

## **Summary of Research that Supports the Pathway Navigation Activities at the Colleges in the San Diego and Imperial Counties Region**

This brief summary highlights the research and best practices identified through a review of the literature, interviews, and focus groups as critical for student success.

Research suggests that early engagement for college and career planning with prospective students increases the likelihood of successful completion of high school diplomas, and also correlates with higher persistence rates in postsecondary (Edwards & Belfield, 2012; Barnett, 2016; Barnett, Fay, Trimble, & Pheatt, 2013). Research conducted into Guided Pathways colleges also found that mandatory pre-enrollment orientation for first-time students, when conducted in conjunction with cohesive integrated advising procedures, results in higher persistence rates and student satisfaction (Completion by Design, 2016).

Research also suggests transition into the college environment begins with coordinated “high-touch” engagement to assist students in aligning skills and interests with career and educational goals; help students understand and effectively navigate administrative requirements, timelines, and financial aid; and provide guidance with course selection and scheduling, as well as access to student supports.

### *Intake/Orientation*

Intake and orientation provide opportunities for colleges to acquaint new students with the full spectrum of pathways, courses, experiences, and services available at the college. Intake processes begin prior to matriculation. Focus group participants and interviews stressed the importance of learning about student interests and needs early on, so that students could be referred appropriately to programs and services at the outset of their college experience.

Orientations are also most effective prior to matriculation, so that upon entry, students are equipped with information and supports needed to successfully navigate and complete programs of study (Completion by Design, 2016). Student focus group participants corroborated the need for better information and navigational support.

Many interviewed noted the importance of incorporating career assessment and early exploration activities (or minimally meeting with a career advisor) into the orientation process. Focus group participants also expressed a desire to front-load career planning into orientation, which ideally would be customized based on students’ interest, program area, and/or needs.

In addition, orientation to campus programs and services needs to be comprehensive and differentiated. For example, young first-generation college students may need orientation to different services than mature students returning to college for advanced certificates. Similarly, students in varying pathways need exposure to the opportunities provided in their pathway.

### *Career Exploration before Education Planning*

Early in students' enrollment processes, academic skills are evaluated using a multiple measures approach and conducted in conjunction with career assessments and skills inventories (Completion by Design, 2016; Jenkins & Fink, 2015; Mejia, Rodriguez, & Johnson, 2016). Measuring attainment of student learning outcomes through the use of targeted assessments is a key feature of effective pathways (Jenkins, Lahr, & Fink, 2017).

Many interviewees noted the importance of incorporating career assessment and early exploration activities (or minimally meeting with a career advisor) into the orientation process. The preferred sequence of steps involves 1) identifying students' interests, 2) career exploration activities, 3) pinpointing a preferred pathway, and 4) creating a detailed education plan. However, interview respondents reported that this sequence is not common practice.

Career exploration is a key element of high-quality career technical education (CDE & CCCCO, 2008). It is also a key element of Guided Pathways (Jenkins et al., 2017). Career exploration should be iterative and developmental, providing opportunities for students to develop their decision-making and metacognitive skills (Karp, 2013). It should also precede academic planning, and continue throughout a student's tenure at the college, with successive work-based learning experiences, and even during the job placement stage, to help students respond flexibly to the outcomes of job-seeking.

Best practices documented in the literature suggest career and education planning is a long-term endeavor (Scrivener, Weiss, & Sommo, 2012), informed by outcomes of pre-engagement activities, assessments, and skills inventories (Karp & Stacey, 2013), which should culminate in academic and career plans that are utilized by both students and advisors throughout college (Jenkins et al., 2017; Kalamarian, Karp, & Ganga, 2017a). Career advising and planning should precede academic advising, enabling students to explore options before making selections about coursework (Karp, 2013).

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