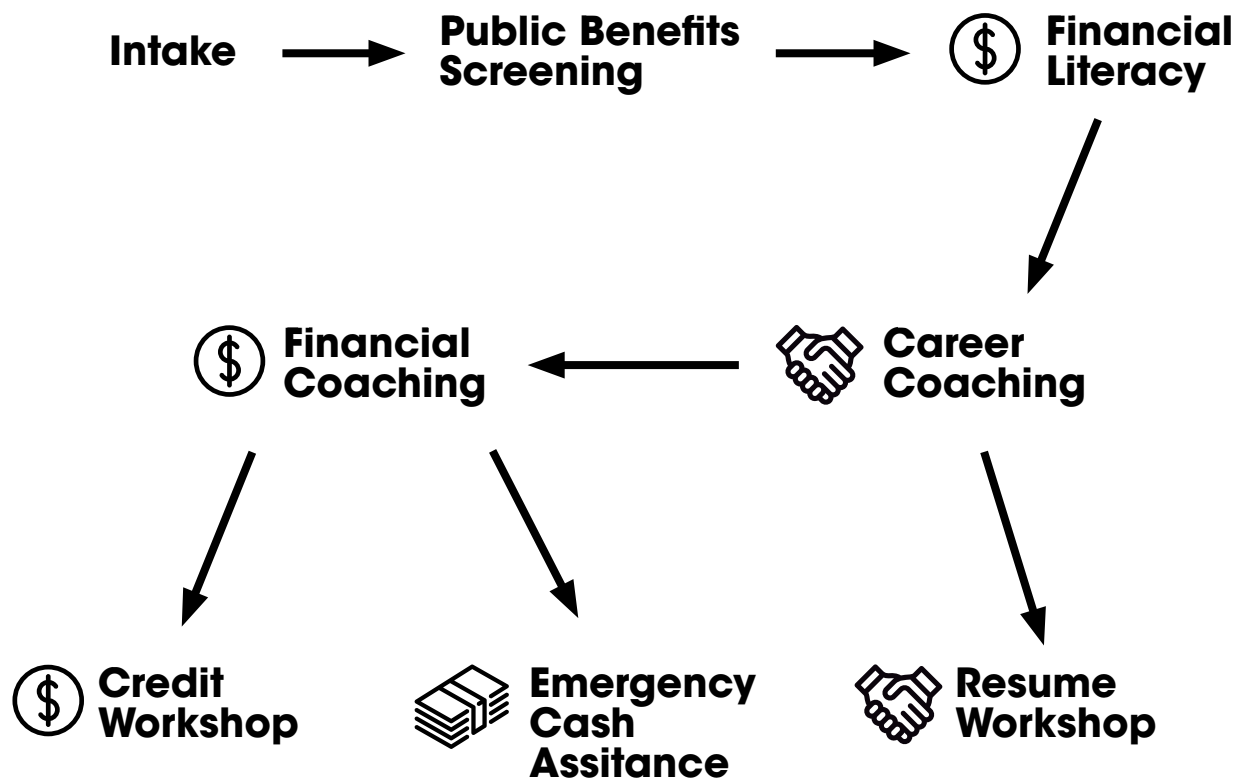
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Opportune scheduling makes a difference. With “opt-in,” you also have to think carefully about logistical ease—when and where you are offering the service. Financial workshops and seminars might be offered at lunchtime, when students can just walk in. Perhaps an appointment would be required for one-on-one counseling or a visit to the food pantry. Can students use a phone app for scheduling? Will your office accept their requests via text? Finding the easiest ways for students to opt in may require asking what will work for them.

## Sequence Services to Flow Sensibly to Students

Intentionally designing and sequencing services with equitable outcomes in mind helps colleges reach the right students, in the right way, at the right time. How do students “flow” through your college’s pathways? Are your services scalable and sustainable? Do they achieve the equity outcomes you have envisioned?

Below is a flow chart that captures service sequencing followed by an example of a student interacting with the WSSN integrated and sequenced services approach.





### **EXAMPLE OF A STUDENT INTERACTING WITH THE INTEGRATED SERVICES APPROACH:**

Ingrid is a new student whose intake process requires her to take an orientation class. She completes an intake form and has received her financial-aid package, which helps with tuition and some living expenses, but she is still short on funds.

Ingrid is screened for public benefits, either as part of her academic student-success course or through standalone workshops where she receives financial education (financial literacy). In the financial-education sessions, she learns basic concepts such as debt and credit scores. The financial-education information prepares Ingrid to meet with her financial and/or career coach(es), one or two depending on how services are structured.

While meeting with her career coach, Ingrid mentions that she is looking for a new job, so the career coach sets her up to take a resume workshop. A few weeks later, when she meets with her financial coach (this could be the same person), she mentions that her car is not working she is struggling to pay her utility bills, and her phone is going to be turned off. The financial coach helps her apply for emergency cash assistance until public benefits arrive and helps her construct a budget so she can manage her money carefully. This is also helpful planning for when she starts receiving the public benefits for which she has previously applied. The financial coach can have her attend a credit workshop the college is offering through its partnership with the local credit union. The incentive for attending is a \$20 gift card that she can use to pay some expenses.

#### **The sequencing of services to students is very important.**

If Ingrid had received financial coaching before gaining financial education/literacy or a basic understanding of financial concepts, she would not know the basics of budgeting. Teaching budgeting is important, but it becomes irrelevant if you have only a few dollars in your checking account or if you don't even have a checking account. Giving students information and helping them master concepts first before they receive coaching leads to a more balanced and trusting relationship between coach and student and more confidence in the decision-making process.

# ACTIVITY:

## Creating Student Flow Charts

### Activity One: Creating a Sample Flow Chart

**Margo's Story:** Margo lives in rural Washington and is the first person in her family to finish high school, much less attend college. She wants to become a nurse one day but doesn't have much faith in her ability to do so. She has a 2-year-old son and works part-time at a restaurant. She does not get a lot of financial support from her family and struggles to provide for herself and her son. She does not receive any public benefits because her family believes that you don't ask for charity.

#### **Additional information about Margo:**

- She has decided to enroll in her local community college and wants to complete the nursing program.
- She relies heavily on alternate means of transportation because she does not have a car (or the funds to purchase one). It is often difficult to arrange rides with her family and friends. She is hoping to save up enough money to purchase a car within the next year.

#### **Using the story above, complete the following activity:**

With a partner or in a small group, design a student flow chart that shows the series of student-support services that would begin to provide the help that Margo will need to be successful. Design these services around WSSN's three core areas (See Chapter 1), Education and Career Services, Income and Work Supports, and Financial Services and Asset Building.

### Activity Two: Create a Student Flow Chart for a Student at Your College

As with the flow chart for Margo, make one for a real student whose story you know or a hypothetical student. First, make a list of the student-support services in place at your college. Then list your student's challenges and needs. Finally map out the flow of services, noting gaps when they occur.

## PRINCIPLE THREE:

# Build Trust Among Faculty, Staff, and Students

We know one of the most significant contributors to success and retention in college is establishing positive and trusting relationships between students and college personnel. Faculty and staff play crucial roles in making integrated student-support services a success, especially when they have bought in to the idea that nonacademic support services are as relevant to student success as teaching and learning.

Faculty and staff are the ones who see students every day. Before the early-alert systems kick in, they notice red flags, such as a student not showing up for class or not acting in his or her normal way. Because faculty and staff are on the front lines, it behooves the college to ensure they are armed with knowledge of and training on what services are available, how to spot early indications of a student problem, and how to make referrals to advisers and coaches. The college can provide this information through in-service trainings, professional development, and departmental meetings.

Another piece of professional development might address a likely gap in many faculty's experience: what life is like for students living in poverty or under strained financial circumstances. Challenges come in all forms, from food insecurity, homelessness, transportation, and domestic violence to having no money to fix a dead car battery, buy a textbook, or get a bus pass. Colleges can build the bridge between staff and students by introducing poverty simulations, having student speakers at faculty in-services, providing information in campus newsletters and on professional-development days, and developing inserts for syllabi.

## ACTIVITY: Play ATD's Finish Line Game

What are the factors that help or hinder student progress? ATD designed the Finish Line Game as a professional-development tool to help college faculty, staff, administrators, and trustees have those sometimes difficult, yet robust discussions surrounding student success and equity. The board game sets up teams to walk in the shoes of 10 students as they navigate their educational journeys and confront the impact of college policies, practices, and culture on their progress and success.

For more information on the Finish Line Game see: <http://achievingthedream.org/resources/finish-line-game>

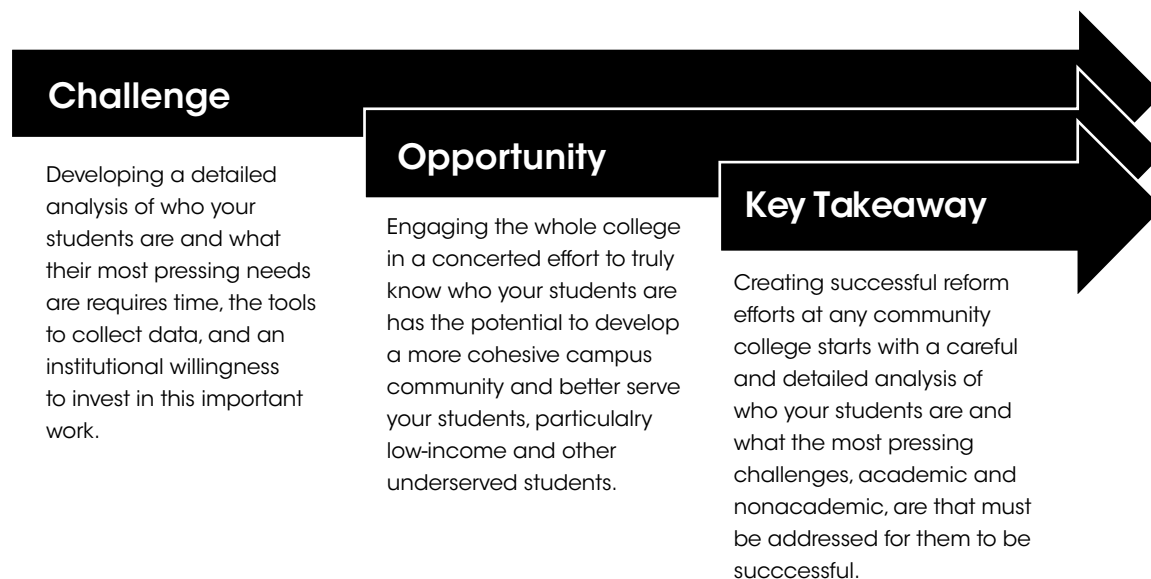
Making an integrated student support services approach part of guided pathways and other reform efforts to improve student learning outcomes doesn't change the place of teaching and learning at the heart of what community colleges do. Full-time and adjunct faculty have a central role to play as change agents within the institution. College strategies to improve teaching and learning capacity include:

- Engaging academic leaders and faculty in efforts to build the integrated student support services into the curriculum and learning outcomes. When these changes are subjected to established rules and processes for changing curricula, it helps sustain the change over time.
- Developing faculty understanding of the protocol for engaging students in need and empowering faculty with tools to refer students to the integrated support services.
- Identifying the spheres of influence across faculty and cultivating champions who will promote the student-success initiatives among their colleagues.

Making sure communication is consistent and clear brings credibility to the relationships. When faculty or staff refer a student, coaches should acknowledge the referral and let the faculty or staff member know what the resolution was without disclosing confidential information. Closing the loop and following up with faculty and staff is important for referral sustainability.

Students need guidance, not only with their academic endeavors, but also with the myriad personal and social issues that may arise. A more personalized, case-management approach that involves coaching and a comprehensive arsenal of support services can build rapport and a trusting relationship with students.

This level of interaction depends on the coaches being knowledgeable, personable, and caring professionals who build trust by focusing on the needs of individual students, understanding the challenges they face in getting an education, offering resources to help mitigate some of those challenges, and engaging and following up routinely throughout students' time at the college.





