Lessons Learned about Guided Pathways

Overview:

Skyline College has a mission "*To empower and transform a global community of learners.*" In 2013, the faculty, staff, administration and students worked together to establish a Comprehensive Diversity Framework, which outlines Skyline College's commitment to diversity driven innovation and excellence that moves the College towards meeting its mission, while moving the students towards meeting their educational goals.

Through the lens of the Comprehensive Diversity Framework, Skyline College continuously examines itself, our institutional structures, processes and practices to address issues that impact students' ability to access, enter, progress through and successfully achieve their educational goals. Through our work, we have recognized that effective equity-minded efforts must intersect all aspects of the institution; that responsibility for identifying barriers and transforming structures must be both coordinated and shared; and that shifting this paradigm begins with creating an institutional culture that is reflective, self-knowing, engages a listening stance, and practices critical inquiry. These intersecting practices promote deeper engagement, more innovative approaches, a constantly evolving consciousness, and a greater likelihood for praxis and transformation.

When confronting our institution's brutal truths, we realized that:
- Each year, only about 50% of Skyline College students persist from Fall to Spring.
- On average, Skyline College students attempt approximately 100 units, complete 80 units and only need 60 units to graduate or transfer.
- After 3 years, approximately 16% of Skyline College students complete their educational goals.

For these reasons, we've made the Skyline College Promise an institutional priority. The Skyline College Promise is our commitment to empower students to find success at every point in their educational journey, so that they can get in, get through and graduate on time. As such, we have set the following goals:
- Using multiple measures assessment, increase placement rates into transfer level coursework in Math and English for incoming students by 50% by the beginning of the 2017-2018 academic year.
- 75% of Skyline College students will achieve on-time degree and certificate completion, and/or transfer according to their educational goal, by the 2020-2021 academic year.

To achieve these goals, and fulfill the Skyline College Promise, the college is embarking on a Comprehensive College Redesign that challenges the traditional "college-ready student" framework and replaces it with a "student-ready" consciousness by implementing three signature components: Meta-majors and Guided Pathways, Promise Scholars Program and Transformative Teaching and Learning.
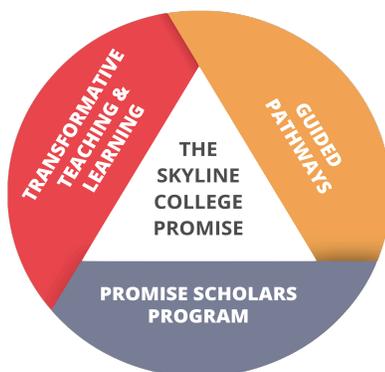
The College is approaching this effort via a college-wide networked community of practitioners (Design Team) to reduce duplication and contradiction of efforts, improve communication and understanding of efforts, and create important "cross-functional" opportunities to strengthen our efforts and bring them to scale as part of a transformation of "business as usual".

The following document not only identifies major milestones in our work, but discusses the lessons we have learned.

Degree/Certificate Sorting:

In the fall of 2016, Skyline College began their Meta-majors work with degree and certificate sorting activities facilitated by Career Ladders Project. One of the goals of this activity was to bring faculty, staff, and administrators together to discuss national community college data trends surrounding the "cafeteria style" model through the data points of units taken, persistence rates, and length of time to completion. The conclusion being that navigating Community Colleges can be difficult, confusing, and frustrating for students, which can negatively impact their educational goal completion. A second goal of the sorting activity was to examine the 100+ degrees and certificates that Skyline College offers and sort them into meaningful categories/groupings. This part promoted an empathetic mindset for the information and choices the institution presents to students in their first experiences with Skyline College. These categories/groupings, or meta-majors, would allow students to examine 4-10 choices instead of the list of 100+.

