

Guided Pathways

Principles

1. The Document called “Vision for Success,” with its 6 goals and 7 commitments, is the blueprint for what Guided Pathways is supposed to ultimately be as far as the Chancellor’s Office (CCCCO) is concerned.

2. There are other, different views of what the phrase “Guided Pathways” can, should or is supposed to mean besides that of The Vision

3. The Vision’s version of Guided Pathways, as well as the interpretation and elaboration on it of Chancellor’s Office personnel (Oakley himself, Laura Hope, for example), calls for

- More invasive “onboarding”—students identify an outcome, a goal, at the outset that is tied to a specific career or job, which corresponds to
- Invasive curriculum redesign to make paths to goals clearer and easier to follow; this includes the call to tie every single course and program to a specific job or career outcome; a part of this, though not foregrounded in the Vision, is curriculum reduction: fewer choices reduces student “confusion”
- More invasive monitoring and nudging of all students (*all students* is a fundamental and emphatic principle here, ala the CCCCCO; the soundbite to sell it is “take the luck out”); interventions take place to prevent the student from veering off the path by, for example, taking courses they don’t need for their stated outcome
- Changing criteria and standards to speed the student through their program; colleges are instructed to adjust basic skills assessment and placement to make it more likely for the student to complete college English and Math in one year—the guiding principle being not the skill but the speed

4. The CCCCCO has maintained that local districts have the freedom to design their own version of Guided Pathways, and that local versions that differ from the Vision document will still be funded. Some local discussions about Guided Pathways, for example,

- Advocate gentle nudging and retain time and space for the student’s exploration
- Accept even invasive nudging but rejects curriculum reductions
- Largely ignores the Vision’s commitments, but seeks to move toward the Vision’s goals by just making pathways—recommended course sequences for majors, for example--clearer to students and easier to follow, and by emphasizing increasing FT-PT faculty ratio, reducing class size, providing training for counselors in specific disciplinary areas, more tutoring, etc.

Procedures

1. The funding is released in stages. The first stage requires a commitment to begin the process. The CCCCCO avers that each district decides and defines that for itself. Presumably, one of the alternative approaches mentioned above will presumably get funded and be fully accepted by the CCCCCO.

2. Step one is to sign off on a Self-Assessment which identifies itself as a commitment to pursue Guided Pathways. In face to face conversation with Laura Hope, I could not get a satisfactory answer to my concern that in the end, the requirement to get the funding will be predicated on alignment with the Vision. But at this stage, the first stage, no such alignment is required. Sign and get the money.

3. To sign or not to sign. What are the advantages and risks?

Advantages to signing

- Get apparently risk-free money
- Engage in a good faith effort that might result in a definitive, well-informed, and collaborative decision about what to do with the Guided Pathways craze for the foreseeable future

Risks in signing

- Wasted time and resources: The money is for committing resources to study how to change the institution in the direction of Guided Pathways—whatever that means to us. But what if we spend lots of time and money—reassigned time for example—only to conclude that we neither need nor want “Guided Pathways” in any particular form?
- Commit to a “devil’s bargain”—sign now and find that we have gotten ourselves into something that only later becomes clear we don’t support

The CCCCCO has not provided the forum to engage in honest debate and dialogue over this. It has been set up as an either/or. To sign at the first stage is innocuous, that seems to be true. But to not sign is an opportunity to make a stand. To sign means getting money, yes, but getting money for Guided Pathways. We can’t put it in savings for a rainy day, use it for STEM offices or hire a badly needed full time faculty retirement replacement. We have flexibility in defining Guided Pathways, but we have to use it for Guided Pathways.

The course of action I was contemplating before my work was interrupted is this: Sign for the first installment. Form a task force led by faculty. Study the impact on student achievement focusing on faculty-student contact. Use the GP funding as an opportunity to press the issue of lowering class size and increasing full time faculty. The money could be used to press the issues of why over-reliance on adjunct faculty is detrimental to student success, and that the most important aspect of a college student finding their pathway and pursuing it is relationships with quality faculty, rather than reduction of choices, forced choices, or administrative/electronic nudging.

I see signing to get the first installment of money is actually an opportunity to poke a hole in the Guided Pathways program. What I was planning to do is sign, then engage a practice of hyper-diligence to make sure that our opposition to the objectionable parts of the Vision do not seep in to our college, using the money to make a case for the specific improvements—full-time faculty contact (and I’m including allied faculty here)—I have in mind.

Alternatively, refusing to sign the first installment is making the stand up front. It seems to me that that is a valid point of view as well. One is a sort of compromise. The other is defiance.

Note: the way the Self-Assessment document is constructed by the CCCCCO requires me to hold my nose to sign it. The questions are coercive and biased (“have you stopped beating your wife, yes or no”). However, as I already said, it could potentially be worth holding the nose, signing the document, and using the money to do something good. This is the one I favor, but not with overwhelmingly strong conviction.

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