## RESOURCE: Assessing Student Needs

How many students could benefit from additional support from campus food pantries, emergency aid, crisis housing, or other interventions?

Which students ought to be flagged in early-alert systems for additional outreach?

To what extent should the security of students' basic needs become a campus priority, especially when it comes to retention efforts?

**Three good sources of information on community college students are also resources for conducting your own tailored surveys or assessments.**

**The Wisconsin HOPE Lab** has resources to help colleges focus on vital aspects of students' lives. Its "Guide to Assessing Basic Needs Insecurity in Higher Education" describes how to perform two types of studies: 1) Surveys to assess basic needs security and 2) Opportunistic small-scale experiments to evaluate the effectiveness of programs meant to address basic needs security.

The Lab points out that this information has uses beyond informing conversations about student well-being. It can support fundraising efforts, guide campus decision-making about key investments, or generate new ideas for improving degree-completion rates.

Learn more about the Lab, and find the guide at <http://wihopelab.com/About/mission.html>

**The Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCCSE)**, based at the University of Texas at Austin, produces the largest annual national survey of current and entering community college students to learn about institutional practices and student behaviors correlated with student learning and retention. The survey serves as a benchmarking instrument, diagnostic tool, and monitoring device.

Much of the national survey data are public, but CCCSE member colleges can look at their own information on an interactive database and request that a set of questions on student financial health be added to the general survey administered on their campus. Or they can draft and add a limited set of their own questions. CCCSE also produces other resources, such as focus-group toolkits and discussion guides. For more information, go to <http://www.ccsse.org/center>

**Lumina Foundation** has developed a Beyond Financial Aid toolkit designed to help colleges close attainment gaps for low-income students. BFA describes six college-tested strategies for helping low-income students overcome the significant challenges created by limited resources.

Learn more about BFA, and find the guide at <https://www.luminafoundation.org/beyond-financial-aid>



## Webinar on Developing Student Flow Charts

This webinar provides insight into how student flow charts were used in the Benefits Access for College Completion (BACC) initiative. The BACC initiative was designed to increase access to public benefits (such as SNAP or Medicaid) for eligible low-income students and provided important insights for the WSSN approach, particularly how these crucial supports reduce students' unmet financial needs and help them persist and complete college.

You can view the webinar at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ALBTgc7Cjg4>

## Webinar on Mapping Student Flow

Appropriate sequencing of services is essential to effectively integrating service delivery. This webinar discusses how students access services via different entry points within a college but still receive the same "bundle" of services, and it provides models for mapping student flow to ensure "warm handoffs" and consistent service delivery.

You can view the webinar at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gSGwjydxfeY>







## Chapter 3

## CHAPTER THREE:

# Principles for Organizing and Redesigning the Delivery of Integrated Services

In the preceding chapter, we focused on understanding students' basic needs. Now we turn to understanding our college's capacity to serve those needs within its existing culture and infrastructure. How well are systems organized to meet both traditional and nontraditional needs—that is, all the factors that can stand in the way of persistence? How prepared are faculty and staff to look differently at student-success goals and embrace a holistic approach and more active engagement? How do colleges free up or reallocate resources to support these services?

Colleges that participated in the WSSN initiative added services, designed new structures to centralize delivery, and revised existing structures to more efficiently coordinate services distributed across campuses and beyond. They found that their redesigns reduced duplication of efforts, resulted in better aligned staff roles and responsibilities, and increased their capacity to support students through completion.

At the same time, it is important to note that no two colleges created the same organizational structure. Colleges implementing integrated student support services in an approach similar to WSSN's can expect to design hybrid versions unique to their students and institutions. What is important is delivering services in a way that reflects the reality of low-income students' complex lives. This entails offering a range of low-touch and high-touch services, making them easy for students to find and use, being able to customize and bundle services for individual situations, and normalizing—

or de-stigmatizing—holistic service delivery to be part of the common student experience. As part of an equity agenda, the goal is to remove obstacles known to put low-income students at a disadvantage so they can achieve their goals.

Before we begin the discussion of the key design principles below, remember that the WSSN approach aims to integrate services in three areas, as outlined on page 5:

- Education and Career Services
- Income and Work Supports
- Financial Services and Asset Building

So, as you consider how to organize college resources, personnel, and the actual physical plants, continue to think about how to integrate these services to meet the particular needs of students.

# The Design Principles

## PRINCIPLE ONE:

### Design an Organizational Structure that Coordinates and Integrates Services Based on Student Need and the College's Realistic Capacity

Colleges participating in the WSSN initiative organized service delivery in two structures:

- The Hub construct: a centralized design that generally entails a standalone, physically located center and varying degrees of integration into college operations.
- The Distributed construct: Support services are more fully integrated with, and delivered throughout, the ongoing student support services of the college.

In the following pages, we provide more detail about the constructs, examples of how colleges used them, and tools to help you determine which construct could fit at your college.

### Choosing the Organizational Structure that Will Work on Your Campus

Many leaders inherently choose a structure they are most familiar with and, within this process, they often neglect to appreciate the strengths and weaknesses of different organizational designs. For example, while a Hub design has benefits because the majority of the services are found in one physical location, it can be hard to implement if the college lacks space and dedicated staff to provide daily oversight. Below, you will find descriptions of the two structures and their characteristics.





# Hub Structure

Originating in the transportation industry, the hub structure at a college relies on a centralized location where students receive most of the core services. This location is clearly identifiable as “the” place for students to go for assistance. From this “single point of entry” or access point, students learn about the supports available, meet with staff dedicated to this effort, and get referred to “complementary” services on and off campus to bolster and enhance the support provided to students. The hub is similar to the “one-stop” concept in which there is a physical location on campus where the majority of student services are delivered and, although staff may refer students to services outside the hub, students always return to the hub for additional services.

The hub design typically uses a case-management approach, in which a coach or adviser has regular contact with the student and can follow his or her progress and use of services.



## The Sparkpoint Center Does It All

Cañada College (CA) has partnered with United Way of the Bay Area to provide many of its WSSN services, which are primarily bundled through the SparkPoint center. The center's location in the Counseling Services area enables an easy referral system. Services in this physical space include financial coaching and benefits access. Additionally, the staff at SparkPoint provide training for faculty and staff in WSSN services to ensure they are knowledgeable and can successfully refer students to these services. Once students are referred to the SparkPoint center, they complete an application and assessment to determine specific bundles of services.

# Distributed Structure

For campuses that are a) unable to bring most services physically together under one roof, b) spread out in multiple locations and cannot replicate all support functions at each one, or c) focused on integrated service delivery as a concept that is every employee's responsibility, this strategy enables students to have multiple points of entry. Like ATM machines, branches, and main banks, students can access services from many locations—some physical with full services, some physical with limited services, and some online.

Colleges implementing this design believe a vertically and horizontally integrated service strategy can be more efficiently scaled and sustained. Services are integrated into existing, ongoing student intake and support programs and activities. For example, a financial-aid department offers financial-education workshops and individual financial counseling in addition to its nonintegrated duties.

The distributed design can also use a case-management approach, but given the multiple points of access to services a student uses, a strong technological component to track and monitor student progress is needed. Ideally, every staff and faculty member has access to students' profiles and records, enabling anyone to recommend service referrals. Training, compliance with privacy rules, and close coordination will help with implementation.



## Hub- and Distributed-Design Advantages

Hub Design	Distributed Design
<b>Resources and communications about services are centralized.</b> Instead of multiple people trying to do the same thing, the hub usually relies on only a few individuals to make decisions and provide direction for students. It creates a hierarchy of control that often leads to maximum levels of efficiency.	<b>Students have multiple access or entry points.</b> This helps the college's overall growth toward institutional change. There is no wrong door for students to enter and begin receiving services.
<b>Service is delivered consistently.</b> Students are hearing the same thing. Centralizing core services minimizes the natural variations that occur when multiple people and divisions are responsible for the same or similar things. It can reduce service-referral redundancy.	<b>It builds awareness among students, faculty, and staff, normalizing the student experience.</b> If done successfully, students experience college as a system of supports and see that as just the way the school does business.
<b>Execution of services is faster.</b> Because the hub allows for departments to be housed in one location, providing services to students can often happen immediately. This also prevents students from getting lost while attempting to find out where they're supposed to go.	<b>It allows for cross-training and integrated professional-development activities.</b> Accountability and transparency are encouraged in the services provided to students.
<b>Maintaining a positive culture is easier.</b> The hub allows service containment and, consequently, facilitates the creation of a positive climate and culture for students.	<b>Service delivery is integrated into multiple campus departments.</b> The distributed design can reduce the amount of funding needed to implement change because most of the departments are already established on campus. Funding and resources can be put toward professional development and training.

## Hub- and Distributed-Design Disadvantages

<b>It can feel stigmatizing.</b> Because a Hub requires a physical location, it increases the possibility of users being negatively labeled. Additionally, because the point of entry may be from a referral, students may perceive the hub as an intimidating additional burden.	<b>It may be harder to initially implement.</b> Because the philosophy of "no wrong door for students" is central to this structure, it may take more time and training to make sure that all faculty and staff have the knowledge and resources to help students.
<b>The isolation can slow institutional culture change.</b> Hubs can have a tendency to work in isolation from other staff, students, and departments. This can lead to slowed progress in integrating student supports across campus and normalizing the supports for all students.	<b>It can lead to job redundancy:</b> Clear communication, accountability for services offered, and technology can decrease the duplication of services.
<b>Staff and faculty may be unaware of services.</b> Students spend a lot of time in their classrooms. If a student expresses a need, staff may not be familiar with the services available in the hub. This may cause a delay in students receiving appropriate services.	<b>Students may be less likely to stay engaged.</b> It is important that the college has a robust tracking system and a "warm hand-off" for students. Students may get easily lost in the uptake of services. Again, communication, accountability for services offered, and technology are important in making sure students stay connected.
<b>Referrals can slow response time.</b> Because staff outside the hub won't be as familiar with service offerings, students are more likely to be referred to the hub for services as opposed to students receiving them when they first express a need.	

Every college has to make its own choice about what will work best. Your college may lean more toward the hub or the distributed design depending on numerous factors of space, staffing, and programming.

As you work toward one of these structures, you may find you have to use features from both during the transition, or your college may decide to adopt characteristics of both models and implement a hybrid design for integrating core-services delivery. The approach is adaptable, versatile, and ever-changing as the needs of your students change. The key is to integrate services in a way that is most responsive to those needs.

## **Multiple Access Points: Where Do Your Students Receive Services?**

It can be helpful when thinking about where and how to locate services to consider how your students “enter” your campus and how they “take up” the services. Two concepts are involved: a referral point and an access point.

**Referral points** are simply where a student might learn about a service or is referred to a service by a faculty or staff member; referral is not considered an access point. Ideally, anywhere a student enters your campus should be either a referral or an access point; this is often referred to as the “no wrong door” policy.

**Access points** are where students actively receive (take up) the service. An example of this is when a student stops by a food pantry to pick up food. When considering how to organize your services, it is important to consider in your design how students will find the access points they need.



# ACTIVITY:

## Identifying How to Organize Your Services on Campus

### Activity #1: Map services offered at your college

On a large sheet of paper or whiteboard, draw a picture of where all relevant services (e.g. financial-aid office, student services, career counseling, food pantry, etc.) are located on your campus—including existing services and those to be created. Alternatively, simply identify locations on an existing campus map. Draw lines between locations where there likely will be integration of core WSSN services.

### Activity #2: Determine where to locate your integrated student support services

Use the following questions to weigh options for where the administrative “home” of your core integrated services should be, in a hub or distributed model. Even after considering these questions, you may have multiple options. Keep in mind that no one department or group of individuals can successfully manage all integrated service-related activities in isolation; administrative areas that work well across departments and with external partners will be best suited to coordinating the activities.