Lessons Learned:

- Before beginning sorting activities, it is critical to establish a process that standardizes the way each group will sort through degrees and certificates. If a uniform process is not established, the results of the sorts tend to not be as useful, because they cannot be compared. Not having a uniform process also allows individuals the freedom to recreate the structure that they already know and are familiar, which can lead to a repeat of status quo. (*See one possible sorting process in Group 7 Facilitation Process document*)
- It is important to frame this type of activity with an explanation of the "why." Why would a college choose to implement Meta-majors? Why would Meta-majors be beneficial to students? Why is sorting degrees and certificates helpful in our pursuit of Meta-majors? This type of information helps participants understand the significance of their work.
- It is difficult, because of the institutionalization of participants into the academy with which they currently work, to look past status quo and imagine something different than what is currently happening in community colleges. Thus, it is important to continually remind participants that the goal of Meta-majors and Guided Pathway work is to try to disrupt and challenge the system(s) that have been created and an opportunity to think outside the box.
- The most important perspective is the student perspective and getting a first-hand student perspective will be the most powerful piece of evidence throughout this process.
- Degree/Certificate sorting may be most useful after course mapping has taken place, so that faculty are more invested in the process.

Design Team Creation:

As the degree/certificate sorts were concluding, it became evident that a cross-functional team was needed to examine results, engage in conversations, and make decisions surrounding the Guided Pathways design work and implementation. In the spring of 2017, the Design Team was established and membership was similar to that of a committee (with representatives from divisions, different projects, areas of campus, administration, and staff). Basically, these individuals represented the various

stakeholders on campus, would become "experts" on the Guided Pathways work, and would allow the project to be viewed through many different lenses.

Lessons Learned:
- The design team engaged in meaningful conversations, but found that making decisions was more difficult than originally thought, because the decision-making process hadn't been established. It is critical, early on, to establish a decision-making process, design principles, and a communication plan to help guide the design team.
- The "two representatives from each area" model works in earlier brainstorming stages, but once design elements start to be inquired about or implemented this model may not be the most effective. The design team must be a flexible and adaptable structure.
- Leveling out the knowledge of the design team is important to the success of the project. So, providing context and framing before each meeting of what may have been discussed prior helps guide the work.
- It is not enough to just bring people together in the same space and have them discuss ideas, so developing a framework, common understanding, and expectations for their participation on the design team must be the first item accomplished. This should include work around how each person doesn't represent their own interests, but their specific area of campus and student interactions with that part of campus, so they should be questioning and interrogating Guided Pathway design ideas from different lens, and how you want them to go about that interrogation.
- Communication is absolutely critical to leveling out the knowledge on campus. Members on a design team must serve as a communication liaison back to their areas. When leading change on a campus, there can never be enough communication. However, the bigger issue is how to make communication transactional (multi-directional). So many times we see the liaisons just reporting back to their areas, but not bringing questions and concerns back to the design team. Establishing this transactional communication model will help the whole campus to become engaged in the work.

Faculty Co-Leads:

Early on in the Guided Pathways design work, it became clear that this was a process that required extensive faculty input, involvement, and leadership. Additionally, in implementing this work, there is a level of flexibility that is required and more consistent faculty oversight can help with project facilitation and flexibility. The Skyline College administration acknowledged this and agreed to provide reassignment for faculty members to guide the inquiry and design process. This decision to provide reassignment was beneficial in many ways because so much of the project involve examination and discussion of aspects that typically fall within the faculty purview. Additionally, the campus community responded more positively to changes that were being proposed and led by faculty. As the project has progressed, the faculty co-leads have met weekly and been the persons responsible for communicating the work to the larger campus, co-leading the inquiry teams, and providing points of collaboration and

integration between the various aspects of the Guided Pathways component of the Comprehensive College Redesign.

Lessons Learned:
- Faculty leadership is crucial for the project to be accepted by the campus community.
- Faculty need dedicated time to be able to work on Guided Pathways in a meaningful way.
- Interdisciplinary and cross-functional teams are preferable so that there are a variety of perspectives and also a wider range of networks that can be accessed by the co-leads.
- It is useful to have point-people for different aspects of the project so that campus constituents know whom to contact and so that there is a clear division of labor.
- It is important to have a clear connection to student services whether through a counseling faculty as a member of the design team co-leads or through regular check-ins.

Course Mapping:

At the end of the spring 2017 semester, the Skyline College instructional and counseling faculty met together in a college-wide workday to map core, required courses for every degree and certificate program. Ultimately, these course maps would become the intentional course sequence portion of Guided Pathways. Prior to the workday, the Design Team Co-leads had to determine mapping requirements to make the course maps consistent across all departments (*See Degree and Certificate Requirement Sequencing document*).
For example:
1. Degrees with lower core, required units, were instructed to leave the first semester open so that students could take English and Math courses, and begin their mapping in the second semester.
2. Degrees with higher core, required units (typically Science and Business degrees), were instructed to try and only place one core, required course in the first semester.
3. Pre-requisites courses would be identified and mapped as well as core required courses.
4. Each degree program would need to create a two-year and three-year map (summer semesters being optional).

At this point, all other general education courses were not mapped, but instructional faculty started discussing and identifying general education courses they would recommend students take during their degree program. The decision not to map all coursework (GE & Core required) was made to allow the general education inquiry team an opportunity to explore different models and best practices of how to make general education courses more meaningful and relevant to students. We did not want to make faculty complete a course map and then possibly have to go back and make changes to those course maps when a general education model was selected. However, GE areas were identified and placed on the maps. For example, in semester two a student might see "Area A1 GE."

What made this activity more powerful for instructional faculty was the collaboration with counseling faculty. The counseling faculty met with departmental instructional faculty as they mapped and, in many cases, presented a different perspective for sequencing specific courses and challenged

assumptions of instructional faculty. This was another opportunity to create empathy among instructional faculty and counseling faculty.

To complete the course mapping, over the summer, the counseling faculty member of the Design Team Co-leads was assigned to review all the course maps and start to identify the GE areas and courses they would recommend students take to transfer to our most popular transfer institutions (i.e. San Francisco State University). This Design Team Co-lead member, in the fall of 2017, also met with each department to discuss any discrepancies or issues that may have gone unnoticed during the course mapping workday.

The result was a more finalized version of an intentional course sequence for each degree and certificate that will be used during initial counseling sessions.

Lessons Learned:
- The course mapping workday was one of the first points of true buy-in and momentum for instructional faculty. Instead of being told that there were barriers preventing students from completing their degrees and certificates, instructional faculty were able to experience how frustrating it might be for a student to try and understand the requirements, select the right courses in the right semester, and complete the degree or certificate. They also were able to find the barriers be it pre-requisite courses or how often courses were scheduled, etc. The project became more real in their minds, which created momentum.
- This activity is one that we would recommend be done towards the beginning of the semester versus the end of the semester, so that the momentum created could be used to further the work in a more efficient manner. Since we mapped at the end of the spring semester, when faculty came back after a summer break it was harder to regain that momentum.
- The all campus workday was an effective structure to complete this type of focused work. It not only allowed us to complete work, but have all the experts in the room to answer any questions or clear up any confusion.

Shared Course Analysis:

After all the course maps were submitted, a shared course analysis was completed. This required the core, required courses from every degree and certificate to be entered into a pivot table. Then, Design Team Co-leads and the Meta-majors inquiry team were able to identify which degrees and certificates had overlapping coursework. To visualize and further analyze the information from the pivot table, a social graph and dendrogram were created to show the arrangement of clusters (in this case the degrees and certificates that had overlapping required courses) and the strength of correlations (how many core required courses were the same) within and between the clusters. These tools allowed us to make a data driven decision in the number of Meta-majors and the cluster of degrees and certificates within each of the Meta-majors.

Throughout the shared course analysis, other questions surfaced that needed to be addressed. For example:

1. CTE certificates such as Automotive, Cosmetology, and Massage Therapy, have such specific coursework that they didn't overlap with other degrees and certificates. How would we place them into the Meta-majors?
2. New degrees and certificates are being created at Skyline College, what would be the procedure followed to place those into the existing Meta-majors?
3. Could degrees/certificates only be placed in one Meta-major?
4. What would these groupings be called? (Meta-majors, houses, areas of interest, etc.)
5. How would names for the Meta-majors be determined?
6. Can Meta-majors exist without changing the internal division structure?