**Record your best thinking about where to locate integrated student support services.**

1. Are there existing programs or services in the prospective office/department/building that can be leveraged to increase support for this approach? If so, list them.
2. Is there staff capacity or resource availability that can be shared? If so, list examples (one list for staff and one for relevant resources).
3. Is there already a high volume of students in your target population who access integrated support-related services in the prospective office/department/building? If so, list which services.
4. If thinking about using one physical location (e.g. student services, workforce office, computer lab, etc.), which administrative area will be able to best manage that center?
5. Which administrative areas at your college are best at working cross-functionally? Why?
6. How far away would senior leadership be from the prospective administrative home for integrated service delivery?
7. Where would access points be most visible (students can't escape them) and welcoming?

## PRINCIPLE TWO:

# Organize Resources And Staff To Support An Integrated Student Services Approach

Organizing your campus facilities to more efficiently serve students must be accompanied by an assessment and reorganization of your staff and other resources. Not having the capacity to provide services or not having staff in proximity to one another but still working in isolation will be as much of a barrier to integrating services as having services spread out over a campus without any coordination. The first task is to assess current staff roles and responsibilities as well as examine how those roles work collaboratively (or don't).

### Staff Roles and Responsibilities Assessment

**Service Area/  
Responsible Staff**  
(Circle all that the college or college partners currently provide)

**Who Does/Who Can**  
(Staff responsible for those provided; staff identified who could provide services not circled)

**Gap Analysis** (Staff needed to provide fully integrated and comprehensive services)

**Connectivity with Other Services/Staff** (Indicate existing connections between services; identify connections that need to be built and/or strengthened)

**Education & Career Services**

Academic Advising  
Career Coaching  
Job Training  
Employment Specialists

**Income & Work Supports**

Financial Aid Planning  
Public Benefits Advising  
Transportation Assistance  
Food Pantry  
Child Care Assistance  
Housing Assistance  
Tax Preparation/Assistance

**Financial Services & Asset Building**

Financial Literacy Education  
Financial Coaching  
Financial Product Assistance

This assessment should help determine your capacity as well as your needs. These needs may require adding staff, developing partnerships, or shifting staff roles and responsibilities (particularly with regard to integrating services). To that end, you may need to take advantage of professional development opportunities to change mindsets or take staff resource development in new directions. Here are five major points to consider:

## Developing Staff Resources

1. Oversight of core services needs an administrative home and clearly defined leadership with responsibility for implementation, budgeting, evaluation, and improvement. Common homes are Student Services, Continuing Education, and Academic Affairs.
2. Make sure that students' connections to on- and off-campus services are easily accessible and that services are designed to be delivered in an integrated and intentional way.
3. Ensure that all who collect, report, analyze, and evaluate data use common definitions, language, and "coding" of services. This supports informed decision-making. Chapter 5 goes more deeply into data.
4. Employ a case-management approach to ensure comprehensive service delivery without duplication and to minimize the chance that students will fall into service gaps.
5. Use student-success champions or coaches to work with students and customize and integrate sets of services that meet their needs without duplication.

## TRAINING STAFF TO BUILD FINANCIAL SKILLS

Porterville College in California has invested significantly in the professional development of staff who provide WSSN integrated services. In the spring of 2017, 14 counselors and staff members participated in a five-day training on financial topics, including a financial-health model, income generation, spending plans, debt alleviation, credit building, investing, retirement, and estate planning. Training also included the COACH model, with such topics as creating a college-going culture, developmental-level supports, and college-success strategies; learning coaching skills; and helping students generate income, save for college, and budget around financial aid, credit, and investing.

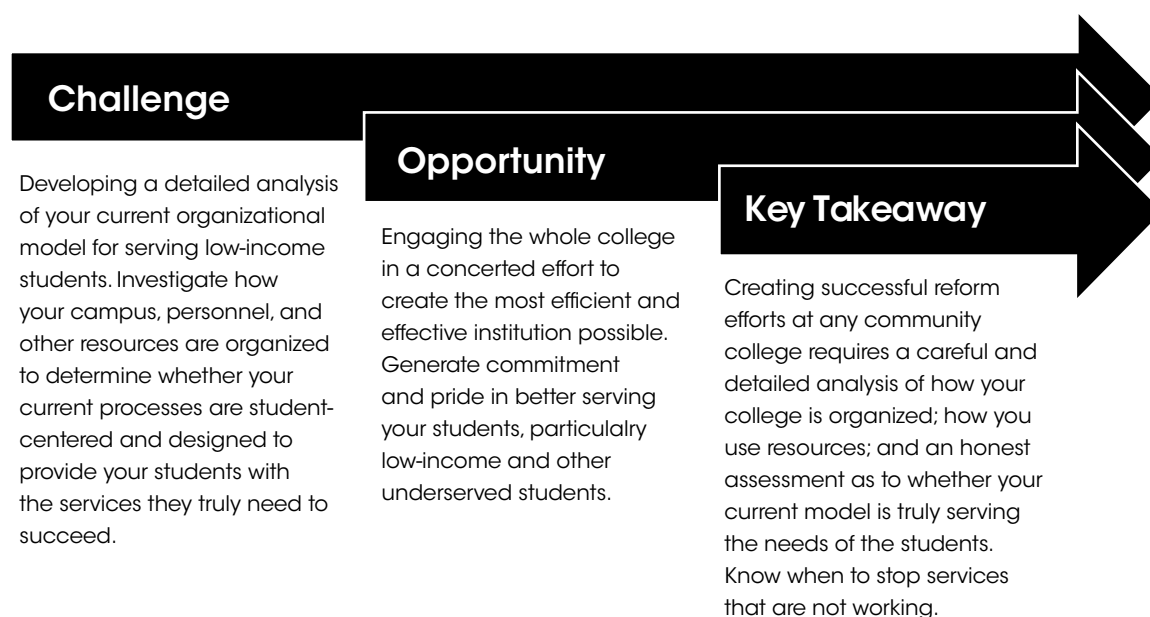
## PRINCIPLE THREE:

# Break Down Silos To Promote College-Wide Buy-In To The Goal Of Serving Students

Breaking down silos and establishing clear lines of communication and responsibility are important components in building and sustaining an equitable student experience. The process of successfully implementing an integrated student support services model requires collaboration across all programs and departments to identify and eliminate service redundancies and possibly learn about and embed new services into existing programs. It can enhance interdepartmental coordination by removing resources and programs from their silos. A heightened commitment to serving diverse students through redesigned organizational structures represents a necessary evolution of the college's institutional mission and practice.

Addressing this challenge is neither new nor unique to any one particular college (or to higher education in general). We are all well aware of where silos tend to exist or have the potential to exist—between the academic and student-services sides of the college; between service areas within student services; between academic programs, divisions, and schools; between business-oriented roles and educational roles; between administrators and others dealing with outside pressures on the college and those focused on the student experience; and on and on. In one sense, these divisions are natural and can grow and become institutionalized. The reality is that these divisions are more artificial than not and can be broken down through deliberate and ongoing attention.

As will be discussed in the next chapter, delivering holistic support services, raising awareness of poverty, and committing to serving diverse students requires a campus-wide discussion and represents a necessary evolution of the college's institutional mission and practice. Engaging administrators, faculty, and staff in discussions that lead to this kind of collective thinking can advance a culture shift about the college's opportunity to more directly understand and address the student experience inside and outside of school. It also can generate widespread buy-in and support for the college to provide high-touch coaching and more extensive low-touch services to address basic needs and financial-stability supports for students.







## Chapter 4



## CHAPTER FOUR:

# Principles for Assessing and Promoting Institutional Culture Change

Assessing your students' particular set of needs and then assessing how your institution is organized, in terms of both personnel and the actual physical space of the campus, are important initial steps in moving toward an integrated student support model. However, to fully embrace the shift to a student-centered model of service delivery also often requires deep and broad changes to the institution's culture.

Colleges involved in the WSSN initiative learned early on that if their college as a whole—from senior leadership to the faculty to student-services staff—was not committed to changing how their institutions thought about serving students, particularly low-income and working students, successfully helping them persist would be limited. To truly serve students required a deep understanding of the real challenges they face on and off campus, the development of services to address as many of those challenges as possible, and engagement with the college community as a whole to reach and assist students in need.

The table on the next page describes the stages and characteristics that reflect different levels of institutional culture change that can guide your own college's planning.





# INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE CHANGE STAGES AND CHARACTERISTICS

Stages	Characteristics
<b>Exploration and Design</b>	<p>Project leaders and support team, including external partners, are identified.</p> <p>An administrative home for integrated support services is chosen.</p>
<b>Early Implementation</b>	<p>Senior administrators publicly acknowledge that institutional culture change is a goal.</p> <p>Middle managers, faculty, and staff indicate buy-in for culture change.</p> <p>Activities are planned for all campus stakeholders to address culture-change goals.</p>
<b>Mature Implementation</b>	<p>Regular and ongoing college-wide communication and professional development are taking place for integrated support services and outcomes.</p> <p>Campus stakeholders are aware of roles and responsibilities to refer and deliver services.</p> <p>Policies, practices, and procedures have changed.</p>
<b>Institutionalization and Sustainability</b>	<p>Campus stakeholders understand and describe a wide variety of services as regular and standard support for students.</p> <p>Job descriptions include expectations for referral and/or provision of services as a core responsibility of faculty and staff.</p>

The principles and work outlined in this chapter are not simple. Changing an employee's role or responsibility, announcing that the college is headed in a new direction, or reorganizing how a department or building is organized is simple in comparison to working collaboratively to alter attitudes and approaches to serving students. These changes will not happen organically without deliberate and sustained efforts to change the culture of an institution.

# The Design Principles

## PRINCIPLE ONE:

### Establish Equity As A Campus-Wide Priority

Putting students at the center forces colleges to make a significant shift in the culture of supporting underserved students. You will see palpable shifts in the cultural responsiveness of the campus community when you create a “culture of care” coupled with increased collective empathy regarding students’ basic and financial needs.

#### Engaging All Stakeholders

A college has some basic shared beliefs that are not always articulated but form the foundation of the way it operates. When a new program, process, or way of thinking starts to shift the culture, it can sometimes be discomfoting. When thinking begins to shift around a long-held belief, it is important to take the time to listen to everyone and begin a dialogue on the new thinking or changes. Understanding your college’s culture and its readiness for a shift in thinking and processes is important to assuring lasting and positive change.

#### **Leadership is essential.**

While particular programs or departments can have a significant impact on students’ lives when they are working independently to address their needs, comprehensive institutional change requires the active involvement of college leadership. Bringing together a leadership team of senior and mid-level administrators, as well as faculty and staff leaders, at the outset to chart a course for your college and then assess institutional progress regularly is an useful strategy for ensuring an ongoing commitment to a more integrated model of services, which address low-income students’ needs in particular.

#### **Generate buy-in among faculty and staff.**

Leadership is important, but sustainable culture change cannot be achieved by fiat. It is critical to engage faculty and staff who work directly with students daily to gather their input on changes being considered and engage them in that work. This can be accomplished in campus-wide meetings, at professional development days, or in smaller focus groups at the department or school level. The key is to underscore that this effort is about fundamentally reorienting how the college serves students and not simply another new and passing trend.

#### **Don’t overlook student voices.**

Chapter 2 discussed engaging students through assessments and focus groups to get a better understanding of their needs. Students should be similarly engaged as the college discusses changes in how to approach services and work with students, particularly underserved students in need of extended services. Working with student representatives not only provides valuable feedback, but it also generates goodwill among students and potential ambassadors for the changes being instituted within the student body.

# Student Assistants Promote Integrated Support Services

At Cañada College (CA), student assistants hired to work on campus received many benefits, such as the opportunity to further develop professional skills. These students also helped promote the WSSN program overall. Student assistants are representative of the demographic targeted through WSSN, and by the nature of their role, they are often in contact with the various service areas. This helps increase their awareness and use of services available to them on campus, as well as indirectly position them as ambassadors of the WSSN program because they often share with their peers the benefits of utilizing various services.

## Engage External Partners Early

Expanding the services that your college can provide low-income students will most likely involve engaging some external partners (see Chapter 6). For many colleges, involving these partners in institutional planning will be a culture change in and of itself. Doing so early in the process will provide additional perspective on the challenges low-income individuals face as well as valuable insights into how best to meet the needs of these students. Early engagement also signals a commitment to collaboration with your potential partners.