The result of the shared course analysis and inquiry of the Meta-majors team is that Skyline College will have four Meta-majors that will be implemented starting in August 2018:
1. Arts, Languages, & Communication
2. Business, Entrepreneurship, & Management
3. Science, Technology, & Health
4. Society & Education

Lessons Learned:
- Student voice is one of the most important voices and needs to constantly be sought out throughout the process. Having the opportunity to engage with different students and student groups has allowed us to challenge our assumptions and make sure we were making the right decision(s). It also seems to be one thing that every part of campus can agree upon. So, if you frame conversations with the student perspective as context, it makes the decision-making process more efficient.
- Communication is critical to the success of this work and there can never be too much communication out to the larger campus. Being able to explain the process, the results and the underlying theme of why degrees/certificates were being placed into specific Meta-majors will make the process easier to implement. A consistent level of knowledge, throughout campus, will help Meta-majors to become institutionalized.
- Transparency is important throughout this process. When large-scale change is being discussed there will always be a level of uncertainty and fear that runs throughout the campus. Being able to show people the process and bring them in to provide feedback before decisions are made will help reduce the uncertainty. Also, being able to gather and analyze data to make decisions makes the process less subjective and more objective.

Student Focus Groups:
Since Meta-majors are a student-facing piece, when working through the shared course data analysis for Meta-majors, the campus heavily relied on student feedback and input. A student focus group structure had been established in March of 2017, with the help of Career Ladders Project. This original student focus group session was conducted to understand student experiences at Skyline

College, specifically what had helped or hindered their ability to select a major, choose classes, and access the support they needed. This focus group resulted in the publication of "*Skyline Students Voice Their Perspectives*" on May 25, 2017.

With focus groups established as an effective structure of gathering student feedback, the Meta-majors work team, when trying to make final decisions, created questions surrounding Meta-majors and facilitated student focus groups in all COUN 110 courses in the Fall of 2017. As a side note, COUN 110 was selected as it would provide access to the largest number of different majors and student perspectives in one course. This student feedback proved to be invaluable in guiding final decisions on the number of Meta-majors, placement of degrees/certificates into Meta-majors, and the language surrounding Meta-majors.

With a successful response rate and clarity of the student perspective, this student focus group process was also used during the naming of the Meta-majors. In this case, focus groups were held with Middle College juniors and seniors, student ambassadors, ASSC representatives, COMM 130 courses, transfer center students, and high school counselors. Their feedback was compiled and reviewed by the Communication team and Meta-majors team before being introduced at Flex days, division meetings, campus forums, participatory governance meetings, and College Governance Council.

After gathering all this feedback, the Meta-majors team was able to narrow the name choices to two different sets, but there was still uncertainty surrounding which set of names would be most meaningful and effective. As a side note, the design team co-leads were aware that all the feedback and input they had received about the names had come from individuals within the institution, and in many cases it was apparent that both students and employees had been "indoctrinated" to the Skyline College language (division & program names). Meta-majors are to help new, incoming students navigate the institution and find information about degrees and certificates, so we knew it would be important to gather feedback from outside the institution. Thus, we decided to move away from the student focus group method and administer a beta-test utilizing our high school partners. Two mock Meta-majors websites (one with each set of names) and survey questions were created and administered to approximately 135 high school students. These students had no prior experience with Skyline College. That data was collected and conclusions about which set of names was easier for students to navigate and find meaning within were drawn. A final recommendation was made and then approved by participatory governance bodies, College Governance Council and the President's Cabinet.

Lessons Learned:
- Student perspective is critical to understanding the institution itself, but it tends to be the perspective that is usually absent from the talking table. It requires planning, coordination, and time (lots of time) to gather, but can be some of the most powerful data in making decisions.
- Understanding which students' perspectives will be most helpful to make the decision(s) and realize they may not currently be on your campus.
- It is important to be aware that student perspectives change and something that may work this year may not in a couple of years, so constant reassessment is needed. This requires a plan and structure to constantly gather that information and more importantly a willingness to change.

Inquiry Teams:

To support a culture that is reflective, self-knowing, engages a listening stance, and practices critical inquiry, as set forth in the Comprehensive Diversity Framework, the Design Team determined seven areas of inquiry that would need exploration as the first phase of the Guided Pathways signature component work in the Comprehensive College Redesign. Over the course of the 2017-2018 academic year, cross functional teams were created and given space, time, and funding to engage in inquiry in the following areas: Exploratory Course, Foundations (Affective Domain), GE Redesign, HIPs (High Impact Practices), Meta-majors, Student Services (specifically the aspects of getting in, getting through and career development), and the Undeclared Student Experience. To frame the inquiry, the Design Team proposed the following inquiry questions for each team:

Exploratory Course Inquiry Team
An exploration of designing a first year seminar course to support all students through the transition into college and careers with the goal of promoting academic and professional success for all.