## CHANGING THE INSTITUTIONAL PERCEPTION OF STUDENT SERVICES

The WSSN initiative at Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA) has significantly changed the perception of what student services we provide, how we provide them, to whom, and why. The program was met with so much acceptance and gratitude from the college because it was already evident how much our students needed these services.

Our college has become much more aware of the types of support services we need to be providing in addition to other student services, like academic advising or tutoring.

WSSN was also introduced to NOVA at the perfect time—the environment was truly ripe for our college to adopt and expand this program. We have learned that true success of student support services comes from forgetting about “turf” and embracing a true “no wrong door” policy, where we are all essential to, and play a role in, serving students.

We are working toward a more collaborative model with a pathway of services, in both the academic and student services arenas, that all students receive. WSSN was important in helping NOVA think about what services are critical to include in this pathway and how we might implement the delivery of these services.

—Northern Virginia Community College  
WSSN Year 3 Annual Report

## PRINCIPLE TWO:

# Ensure That Institutional Policies And Practices Reflect Your Commitment To Equity And Integrated Student Services

Changing an organization's culture takes time and effort and ultimately depends on the buy-in of the people involved to commit to that new culture. However, institutional policies and practices can both reflect and promote a culture. Similarly, they can undermine your effort to change the college culture if they do not reflect your commitment to an integrated model of student services. As you engage stakeholders in the process of shifting your culture to a student-centered model designed to provide low-income students with equitable services, it will be important to get a sense of policies and practices that either facilitate that work or hinder it—both at a high level and at the day-to-day level.

### Institutional Policy and Practice Assessment

**Directions:** For each of the following policy and/or practice areas, indicate whether they demonstrate an integrated student services model specifically focused on equity and serving low-income and other underserved students.

Policy and Practice Areas	Yes	Need to Improve	No
<b>Mission and Strategic Plan</b>			
<b>Hiring Practices</b> that includes job descriptions, postings, and interview processes			
<b>Evaluation Practices</b>			
<b>Full-time Faculty and Staff Professional Development</b> to promote equitable integration of services across campus activities and gain better understanding of students' needs			
<b>Part-time Faculty and Staff Professional Development</b> to promote equity and meet students' needs			
<b>Involvement of Student Services Staff in Curriculum Development and Course Sequencing</b> to integrate financial and career education			
<b>Encouragement of Faculty</b> to include resource and referral information to integrated services to meet students' needs			
<b>Cross-Departmental Meetings and All-College Discussions</b> on service integration efforts and meeting students' needs			

**Other** - Are there other institutional policies and practices that your college should consider modifying to better reflect a commitment to equity and serving low-income and other underserved students? If so, what are they?

# The Importance of State Policy Joining the Discussion

Even when employed, low-income students struggle to make ends meet. They juggle child care, transportation, food, and housing insecurities. For these students and their families, safety net programs, such as SNAP, TANF, and Medicaid, are vital to meeting basic needs. Knowing this, ATD partnered with the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)—a national nonpartisan, anti-poverty nonprofit advancing policy solutions for low-income people—to bring together state advocates, institutional leaders, state agency managers, and national policy experts to develop strategies that effect change in WSSN's three service areas because, when we invest in the safety net, we support students basic needs.

## **ATD identified four state partners, one in each state, to:**

Collaborate and determine short-, intermediate-, and long-term state policy goals and objectives.

Develop and execute a strategy and identify state and institutional policy barriers and opportunities that impact WSSN objectives.

Promote cross-college communication and peer learning via a culture of mutual accountability.

As you design your integrated-student-support model, remember that advocating for state policies that prevent harmful cuts and increases access and investments will increase students' ability to persist and complete.

On the next page are examples of policies our state partners identified and their advocacy strategy.



<p><b>Expanding use of exemptions to SNAP student ban</b></p>	<p><b>Arkansas &amp; California</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expand definition of career-focused training so more students qualify for SNAP</li> <li>Explore use of work-study funds to expand SNAP access</li> </ul> <p><b>Virginia</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expand definition of career-focused training so more students qualify for SNAP</li> <li>Create system to inform colleges about the ability to use state work-study funds to expand exemptions</li> </ul> <p><b>Washington</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expand definition of career-focused training so more students qualify for SNAP</li> <li>Create system to promote student exemptions to work requirements for SNAP, including eligibility for those receiving state-funded work-study</li> </ul>
<p><b>Preserving and/or expanding access to child care subsidies</b></p>	<p><b>Arkansas, California &amp; Virginia</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Preserve and/or expand parent/student access to child care subsidies</li> </ul> <p><b>Washington</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Push for SNAP E&amp;T to be included as a priority for Working Connections subsidy child care (currently, TANF is only priority)</li> <li>Address access challenges with the implementation of higher education standards for providers</li> </ul>
<p><b>Changes to Employment and Education Services Policies</b></p>	<p><b>Arkansas</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain federal TANF funding and ideally expand with new state funding for Career Pathways program, which provides important infrastructure for colleges to offer integrated support services to Career Pathways and WSSN students</li> <li>Expand to more colleges Accelerating Opportunity Arkansas programming, which combines postsecondary CTE training for GED students</li> <li>Support efforts to establish a state EITC</li> </ul> <p><b>California</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expand policies related to increasing access to career advising and counseling</li> </ul> <p><b>Virginia</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain or expand funding for Career Pathways programs that integrate services (help students align career goals on front end—purpose before placement)</li> <li>Establish or expand policies related to increasing access to job-readiness training by integrating soft skills into credit and noncredit programs</li> <li>Promote job-quality initiatives for low-skilled/student workers—work with state workforce board to identify which credentials are high-wage and high-demand, and attach funding model to that logic</li> </ul> <p><b>Washington</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to fund and expand I-BEST (including ESL).—increase the provision of work-based learning, like I-BEST at Work</li> <li>Expand or maintain funding for Career Pathways programs (aligned with WIOA efforts)</li> <li>Align and expand access to navigators/career counselors to increase collaboration and decrease silos in serving students</li> <li>Increase education and training time limit under TANF</li> </ul>



### PRINCIPLE THREE:

## Make Your Commitment to Culture Change Public

Culture change is not simply a change in policy that trickles down into practice. It requires ongoing changes to the day-to-day operations of the college and a commitment to cultivating that culture. To that end, it is important that the campus community is aware of those efforts and can visibly see your college's commitment to equity and helping low-income students.

This is particularly important with regard to normalizing the services provided and "de-stigmatizing negative campus perceptions around poverty. In practice, this mean[s] building awareness and acceptance that students' academic success is affected by several nonacademic barriers related to student poverty, and that the college has an important role in addressing students' basic needs and improving their financial stability as a strategy to increase student persistence and credential attainment."

Several WSSN-initiative colleges developed marketing and outreach campaigns to raise campus awareness of their efforts to address the financial challenges faced by many of their students. For example, Clark College in Washington state engaged its marketing staff to orchestrate a campaign to communicate that student success was tied to students' personal and financial stability, and that the college had a role in helping students access additional services and resources, including public benefits. Similarly, North Arkansas branded its effort as 'NorthArk Cares' from the onset of WSSN, displaying banners across the campus and building a dedicated website about the services available to students. These coordinated and strategic efforts helped move campus stakeholders to become more aware and accepting of the basic needs and financial circumstances facing their students.



# ACTIVITY:

## Developing A Potential Marketing And Outreach Campaign

Chapter 7 of the Guidebook will address launching and communicating about your college's effort to implement a more integrated student support services model with expanded services for low-income students. However, as you think through the types of changes that need to occur to accomplish your goals, the exercise of developing an outreach campaign can be useful in articulating goals, identifying changes that need to be made, and gauging the attitudes of the campus community.

### Create Teams of Stakeholders

As this activity is as much about assessing attitudes as creating campus-wide buy-in, it is worthwhile to engage teams of stakeholders that represent the campus community. Create teams that include senior leadership, mid-level management, faculty, staff, and students.

### Brainstorm a Campaign

This is not a formal campaign, but rather a brainstorming session on what a campaign might look like. Encourage teams to be creative, create mock materials, and sketch out ideas that might all be used once a formal campaign is designed.

Key questions for teams to consider:

- |  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| 1. Who are you trying to communicate with in this campaign?                    | 4. What types of materials/ media do you want to employ in your campaign? | 5. How would you roll out the campaign for best reach and sustainability? |
| 2. What images, concepts, and themes will resonate best with your audience(s)? | a. Posters  |   |
| 3. Who are the best spokespeople/representatives for the campaign?             | b. Fliers   |   |
|  | c. Advertorials in campus publications                                    |   |
|  | d. Website materials  |   |
|  | e. Videos (YouTube channel  |   |
|  | f. Social media   |   |
|  | g. Other?   |   |

**Note:** This exercise does not need to happen all at one time. Teams can be formed and given a timeframe for meeting and creating their campaign, and then the larger discussion can occur after teams have completed their work.

### Compare and Assess Campaigns

Once teams have come up with ideas for a campaign, have each team present them, and discuss the relative strengths and weaknesses of each campaign. The goal is to identify themes, concepts, and strategies that appeal to a wide variety of stakeholders and that your team feels will be effective in reaching the campus community.

When we put students at the center, know who they are, listen to and understand them, and think about student needs, we are a step closer to increasing retention and completion. This necessarily requires a greater emphasis on inquiry and assessment.

The college will begin to see a culture shift—a shift that is holistic in approach and assures that we look at the whole student, not just the academic guidelines, and give each one integrated support services. Recognizing students' needs and offering services in ways that reach them when they're most in need is critical. As colleges institute Guided Pathways, IPASS, and other reform efforts, this student-centered approach becomes a value-added component in the redesign of student-success agendas.



## Case Study:

# ALL HANDS ON DECK: Culture Change in Action at North Arkansas College



To help meet the needs of its low-income students, North Arkansas College opened an on-campus food pantry in fall 2015. Stocked in part by a fundraising competition among different college departments, Pete's Pantry (named after the community college's mascot) was an immediate success—so much so that the shelves were stripped nearly bare soon after it opened.

After arranging an emergency shipment, the college's truck-driving program instructor volunteered to haul the supplies early in the morning on his day off, and volunteers from across campus helped restock Pete's Pantry. "With an all-hands-on-deck approach, the shipment was broken down, inventoried, and stocked just in time for the pantry to open," says a college official.

All told, more than \$10,500 in food was distributed to 265 North Arkansas College students and their family members during the 2015-16 school year. When paper goods ran low later in the year, faculty and staff brought more than 400 rolls of toilet paper and paper towels from home to keep the shelves stocked. College officials also helped students who came to the pantry and requested additional services to apply for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits and referred them to other services. The coordinated effort paid off: Students who accessed the pantry in the fall were 12 percent more likely to persist than their counterparts who did not, according to college officials.

"Pete's Pantry was a dream that WSSN made a reality, and we feel it has had, by far, the greatest impact on our students," the college says. "It has also been a tangible motivator to encourage students to remain in college to pursue their goals."

North Arkansas—better known locally as "NorthArk"—adopted the slogan "NorthArk Cares" for its WSSN efforts. Fearful of "grant overload," college leaders focused on integrating services into existing programs, training larger numbers of staff members to provide coaching, and deepening faculty and staff understanding of the challenges high-poverty students face.

Financial- and career-literacy programs were incorporated into NorthArk's freshman orientation success course, and students in that course are also required to attend one-on-one financial and career coaching sessions. The college's advisers and financial-aid officers, admissions and registrar staff, and others have been trained to provide financial and career coaching, as well as help students apply for benefits and coordinate referrals to other services. Starting this fall, faculty also will provide coaching services during assigned faculty adviser sessions.

"Instead of creating a WSSN Center and only serving students in that center/program, NorthArk chose to implement the strategies into multiple college functions and processes to ensure multiple student exposures, strategic longevity, and ultimately culture change," a college official says.

NorthArk leaders also quickly recognized the limitations of existing data systems and upgraded technology to better meet the needs of advising center personnel and coaches. This is helping the transition to a case-management advising and mentoring approach for all students.