Questions to explore: What are the main outcomes an exploratory course could achieve? What are some affective domain outcomes to consider? What are some career outcomes to consider? What are implications for specific disciplines as part of the course? Should this be one course offered in the first semester or two courses, one in the first semester and one later? Will HIPS be included in this course, if so which ones? How many units? How will this course empower students in education and careers? What are the implications for teaching this course to scale? Who is qualified to teach this course? Will the course be specific to individual Meta-majors? What is "success" for an exploratory course? How will success be assessed? How will the exploratory course address existing equity gaps among students?

Foundation (Affective Domain) Inquiry Team
An exploration of the beliefs and behaviors that promote college success for all and how Skyline College can incorporate them into all foundational courses.

Questions to explore: What beliefs and behaviors lead to college success? What learning outcomes will encourage delivery development of these beliefs and behaviors by students enrolled in ESOL, Developmental English, English 100 & 105 and Math 811, 110, 120, and 190? Are there other foundational courses where affective domain is or should be addressed? How can affective domain be used to achieve equitable outcomes? Which assessment measures will be used evaluate the impact of affective domain on student success? What roles can learning communities play in foundational courses?

GE Redesign Inquiry Team
A continued exploration of how Skyline College should contextualize general education courses to make them more relevant to students and make the curriculum more cohesive.

Questions to explore: How do we ensure that GE is meaningful for students? What model or models for GE can the college implement to increase student engagement, improve the overall educational experience for all students and increase persistence to their educational goal? What alternatives to the "cafeteria model" exist? Do we want a GE model that is contextualized to each Meta-major or run across Meta-majors? How can we use alternative models to promote equity? What potential implications would the GE model/s have on guided pathways? Which assessment

measures will be used to determine the GE redesign on student success and completion? How does the learning community experience factor into models being explored?

HIPs (High Impact Practices) Inquiry Team
An exploration of pedagogy centered on equity and high impact teaching practices such as undergraduate research, service learning, e-portfolios, culminating projects, study abroad, internships and more.

Questions to explore: What HIPS are already being implemented on campus? What HIPS make sense to implement across the college? How do we place HIPS in courses so that all students have opportunities? Will they be embedded? What institutional support is needed to implement HIPs on a larger scale? How do we improve equity through HIPs? Which assessment measures will be used? What % of the student population do we want to be exposed to HIPs?

Meta-Majors Work Team
A continued exploration of how Skyline College should structure its Meta-Majors and places degrees and certificates to make them relevant and easy to access by students.

Questions to explore: Should we incorporate Meta-majors? How many Meta-majors are appropriate? Can degrees/certificates be placed in more than one Meta-major? How do we improve equity through Meta-majors? Which assessment measures are most effective for assessing Meta-majors? What should the names of Meta-majors be?

Student Support Services Work Team
An exploration of redesigning student services to be in alignment with Meta-majors that includes implications for modifications to orientation (Getting In), increasing comprehensive educational plans (Getting Through), delivery of career support and services (Career Development), and examining integration with instruction.

Questions to explore: How will student services be redesigned to be in alignment with the College's redesign? How will our current processes be impacted? How do we integrate SSSP, Promise Scholars Program and undeclared students? Will counselors be assigned to specific Meta-majors? How will that assignment happen? How do we integrate Student Services and instruction? What are the implications for the comprehensive SEP? Which assessment measures will be used? How do we address equity gaps by realigning student support services?

To complete the inquiry within Student Services, three smaller teams were created.

The Getting In Team was focused on:
1. Developing an approach for working with new students as they enter Skyline College in order to help facilitate and support the selection of a Meta-major and connect them to a support team that facilitates their success.
2. Redesigning New Student Orientation.
3. Developing outcomes for initial counseling appointments that all counselors will achieve, which include supporting students in identifying a Meta-major or connecting them to undeclared support programs.
4. Examining the entire "getting in" process including outreach, application, orientation, counseling, assessment, and registration support and making modifications as needed to make it a meaningful and seamless experience that culminates in getting students connected to a support system.

The Getting Through Team was focused on:
1. Examining a needs-based counseling model to serve new, incoming students.
2. Identifying counseling-related benchmarks that support students intentionally within the guided pathways model.
3. Exploring campus partnerships who can support counseling within the needs-based model.
4. Developing a counseling structure within the Meta-majors model.