"Students seem to thrive and light up when they realize their coach will not judge or make decisions for them, but facilitate them in talking through all sides of the issue, coming to their own conclusions," the official says. "Once students find the excitement of knowing what they are working for, they seem to be more engaged and invested in being successful, one step at a time."

NorthArk officials share stories about how growing numbers of faculty and staff have focused on helping individual students—finding a work-study job in the college library for one student who was living in a campground near campus; helping another appeal denial of SNAP

benefits; and giving one student with aspirations of earning a PhD in mathematics his first suit as part of a program that provides students with professional attire for job interviews.

"He looked at the staff member and said, 'I could get married in this suit.' "

NorthArk points to the cumulative impact of individual successes like these over time. "We find that our students would much rather break their direction down in small steps, celebrating little victories along the way."

## Food Pantries as an Emerging Effort for Equity

### Indicators of Culture Change and Key Access Points for Integrated Services

At colleges participating in the WSSN initiative, a clear sign of culture change was the sprouting of food pantries. As an evaluation of the WSSN noted, they were a reflection of campus stakeholders' enhanced understanding of student poverty and the college's responsibility to provide culturally responsive services in response. "This was most notable when administrators, faculty, and staff discussed campus food pantries as a visible signal, close to peoples' hearts, influential in engaging the entire campus, and signifying the college's commitment to meeting students' basic needs," wrote the evaluation's authors.

Establishing a food pantry can have a significant impact on the lives of students and families in need. Pantries also provide key entry points for colleges to engage students and determine what other challenges they are facing so colleges can integrate several core services into a logical sequence or bundle of services and help students persist, complete, and achieve financial stability.

Because food pantries became such a widespread and valuable strategy for WSSN-initiative colleges, ATD produced the report *Addressing Food Insecurity on Campus: Establishing Food Pantries at Community Colleges and Connecting Students to Wider Services*. It aims to help other colleges determine whether a food pantry is a good option and, if so, how to implement one. The following summary includes highlights from the report.

The complete report can be downloaded at [http://achievingthedream.org/sites/default/files/body-files/atd-2017-foodinsecurityrpt\\_website\\_1.pdf](http://achievingthedream.org/sites/default/files/body-files/atd-2017-foodinsecurityrpt_website_1.pdf).



## ADDRESSING THE IMMEDIATE NEED:

# Starting a Food Pantry on Your Campus

Not having enough food is an immediate need that can often signal a much larger and more complex set of insecurities, such as lack of adequate housing, homelessness, or difficulty finding child care or transportation. Any one of these factors can undermine or torpedo a student's ability to persist and complete a certificate or degree. Data further suggests that when students feel compromised by lack of access to basic needs, this influences the ability to focus on school.

Starting a food pantry to help address student hunger might seem like an overwhelming undertaking. However, 13 of the colleges in the WSSN initiative have found it to be quite manageable—and they report that the pantries are extremely valuable for students and families. The pantries offer students and their families access to a variety of nonperishable and, in some cases, perishable food items and basic necessities, and they help students apply for SNAP and other benefits to address short-term needs. The following practices for getting a food pantry started are based on experiences at these colleges and are designed to provide a roadmap for others.

Needs Assessment	Project Design and Development	Marketing and Outreach	Assessment and Feedback
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Hold student-centered focus groups to hear directly from students about their needs.</li><li>2. Discuss the issue of food insecurity with faculty and staff.</li><li>3. Reach out to other colleges with food pantries.</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Find lead people to champion this work.</li><li>2. Map the needed resources.</li><li>3. Collect data, and develop a written plan and presentation.</li><li>4. Reach out to community partners.</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Launch the food pantry with a campus-wide kickoff event.</li><li>2. Leverage student government and other student groups to partner in spearheading the effort.</li><li>3. Identify students who are most in need.</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Work with IT and Institutional Research.</li><li>2. Hold follow-up focus groups with students as well as with faculty and staff.</li></ol>

## KEY CONSIDERATIONS WHEN STARTING A FOOD PANTRY

In the WSSN initiative, ATD generally has found that smaller, usually rural colleges have a more straightforward route to setting up a food pantry than larger colleges and districts with multiple campuses, which often take longer to get approval and launch these initiatives. In rural colleges, typically, an area or department sees the need, gets approval from the president, and a food pantry is born. At larger and multi-campus institutions, the process can involve academic research and presentations to departments, administrations, and boards to gain buy-in and approval. This all can take time.

That said, college officials, regardless of the size of their institutions, typically need to address three key considerations: space, staffing, and sustainability.

## IS A FOOD PANTRY NEEDED?

Determining whether to open a food pantry can often rest on several unscientific, but important, indicators.

- Faculty and staff keep food in their desks for students.
- Faculty and staff ask for information about local food banks.
- Students are Pell-grant eligible.
- Students ask for emergency loans and assistance.
- Students say they are hungry.



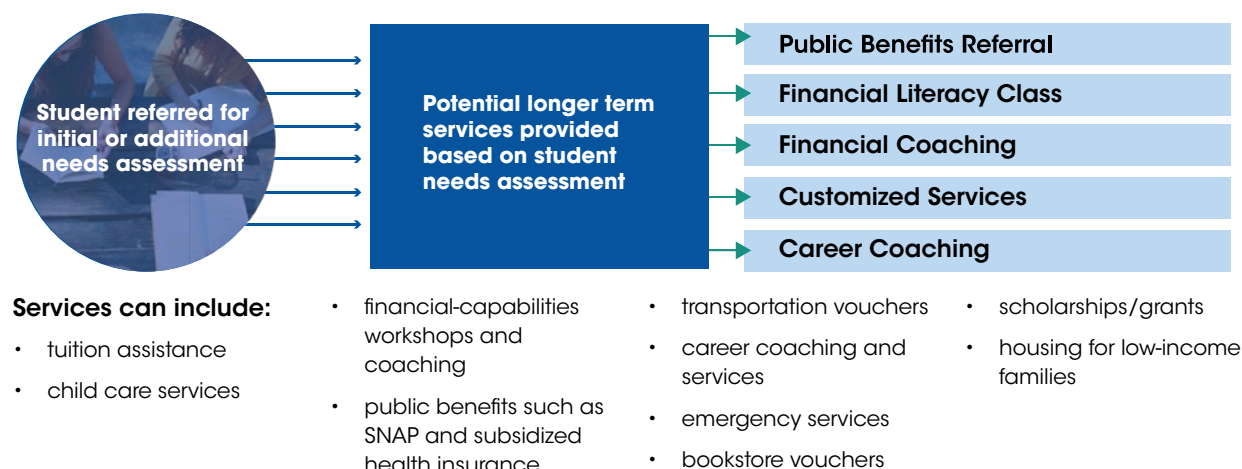
## ADDRESSING LONGER-TERM NEEDS:

# Food Pantries as Entry Points to Additional Services

Establishing a food pantry can have a significant impact on the lives of students and families in need. They also provide key entry points for colleges to engage students and determine what other challenges they are facing so colleges can offer additional services to help students persist, complete, and achieve financial stability. For example, several WSSN colleges are using their food pantries as connection points for more intensive referrals to financial-health workshops and coaching, putting students on a more solid footing and increasing the potential for long-term persistence and success.

Colleges find that a pantry visit can be a stepping-off point to talk with students about other available services that offer long-term support and greater financial stability. Making the visit a successful entry point to more services may involve weaving several services together into a bundle. This practice involves selecting and integrating specific services that help students move efficiently along a pathway to college success.

### From Short-Term Need to Long Term Support



The time students have to spend on campus is a final key consideration when determining the services that will meet their short-term and/or long-term needs. The last thing a student feeling overwhelmed by daily circumstances needs is to feel required to add to an already full plate. WSSN colleges are overcoming this challenge by integrating the more high-touch services into existing programs so students see this as a natural part of a college-completion plan rather than an add-on. By creating innovative ways to meet their students' needs and staying within resource constraints, colleges are doing more with less. Integrating financial education with bundled services such as a food pantry, transportation vouchers, and child care subsidies enhances a student's ability to succeed, not only while in college, but also into the future.

## CONCLUSION

Colleges have found that addressing food insecurity is often just one piece of the puzzle in helping students achieve sustained financial health. A successful long-term strategy requires identifying students in need, providing immediate assistance, and offering long-term financial education and coaching. These are the integral components of a solid persistence and completion plan. Changing the institutional culture to support students in a holistic way takes time, effort, focus, and a vision. But students with food and other insecurities who are enrolling and attending college deserve every opportunity to succeed that community colleges can afford them.



A full-page photograph of a young woman with long brown hair, smiling broadly and wearing a black graduation cap. She is wearing a red dress with large white and pink floral patterns and a black belt. Her right hand is raised in a gesture. The background is a blurred green forest. The text "Chapter 5" is centered over the image.

## Chapter 5



## CHAPTER FIVE:

# Using Data To Strengthen Your Integrated Student Support Services Work

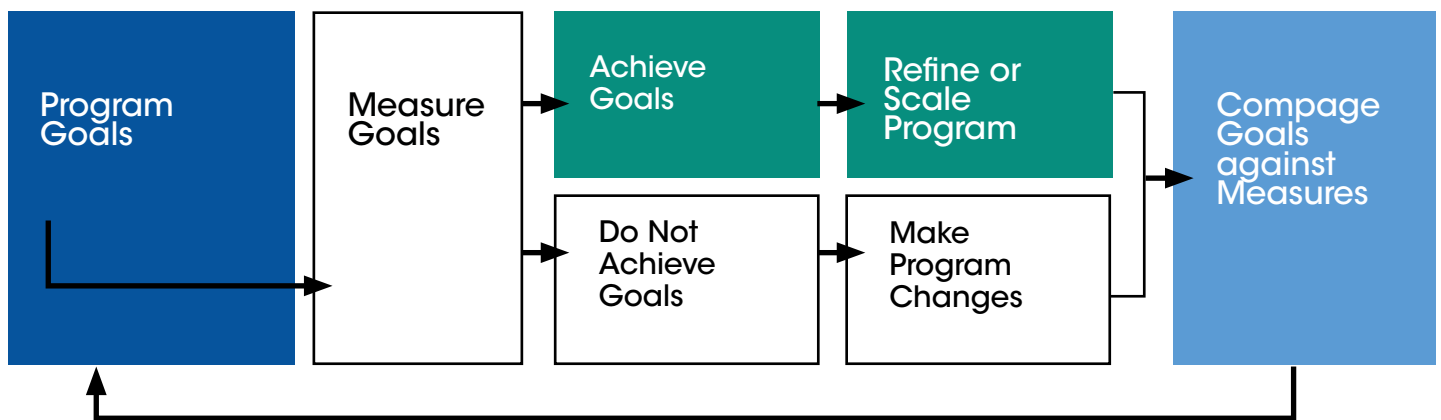
The main reason to embrace an expanded and integrated student support services approach is to help more low-income and other underserved students achieve their academic goals and improve their financial health.

But clearly this approach can benefit a wider set of students and the college as a whole as well. The data system you use to assess how well your college is achieving this overarching objective can offer a trove of insights about student-success efforts. Designing a useful and reliable system requires:

- **Setting clear outcome goals.**
- **Creating a mechanism to collect and analyze data that will tell you whether the goals are being met.**
- **Using a continuous feedback loop to identify which programs and services are successfully helping students reach their goals and which are not.**



# Continuous Program Improvement Cycle



The continuous program improvement cycle diagrammed above is dependent upon a comprehensive data-collection and tracking system. It is important to think this through thoroughly at the beginning of your college's efforts to build or strengthen integrated student services. You may need to make adjustments to improve the system, but solid design upfront will make the work of collecting and tracking data much more efficient from the start.

The design principles in this chapter focus on the strategies for creating a valuable data system to track integrated support services. Colleges already have student data systems in place, and those systems can vary significantly, from basic use of spreadsheets to more sophisticated course-management software and database-management programs (or some mix of all three). Consequently, this chapter will not focus on the technical aspects of various programs, but rather on the broad processes and components to be considered when modifying your particular system to capture the data necessary for assessing the effectiveness of your integrated student support efforts.