The Career Development Team was focused on:
1. Identifying student career, transfer, and educational benchmarks to embed in their educational experience ranging from increased awareness of career options (semester 1) up to job/career readiness support (semester 4).
2. Identifying Career Development benchmarks to be included in the guided pathways visual.
3. Developing a proposal on how career development will be implemented to support students meeting benchmarks to scale

The Undeclared Student Experience Inquiry Team
An exploration of the experience of undeclared students, including how to incorporate exploration into their experience to give them the tools to choose a degree or certificate.

Questions to explore: How will the college help undeclared students choose a Meta-major and a major pathway? How do we identify undeclared students? Should we have a Meta-major for undeclared students? If yes, what does it look like? How are students supported in transitioning out of the Meta-major? Do we see students who are undeclared choosing the Exploratory House or can they explore within a Meta-major? How do we ensure equity for undeclared students? What role can learning communities play in student exploration? Using data, what are the demographics of undeclared students at Skyline College? Can learning communities be utilized as tool in helping undeclared students in the decision making process? Which assessment measures will be used to measure the effectiveness of supporting students on deciding on a major?

Lessons Learned:
- Inquiry is valuable, but throughout the inquiry process there must be constant transparency and an awareness of the work that is happening on campus. This requires a breaking down of silos and a willingness to hear others' perspectives. Many people get involved in work they care about and have specific ideas on how to implement, so inquiry is uncomfortable for many. However, allowing a space for people to be uncomfortable, take risks, and offer ideas that may be innovative and different is invaluable. Ultimately, this means that those that are leading inquiry must be trained facilitators and conflict managers, so it requires a level of professional development before the inquiry process can begin.
- A prioritization of projects is helpful for participants, so that they can see where their work fits into the implantation. It is human nature to get frustrated and discouraged to do a lot of work and then not see that work woven into the larger project.
- A true inquiry process requires collaboration and synthesis of ideas between teams/participants to create a unified vision. It is not enough to just bring people together in the same space and have them discuss ideas, collaboration must be modeled, taught, and developed. It can be

difficult for some people to see the larger perspective when they have been focusing on one specific portion of the project, so communication and facilitation skills become critical at this point in the project.

- At a time when many people are busy with other committee assignments, projects, initiatives, and programs, it can be hard to have the human capital needed to complete inquiry (especially in a cross-functional and inclusive way). We offered to pay individuals for their participation, but have learned that this might not be the most sustainable structure. It also has a tendency for people to then require payment to complete any additional work. This, to us, is the most difficult part of the Guided Pathways work; how do you get people involved and continue their involvement at a high level with only internal incentives?

- Another issue that may arise is the speed with which change is happening on campus. As stated earlier, change can be uncomfortable and uncertain for many people, so they will try and slow the inquiry down to make it the "perfect design." However, an urgency around student success and their lives, compels this work to happen in an efficient and somewhat fast manner. So this is a constant tension that surrounds the inquiry/design process. We found it is important in framing the inquiry work that time limits be placed on the inquiry and clear goals be established to help guide individuals through the work.

Final Thoughts:

Guided Pathways work is a team lift and institutions need to acknowledge that staff are a significant portion of the individuals that students first come into contact with, ask questions of, and seek guidance from. However, due to the nature of their work, they are often less able to attend campus forums, serve on inquiry teams and committees, and many have no divisions to be able to attend division meetings. This means that additional efforts must be made to engage them and bring their perspectives into the work. So, early on, it is important to be very intentional about supporting staff in learning about, engaging with, and communicating changes.

Secondly, institutions need to acknowledge that many faculty, both counseling and instruction, are part-time. This requires them to move between campuses and make them unable to attend campus forums, division or department meetings. However, to ensure efforts are scalable and reach all parts of the campus, this too requires intentionality when it comes to communicating and professional development efforts.

Both of these issues require institutions to think through their communication plan, training, and professional development and utilize various mediums and methods to ensure a consistent level of understanding about the project. Ultimately, this means institutions may need to leverage existing systems, structures, and tools, but in completely different ways. The college redesign can not only be about student experience, but also address the employee experience as well.