The principles included here rely heavily on the WSSN Data Service Guide developed by MDRC and Mathematica Policy Research to help the WSSN-initiative colleges develop their data systems. See the end of this chapter for information on resources available to assist ATD-network colleges with this effort and data management in general.

# The Design Principles

## PRINCIPLE ONE:

### Break Down the Basic Components of the Program to Be Tracked and Used to Assess Program Effectiveness

An important first step in designing your system is to create an inventory of program components intended to lead to greater student success, and indicate whom they are for, and where and how you will offer them.

**To accomplish this task, you will want to identify:**

**Program Participants:** Who will be targeted for integrated services? This could range from your college's definition of low-income students (i.e., Pell-eligible, state-grant-eligible, etc.) to a wider group to, in some cases, all the students at the college. This process is important for determining whether any data components will be needed to identify program participants in the data system.

**Services Provided:** What services does the college intend to provide to the target audience? These would focus on the three pillars of services identified in the WSSN approach (as well as others) and would include services already provided as well as new ones to be implemented. This component is important for identifying what discrete services will need to be tracked within the system.

**Service-Delivery Mode:** Where and how will services be provided? This would include identifying low-touch delivery modes such as student-success courses, workshops, orientations, etc. and high-touch delivery modes such as one-on-one advising or coaching. This component will be important in determining who will be responsible for inputting service-delivery information in the system.

**Program Goals:** What are the outcomes that will represent success? These will be particular to your college but could range from the number of students receiving certain services or accessing certain benefits to larger outcome goals such as completing a percentage of coursework or actual credential attainment. You will likely have a set of outcomes that includes short- and long-term goals. This component is important in determining how you will integrate data points to see the relationship between services and outcomes.



The following assessment tool can be used to begin developing your college's inventory.

## INTEGRATED STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES DATA INVENTORY

### Students Served:

Identify the target group of students to receive services and how you can or will identify these students within your system (e.g. low-income students who are receiving Pell grants).

### Services Provided and Primary Provider:

Identify all services your college intends to make available to the target population of students and by whom or where that service is primarily provided—e.g. academic adviser, financial coach, faculty member in a course (identify course), external partner (name of partner), etc.

Education & Career Services	Y/N	Primary Provider
Academic Advising		
Career Coaching		
Job Training		
Job Placement		
Other:		

Income & Work Supports	Y/N	Primary Provider
Financial Aid Planning/FAFSA Assistance		
Public Benefits Advising		
Transportation Assistance		
Food Pantry Access		
Child Care Assistance		
Housing Assistance		
Tax Preparation/Assistance		
Other:		

Financial Services & Asset Building	Y/N	Primary Provider
Financial Literacy Education		
Financial Coaching		
Financial Product Assistance		
Other:		

**Program Goals:** Identify each of the target goals that your college hopes to achieve with regard to service delivery, students reached, and student outcomes.

## **PRINCIPLE TWO:**

# **Structure Your Data System to Use the Most Discrete Data Fields Possible**

To make the data in your tracking system efficient and usable, build a structure with the most discrete data elements possible. WSSN-initiative colleges found that if they did not create consistent and discrete data elements to be entered into the system, they were left with inconsistent information on services that was not useful for analysis and reporting beyond information about a particular student. Data systems need to be able to tell users key information about individual students so that services can be customized, sequenced and assessed for that student, but they must also be constructed so the college can make best use of the data to evaluate what is working and what is not.

**Colleges should consider the following as you develop your data system's structure.**

### **1. Ensure that you have a unique student identifier that can be attached to each student's interaction with a service or engagement.**

Most colleges already have such a unique identifier, but it is critical to ensure that the system tracking integrated student services is using this identifier to connect service tracking with other college databases.

### **2. Create discrete data elements for each type of service provided to ensure consistency.**

To fully understand what services are reaching students and their impact, it is key to ensure that those services are coded the same way in the system. Colleges should break down services into the most discrete activity possible with regard to both low- and high-touch services. For example:

- a.** A college may require all students in the target population to enroll in a first-year student-success course that includes various types of financial education within the course—a low-touch service. Those might, for instance, include: debt-management education, how to create a personal budget, or how to establish a good credit score. Rather than just creating a field that indicates a student enrolled in such a class, it is more useful to identify the discrete lessons/activities in the course and record when those are completed.
- b.** Or a college may require that students complete a multi-step intake process that involves interactions with more than one staff member. That might involve completing a general intake form, completing financial-aid information, and being assessed for public benefits. Again, the data system should indicate each service activity rather than generically recording that a student completed the intake process.

### 3. Create discrete codes for service providers so that you know who provided the service activity by position.

Most data systems will record the person who entered a data record, but it is also helpful to know the position of the person providing the service whether they be a full- or part-time faculty member, an academic adviser, a financial coach, an external partner, etc. Having a code for each position will allow the college to identify where most services are being provided and by whom.

### 4. Distinguish between a service “encounter” and a service “activity” to further distinguish discrete activities.

Start with how and where a student enters the services system—through a referral or the first access point. Each encounter a college representative has with a student should be identified with a date. However, that staff person may provide two or more types of services to a student. Those should be distinguished as separate activities with dates associated. This will help ensure that the college doesn’t lose track of different services provided in a single encounter.

Below is an example of what data records might look like using these discrete data elements.

Student ID	Encounter Date	Service Provider ID	Service Activity	Activity Start Date	Activity End Date
12345	8/4/2015	A-1	Academic tutoring	8/4/2015	8/4/2015
98765	8/4/2015	B-7	Academic tutoring	8/4/2015	8/4/2015
12345	8/4/2015	A-1	Debt management	12/5/2015	12/15/2015

The bottom line in terms of your data-system design will be obvious to anyone who has worked with databases. Having hundreds of entries that are narrative based and describe different encounters and activities in myriad ways does not provide the college with data that will help evaluate and design services that will most benefit your students. This is particularly true with the integrated student support approach, which is based on the assumption that the entire college (or at least a large percentage of it) is involved in the effort. As the saying goes, many hands can make light work, as long as the data system is well-designed—otherwise, many hands just make a mess.

### PRINCIPLE THREE:

## Engage a Wide Set of Users in the Design of Your Data System

Too often, organizations, including colleges, think of data-system development as the work of IT professionals and management. However, a data system designed without the input and feedback from those who will use it and be most responsible for inputting data and analyzing the information to better serve students will not be as efficient and useful as it could be. Furthermore, early engagement will be important for identifying key data elements to include, using language that makes sense to users, understanding how they want to interact with the system and what uses they can imagine for it.



# **ACTIVITY:**

## **Create An Integrated Student Services Data System Advisory Committee**

### **Step One: Establish the Committee**

Identify a wide set of constituents that includes users and those who will design and maintain the data system. This will likely be IT staff, senior and mid-level managers, faculty (full- and part-time), and student services staff who will be working with students on many of the included services. If you have key external partners who will be involved in service delivery and data sharing, they also should be included.

### **Step Two: Planning and Development**

Hold meetings to outline the task of the committee and engage in discussions using the Integrated Student Support Services Data Inventory to determine who is being served, what services are going to be provided, who will provide services, and what the goals of your program are. Once these initial meetings are complete, the design team should put together a plan for system development and an outline of key data elements for review.

### **Step Three: Design the Data System**

Hold meetings to work through the design, the elements to be collected and tracked, and the types of reports that can be generated to ensure that the system will meet the needs of the college.

### **Step Four: Test for Usability**

Once the system is designed, take ample time to test it and ensure that users are comfortable with the interface, and identify any problems that users are having with data collection, entry, and use.

### **Step Five: Design Ongoing Evaluation, and Seek Feedback**

Once the system has been tested and implemented, hold regular meetings of the committee to evaluate its effectiveness, troubleshoot problems, and make adjustments to the system.

Community colleges make choices every day that may change the course of a student's life. When decision-making is informed by data, efficiency and focus are heightened, and that yields alignment in purpose.



## Additional Resources

ATD has multiple resources to help colleges with data management that you can use as you design a system to track integrated student services and for using data to increase your institution's capacity and efficiency in general.

### Working Students Success Network: A Guide for Tracking Service Participation

The Data Service Guide that much of this chapter has been based on was prepared by MDRC and Mathematica Policy Research to highlight best practices to track, store, and report data on students' participation in integrated student support services. This guide was a central guiding document for WSSN initiative colleges regarding data collection and service tracking and is available to all ATD network colleges through ATD Connect.

### Return on Investment Calculator

Created by the National Center of Inquiry and Improvement, the Return on Investment Calculator helps colleges use a "cost-effectiveness" approach to determine the value of a program to a college. The calculator helps colleges determine the cost and return calculations for implementing the integrated student services approach. ATD network colleges can access the ROI Calculator on ATD Connect.

### Data Discovery

Data Discovery is a comprehensive guide to student success through the lens of data, customized for ATD network institutions. The digital guide is media-rich and interactive and includes embedded resources such as webinars, data templates and resources and is a living publication that will be updated annually. Data Discovery includes the foundational data that all colleges should be collecting and analyzing to cultivate a culture of evidence to support student success.



## RESOURCE:

**An overview of Data Discovery is available on the ATD website here:**

<http://achievingthedream.org/resource/14989/data-discovery> ATD Network colleges have access to the complete tool through ATD Connect.

### Challenge

Designing and maintaining data systems that are accessible and widely used by administrators, faculty, and staff to improve student persistence is time-consuming and requires a college-wide commitment to ensure success.

### Opportunity

Engaging the whole college in a concerted effort to use data as more than a tracking and reporting tool, but rather as a guide to improving the success of low-income and other underserved students.

### Key Takeaway

Creating successful reform efforts at any community college requires efficient and effective data systems that can provide both student information for individual help and college-wide outcomes data to determine which services and activities are having the greatest impact on student success overall.

A photograph of a modern lecture hall with tiered seating. Several students are seated at their desks, which are equipped with integrated reading lights. In the foreground, a young woman with dark curly hair is looking down. Behind her, a young man in a red sweater is looking forward. The text 'Chapter 6' is overlaid in the center of the image.

## Chapter 6

## CHAPTER SIX:

# Principles for Developing and Maintaining External Partnerships

How do colleges with finite resources offer new or expanded services to put together a broad spectrum of integrated student supports? Every college participating in the WSSN initiative answered that question by turning to external partnerships as a vital part of their student-success strategies.

Community colleges are among many entities committed to tackling social problems, enhancing economic opportunity, and improving quality of life for residents. Nearly every college is in a town, city, or county that is home to service-providing, public and private, faith-based, charitable, taxpayer- or donor-supported, or philanthropically funded organizations. Many of their services align with the mission of our colleges, and some partnerships already exist, especially in areas related to workforce development, in which the needs and opportunities for both sides of the partnership are clear. Building an integrated student support services approach that goes beyond the typical academic supports requires organizing and leveraging new partnerships to broaden the scope of services and boost results for all parties involved.

Traditionally, colleges have not seen a need to step into service areas that are the bailiwick of social or community agencies. However, with the recognition that increasing numbers of our students face serious and competing work, family, and school demands that directly affect their ability to focus on their studies, working in partnerships allows colleges to

meet students where they are and shape a student-centered education experience that leads to success and completion.

Partnering with community service providers is a win-win proposition. It can bring economies of scale, increased capacity, and complementary services to fill the gaps in core (Education and Career) service areas and foster innovations in new areas, such as WSSN's focuses on Income and Work Supports and Financial Education and Asset Building.

This chapter discusses the importance of identifying organizations to partner with based on interests and mission, framing written work agreements, clarifying expectations and goals on both sides, countering internal resistance, and maintaining ongoing engagement to grow and pivot when circumstances change.

To begin work on this aspect of expanding and integrating your student support services, it will be helpful to first assess your current and potential partnerships as well as your processes for nurturing these relationships. If your college does not have active partners on campus, the assessment can assist you in thinking through key questions for developing such partnerships.

## External Partnerships Assessment

Identify the organizations your college works with or has the potential to work with by type.	Current Partners	Potential Partners	Service or Potential Service Provided
Community-based organizations			
Faith-based organizations			
State agencies (public benefits, workforce development, etc.)			
Business-related groups			
Financial institutions			
Other			

**Does your college have regular meetings with partners to assess working relationships and mutual benefits of the partnership?**

- ☐ Yes, regular meetings that include diverse representation from the college  
☐ Yes, regular meetings but only with senior leadership  
☐ No regular meetings with partners  
☐ No current partners

**Does your college promote your partnerships on campus so that students are aware of the work your partners do and the services or benefits your partners provide students?**

☐ Yes ☐ No

**Does your college provide materials and resources to your partners that they can share with their constituents and other organizations they work with outside of the college?**

☐ Yes ☐ No

**Does your college have agreements with your partners to share data about services provided to students?**

☐ Yes ☐ No

# The Design Principles

## PRINCIPLE ONE:

### Identify and Leverage Partnerships to Bolster Capacity

To be able to work together, potential partners should have similar goals and desired outcomes aligned with the college’s core services. Just as these partnerships can make essential integrated support services available to current students, expanding the providers’ reach, they can extend the college’s ability to reach potential students whom it has struggled to find and connect with.

**Leveraging partnership opportunities allows the college to:**

**Provide better, holistic services for students.**

Partnerships provide economies of scale and service innovations.

**Stretch limited budgets.** Partner networks open additional opportunities for funding.

**Reduce and eliminate process redundancies.** With good communication between partners comes the opportunity to continuously fine-tune process improvements.

**Strengthen college-community relations.** Working with community organizations can make the college a more welcoming place. This strategy opens up the collaborative mindset and welcomes everyone to the table.

**Improve persistence and completion.** Greater student success is the Holy Grail for colleges, communities, and local economic development.

EXAMPLES OF POSSIBLE EXTERNAL PARTNERS AND PARTNER SERVICES	
Partners	Services
<p><b>National Organizations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• United Way Worldwide or local United Ways</li><li>• Goodwill Industries</li><li>• Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC)</li><li>• Foundations with a focus on identified communities</li><li>• Achieving the Dream</li><li>• State/Local Organizations</li><li>• State or regional Workforce Investment Boards or WIOA agencies</li><li>• State Department of Human Services (or similar agency)</li><li>• County government agencies</li><li>• City government agencies</li><li>• Community-based organizations</li><li>• Financial institutions</li><li>• Faith-based organizations (AMOS, churches, etc.)</li></ul>	<p><b>Provide assistance with:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Job search</li><li>• Resumes</li><li>• Job-interview preparation</li><li>• Job placement</li><li>• Short-term certificate training</li><li>• Employment plans</li><li>• Financial classes</li><li>• Financial coaching</li><li>• Emergency loans</li><li>• Benefits screening</li><li>• Clothing closets</li><li>• Food pantries</li><li>• Transportation assistance</li><li>• Child care</li><li>• Mentoring</li><li>• Resource fairs</li></ul>





# How Three Colleges Boosted Community Relationships

**Highline College (WA)** has developed a strong partnership with the United Way of King County. In the fall of 2016, United Way began piloting the Housing Ready Crisis Resilient program to test new strategies to reduce homelessness by increasing low-income county residents' access to emergency financial assistance, income supports, and financial products. United Way saw Highline College as an ideal campus for the pilot "because of the work the college has already done to address homelessness and poverty through the Working Students Success Network, Welcome Back Center, and other campus-wide efforts." This partnership addresses services across the three pillars, including:

- Direct enrollment in or referrals to programs related to housing assistance, food assistance, transportation, FAFSA, and tax preparation.
- Education and awareness about the Working Students Success Center, scholarships, financial aid, child care, and other programs.
- Workshops on financial empowerment and asset building.
- Direct financial coaching for students.
- Hosting events on campus.
- Free tax-preparation services for college students and eligible faculty.
- Commitment to work with students and school leaders to design effective interventions.

**Danville Community College (VA)** launched an innovative partnership with Virginia 529, a state program to promote college savings. DCC's Greater Opportunities for Achievement in Learning (GOAL) Center is partnering with Virginia 529 to kick off a new "Two Generation" effort. Through this partnership, students can attend financial workshops and receive financial advice on college savings, not only for themselves, but also for their children.

**College of the Ouachitas (AR)** has developed a robust partnership with the Central Arkansas Development Council, a private nonprofit community-action program that provides a wide array of resources. One is the Individual Development Account program, designed to help people become more financially stable. Council representatives visit the campus to conduct workshops on the program and are available to follow up with students and help them develop a better understanding of financial management and asset building.

Of course, external partnerships will be different at each college and defined by its service area. Some of the larger, national partners may not have bases in rural areas or smaller cities. If not, you may have to look for similar community-based organizations or consider working with government agencies.

External partnerships can grow out of various formal and informal connections. For example, you can survey faculty and staff to find out where relationships already exist, such as with industry or social-service agencies, and look for ways to expand or strengthen them. Or establish reciprocal relations with your local workforce development center by offering on-site help with resume and job preparation in exchange for updates on local labor trends useful to your career center. You can invite community-based organizations, public agencies, and private groups to participate in an annual resource fair on campus. Your students can see what services are available, the agencies can heighten their profiles, and the college can scout potential partnerships.

Colleges using the WSSN approach relied upon a small set of critical partners and a second tier of less formal relationships. Engaging with partners who share social-service missions brings diversity and ingenious solutions to intractable problems.

You need to thoroughly understand your students' needs at all times and the gaps in your college's ability to meet them to ensure you find the right partners to serve your students. As new needs arise, you may have to find and cultivate new partnerships to ensure services are timely and appropriate.



## PRINCIPLE TWO:

# Ground Partnerships in Clear Expectations

Just as in a marriage, how partners communicate can make or break the relationship. To start on the right foot, colleges must lay out clear expectations for the partnership in the planning stage—expecting the partner to do the same and always keeping in mind that only a mutually beneficial partnership will keep both parties engaged.

The way to ensure partners are on the same page is through a written agreement, such as a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). This will clarify, among other things:

- The purpose and goals of the partnership.
- How that purpose is linked to the partners' missions.
- Expectations and the roles and responsibilities of each partner.
- Communication and decision-making protocols, both day-to-day and long-range.
- How resources will be shared.
- Who is responsible for contributions.
- Data to be collected and reported on both sides.
- How partners will adjust should either be barred from agreeing to the MOU.
- Acknowledgment of different cultures, calendars, and goals.
- Buy-in from the partners' top leadership before entering into the agreement.

The MOU will help establish the processes for how the college will work with the partner and ensure that students are kept at the center of the partnership. Agreements lay a foundation of trust, which is essential for working through any glitches that may occur. For example, challenges that might arise include:

- Resistance to change. Some on the college side may feel that bringing nonacademic services to students is not a necessary college function; on the other side, a community-based organization may feel the partnership threatens its budget or role. Staff on both sides may worry about increased workload and demands on their limited time.
- Database problems. Colleges and their community-based partners may have outdated or incompatible database systems. In fact, this is likely because these entities make do with scant resources. This could limit the partnership's ability to track provided data services.
- Culture clashes. The missions or work styles of the partners may collide. A well-articulated agreement on common goals and outcomes is the best guarantee of a mutually beneficial partnership.



**Partnerships take time to develop. They require patience, flexibility, creativity, and a willingness to chart new territory. When partners stay highly engaged, the relationships that evolve create essential and sometimes unexpected supports to address students' basic needs and improve their financial stability. The key as you develop partnerships is to:**

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**Make them win-win.** Both sides must feel satisfaction in truly making a difference in people's lives for a partnership to flourish.

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**Be flexible.** Do not have a rigid mindset. Both sides must remain patient and open to change as the service delivery evolves.

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**Keep up with your students' needs and your college's limitations.** As new needs arise, you have to develop new partnerships to respond.

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**Prioritize data-sharing arrangements.** Partners must track the student services they deliver to show improved outcomes for students and the growth the partnership made possible.

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**Close the achievement gap.** Partnerships support a holistic approach to serving students and their families so students achieve academic success and financial stability.

## Leveraging a Partnership for Multiple Effects



When a student at Cañada College (CA) ran into a problem attempting to cash his financial aid check, he reached out to a financial coach on campus for help. The coach used her relationship with a local credit union to put the student in touch with the right person to help. More than just cashing the check, the credit union was able to set up the student with free checking and savings accounts, consolidate his debt from a previous car loan, and lower his interest rate. While the student began with only one request, his savvy financial coach leveraged a college partnership to help him build a financial infrastructure to lead to more success over time.

### Challenge

With little to no new resources, expand and integrate services to holistically meet the academic and nonacademic needs of low-income students, improve their financial stability, and increase the odds of their completing degrees.

### Opportunity

Creatively engage external partners in relationships of mutual benefit to bring economies of scale, increase capacity, and innovate in the delivery of services to low-income students and community members.

### Key Takeaway

Partnerships must be a win-win for all parties, have buy-in from executive leaders, and be flexible, with clearly articulated goals, roles, and responsibilities spelled out in a memorandum of understanding.

## Chapter 7





## CHAPTER SEVEN:

# Principles for Designing a Successful Outreach and Marketing Strategy

It's not enough for a college to offer services; it must make sure that students know what's available, how to gain access, and why the college believes these services are important to each student's success. This involves reaching out to students on campus and marketing the college's approach and commitment to serving low-income students to the outside community.

Marketing is more than just raising awareness of available services; it's telling the story in a way that will make the value of this work clear to everyone on campus. A compelling message will help all stakeholders understand that the integrated student support approach is essential to student success and is worth adopting and supporting.

To ensure the necessary participation in this approach, the planning team will need to clearly articulate the rationale, expectations, commitment, and process for the service delivery. You will need to figure out what you want to say, whom you are saying it to, the best way to say it, and then how to share it.

**Reminder:** If your team completed the "Developing a Potential Marketing and Outreach Campaign" in Chapter Four, use that work as a basis for developing your official marketing and outreach campaign in this chapter.

This chapter will briefly outline guiding principles for developing your outreach strategy and then provide a guide for launching your effort to help more low-income students at your college succeed through expanded services and an integrated student support services approach.

### THE DESIGN PRINCIPLES

The following four principles should inform all your decisions as you create your marketing and outreach strategy.

# The Design Principles

## PRINCIPLE ONE:

### Identify Your Goals

If you are not clear on what the goals of your effort are, it will be impossible to articulate them to your audiences. You will most likely have more than one goal for your campaign—some focused on big-picture outcomes and others on practical outcomes, but you should also limit these to ensure that your communications are focused and not overly complicated. Goals could include:

1. Creating a better understanding of the financial challenges that many students on campus face and de-stigmatizing poverty and the related challenges it creates for low-income students.
2. Normalizing the use of a wider set of public services as a common strategy that students can use to gain better financial stability as a foundation for academic success.
3. Getting more students to access that wider set of services.
4. Building a greater sense of community on campus and creating a culture in which all members of the campus community are committed to increased services for low-income students.
5. Helping more low-income students persist and achieve their academic and financial goals in the most efficient way possible.
6. Driving local economic development by preparing more students for work or ongoing education and creating better financial health in general in your community.

These are just examples. Your college will certainly have others or different versions of those listed above. Regardless, it is critical that you establish what these goals are as a driver of what you want to communicate to your various audiences and how you want to frame your message.

## PRINCIPLE TWO:

# Identify Your Audiences

You will certainly have different audiences that you are trying to engage with your marketing and outreach efforts. The core messages that you develop should be consistent across all audiences, but also customized to speak to their different interests.

Possible audiences you will want to reach include:

- Students
- Faculty and staff
- External partners such as community and state agencies
- Policymakers
- Others

Below are potential messages to consider for each audience.

Audience	Key Messages: What They Need to Know
Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The college is not just interested in helping our students succeed academically, but also in connecting their educational goals to their career goals.</li> <li>• We are committed to working with students to find income and work supports to tide them over when life gets complicated.</li> <li>• We also want to link students to financial services and asset building for a solid and stable financial future.</li> </ul>
Faculty and Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The work of faculty and staff—to teach, counsel, advise, and fully support our students—remains at the center of our endeavors.</li> <li>• This new effort is an opportunity to build on our successes by helping students see the connection between academic success and financial stability during and after college.</li> <li>• Your knowledge and expertise will be central to our working with students to identify their needs—academic and financial—and providing them with required supports.</li> <li>• We are always asked to do more with less, which is why we are reaching out to the community to pool more resources to help our students.</li> </ul>
State and Community Agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our new effort is about helping students succeed academically and become financially stable, which will benefit our community and our state.</li> <li>• Through coordination with the college, this effort will help community and state agencies more easily reach students who need their help.</li> <li>• Your partnership is critical to the success of this initiative.</li> <li>• The college is committed to working with our community and state partners to help students create a more vibrant community and improve our economy.</li> </ul>
Policymakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The college is engaged in an effort to make better use of existing resources at the college and in community and state agencies to help more students succeed academically and achieve financial stability.</li> <li>• The intent in using an integrated student support services approach is to help more students succeed, which will have a direct impact on the state's socioeconomic well-being.</li> <li>• State policymakers are critical to the college's efforts, by making it easier to knit together public resources across agencies and scale up comprehensive service delivery and by setting policies that make helping community colleges expand and integrate services a key state priority.</li> </ul>

## PRINCIPLE THREE:

### Frame Your Message(s)

Given an understanding of your audiences, you will have to decide what you want to tell them and how to frame different messages for each. Put yourself in the shoes of a student unfamiliar with the workings of your college, a staff member who may wish he or she could do more for students, a faculty member who won't naturally see a role for herself in "student services," or a community partner who hasn't made the connection between what they do and what your college does. Messages need to speak directly to these audiences, connect with their lived experiences, and show how the approach the college is working to implement has value to them, the college, and the community.



# ACTIVITY:

## Creating An Elevator Pitch

This is a useful activity in honing your core messages. An elevator pitch is “a short summary used to quickly and simply define a process, product, service, organization, or event and its value proposition.” (Wikipedia) Developing this pitch will help you focus on the key components of your message. You can create a pitch for each key audience you want to reach. The key is to imagine that you have a very short time period (a ride in an elevator) to convey your message.

### Building Your Pitch

The typical pitch includes the following components:

1. Problem Statement
2. Value Statement (The big idea)
3. How We Do It
4. Proof Points (Evidence of success)
5. Examples/Customer Stories
6. Engaging Question

**Step 1:** In a sentence, describe the problem your audience faces and would like to solve.

**Step 2:** Describe in a few short sentences the most significant value of the college’s new effort and what it changes.

**Step 3:** Write a few sentences describing how your new approach works, making clear what it accomplishes.

**Step 4:** Provide evidence, or proof points, of the benefits.

**Step 5:** Tell a brief story to illustrate the benefit.

**Step 6:** State what you want to happen next.

**Step 7:** Create an attention-getting hook.

**Step 8:** Put it all together, beginning with the hook.

**Step 9:** Review, tighten, rework, read aloud.

Shaping and Sharpening Your Pitch	Shaping Your Pitch	Sharpening Your Pitch
As you work on your pitch, keep in mind the following to make sure it is as focused as possible.	Clarify the problem. Use numbers wisely. Make it about people. Make it relevant. Anticipate the obvious objections. Use simple language. Be truthful.	Remove hot air. Match against models. Try different hooks. Test through speech. Simplify. Practice. Make it natural and your own.



## PRINCIPLE FOUR:

# Identify Your Communicators and Communication Vehicles

Just as different audiences may need customized messages, they will respond better to different communication vehicles, including the messenger. Students, for instance, may be more open to messaging over social media or hearing about services from their peers. Policymakers or community leaders may be more open to traditional written communication from campus leaders. The bottom line is that your outreach will more than likely need to take advantage of different vehicles and different spokespeople targeted to specific audiences.

### ACTIVITY: MATCHING AUDIENCE, VEHICLE, AND MESSENGER

Create a table that identifies audiences you want to reach, what communication vehicles you think will be most strategic for each audience, and who are the best messengers. Try to identify as many discrete audiences as possible.

Audience	Communication Vehicle	Messenger(s)

## LAUNCHING YOUR INTEGRATED STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES CAMPAIGN

The official launch of a college's effort to strengthen student experiences and outcomes by expanding and integrating student support services, particularly for low-income students, is an opportunity to raise awareness about efforts on and off campus to help students gain the strong financial foothold they need to help themselves and their families succeed. The success of your effort is dependent upon both input and buy-in from a variety of stakeholders—students, faculty and staff, state and local community agency leaders, and state policymakers. The launch is an opportunity to engage many of those stakeholders, spark their interest in the changes the college is implementing, and demonstrate why their participation or support is critical to the project.

# Key Messages and Message Tools

Campuses can use a broad range of materials to engage stakeholders. Available tools include:

- Messages tailored for different stakeholder groups
- An initiative brochure
- A Q&A or fact sheet about services and changes on campus
- A PowerPoint presentation about services and changes on campus
- Talking points for addressing policymakers, faculty and staff, students, and others
- Social media strategies for outreach

All of these should be customizable at the campus level to build your efforts around the already existing programs and activities at the college, but they also will be centered on key messages for each constituency.

## Possible Launch Activities

Campuses all have a variety of activities early in an academic year—commencement, open houses, early enrollment days, etc.—many of which could provide venues and opportunities to highlight the college’s effort to create expanded and integrated student services and help more low-income students succeed. Below are lists of general ideas to consider when launching the initiative on campus. These could be used as an independent launch event or be built into other activities planned for the beginning of the academic year.

**1. Alert the campus.** Use social media, campus events, and visuals to announce the college’s new efforts. These might include:

- A formal presentation to faculty, staff, and students
- Meetings with the student senate and student organizations
- Orientations for students in selected classes such as new-student orientation
- Posters and fliers on campus
- Advertisements in the campus newspaper
- A social media campaign, which might include:
  - Building out a web page on the college site devoted to services available at the college
  - Using college social media sites to promote the launch, including an agreed-upon hashtag for posts
  - Launching Facebook and/or Instagram pages to capture the launch and students’ stories
  - Connecting with partners on social media and supplying them with possible posts, tweets, photos, etc. so they can promote as well

**2. Have a party or an open house.**

**What:** Gathering(s) over a several-hour period with various events and speakers focused on new, expanded, and integrated services that the campus community can attend around their class/work schedule

**When:** Early in the term at student-service centers at times and locations that will attract the most students

**Who:** Key employers to discuss what they are looking for in future employees and community partners to discuss services they provide

**Incentives:** Raffle or giveaway for students completing needs analysis, refreshments, and so on

**3. Spread out activities over an entire week or month.** Because most community colleges have a diverse set of students on their campus(es) at different times of the day/week, a launch week of activities may be more strategic than a single event.

**4. Connect with the community.**

- Honor partners who are already committed to providing services to students on campus.
- Host briefings with business and community advisory groups about the college's efforts and how to bring in new services and sponsors.
- Provide community agencies with materials about the college's expanded services to use with individuals or clients who may be considering attending college, but are unsure whether they can afford to attend or will be successful.

**5. Have students tell their stories to promote services through peer-to-peer messaging.**

- Work with students who have already benefited from expanded and integrated services to draft op-eds in the school or local newspapers.
- Create posters with student images and quotes to encourage other students to seek out these services
- Develop student ambassadors who would be willing to do brief presentations in core introductory classes about services available to students.
- Create Facebook or other social media group pages, and encourage students to join and share stories.

**6. Share what's happening through the media. This includes feel-good stories about community partnerships stepping in to address student needs.** Work with the college's Public Information Office to develop a news release and talking points for the media to shape a story about the campus initiative that is compelling and will garner attention and support.

This work will include identifying:

**A stable of spokespeople**

- Students who will benefit and can serve as messengers
- Campus faculty and staff involved closely with the initiative
- Community and business partners who can speak to and validate the goals of the initiative

**Materials for the media**

- News release
- Op-ed for local audience
- Strong visuals of campus work
- Press lists and strategies to reach out to media targets
- Stories and messages to post through social media and on the website

**7. Use this moment to reach out to policymakers.** The launch of the initiative on campus provides a ready-made opportunity to begin outreach to policymakers to build awareness and support. Those activities could include:

- Having a legislator close to the college send a letter to colleagues and other state leaders about the program
- Adapting an informational brochure and/or news release about the initiative into an email announcement to be sent to state and community leaders
- Briefing the governor and governor's aides as well as political leaders and heads of key legislative committees (Education, Budget)

ATD has a host of materials about integrated student support services developed as part of the Working Students Success Network and other related initiatives. As you build your marketing and outreach campaign, be sure to visit the ATD website and reach out to ATD coaches and staff for assistance with materials and strategies that you can use on your campus.

# CONCLUSION

This guidebook offers a starting point for colleges looking to improve student success, life outcomes, and equity for a critical group of students—those who are low-income and not well-versed in how to navigate academic life. Struggling to juggle school, jobs, and often families, they can be one financial bump in the road away from being derailed and unable to achieve their educational goals.

In recent years, integrated student support services have proved to be a powerful tool for keeping students on track to persist and complete. Approaches like the WSSN have shown the importance of bringing together academic and nonacademic supports in a package of sequenced, intentional services focused holistically on the entire spectrum of student needs. Further, the process of implementing integrated services—applying the principles, tools, and resources in these pages—changes the campus culture, bringing new meaning and cohesion to the work of the college.

More broadly, in the context of community college reform, integrating student services complements other reforms a college may be undertaking as it reorganizes for a holistic student-centric approach. These include three significant interventions that ATD has advanced:

**Guided Pathways:** An approach to restructuring community college processes that clearly maps out a program of study, indicating which courses a student should take and the sequence to follow in taking them. It replaces what has been described as the “cafeteria model,” in which colleges offer lots of options for students and insufficient guidance or support for making choices.

**Integrated Planning and Advising for Student Success, or iPASS:** The use of technology to enhance and streamline the student experience of academic, career, and financial advising and planning services. Effective implementation of iPASS requires transformation of the institution’s approach to these services, including structural organizational changes,

process and policy changes, and attitudinal changes of stakeholders.

## **Institutional Change Assessment Tool (ICAT):**

An online self-assessment that helps colleges determine their current capacity in each of seven key dimensions identified in ATD’s Institutional Capacity Framework: Leadership & Vision; Data & Technology; Equity, Teaching, & Learning; Engagement & Communication; Strategy & Planning; and Policies & Practices. Strong capacity in these areas is at the heart of building and maintaining a student-focused culture. Ideally, colleges administer ICAT to a broad group of stakeholders, including representatives from the board of trustees, president’s cabinet, administrators, full-time and adjunct faculty, staff, and student-success teams. Then, a cross-section of the college community, working with ATD leadership and data coaches, discusses the results to identify strengths, zero in on areas in need of bolstering, and generate actionable ideas.

Taken together, integrated student support systems inform all of these reform efforts, from the more tightly focused tracking interventions of WSSN and Guided Pathways to the continuous improvement characteristics of iPASS and ICAT. Using these approaches requires colleges to examine every aspect of their institutions and engage in a fundamental organizational redesign, from rethinking and honing capacities to reorienting all stakeholders so they can embrace culture change.

Most efforts to improve community college students’ outcomes involve relatively small innovations or changes at the margins. After more than a decade of experience, Achieving the Dream has learned that improving student success on a substantial scale requires colleges to engage in bold, holistic, sustainable institutional change. ATD, with its experience, experts, coaches, and network of peer and leader colleges, will continue to work with colleges to successfully integrate these approaches to fit their unique needs.

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#### ABOUT ACHIEVING THE DREAM

Achieving the Dream is a comprehensive non-governmental reform movement for student success. Together with our network of higher ed institutions, coaches and advisors, state policy teams, investors and partners, we are helping more than 4 million community college students have a better economic opportunity and achieve their dreams.

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