Personalizing the Onboarding Experience through Guided Pathways: Lessons from Ohio Community Colleges

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Presentation Overview

- **Guided pathways in the current moment:** Redesigning for access and success post-COVID
- **Making the case:** Why onboarding and personalized support are important
- **Guided pathways in practice:** Personalized onboarding examples from colleges
- **Taking institutional context into account:** Strategies for personalizing support in small and large colleges
Redesigning for Access and Success post-COVID
Guided pathways college: Redesigned for access and success

**Clarify paths to student end goals** – by ensuring that every program prepares students for good jobs and further education needed for career advancement

**Help students get on a path** – by helping all students actively explore options and interests, become part of an academic and career community, and develop a full program completion plan

**Keep students on path** – by scheduling classes and monitoring student progress based on students’ plans to ensure timely and affordable program completion

**Ensure students are learning** – by strengthening active and experiential learning across programs to ensure students have know-how (including soft skills) required for good jobs and further education
COVID challenges for students and colleges

- Students will be even less able to afford college so they will expect programs that enable them to achieve goals as quickly and affordably as possible.

- Students will want programs that enable them to secure stable jobs in short term and good jobs in longer term—offered in formats/on schedules that work for adults with intense job and family pressures.

- Demand for HS dual enrollment offerings that save time and money required to earn a bachelor’s degree will increase.

- Students will face higher levels of trauma than usual.

- Competition from online degree completion providers, regional public universities, less-selective privates will intensify.

- State funding will likely be cut substantially; colleges will have to break down silos, work collaboratively to respond to challenges.
GP strategies for student success and college survival post-Covid

1) *Program* – Ensure every student is in high-opportunity program that leads to good job or transfer with junior standing in student’s major

2) *Purpose* - Help every student explore interests/ strengths and connect with faculty, experienced students, alumni others in fields of interest from the start

3) *Empower* - Ensure every student takes a “light the fire” course on topics of interest in term 1

4) *Plan* - Help every student (including dual enrollment) develop an educational and financial plan by end of term 1
How Colleges Are Rethinking New Student Onboarding as Part of Guided Pathways
Why focus on onboarding?

- Uncertainty about enrollments, in-person vs. online, funding, etc.
- Between 10 and 40% of students who apply don’t enroll
- ~40% of all CC students are gone from higher education by the start of year 2; nearly 60% among underrepresented students
- Selecting a major is a complex process, yet orientation is often limited to an introduction to the college campus and first-term registration (Jenkins, Lahr, & Pellegrino, 2020).
- Even adults with prior college experience need the opportunity to explore program and career options and confirm their choice (Klempin & Lahr, forthcoming).
Rethinking onboarding from a guided pathways perspective

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<td>Orientation to college</td>
<td>Orientation to fields of study</td>
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<td>Optional career and transfer advising and planning</td>
<td>Required career and transfer advising and program planning</td>
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<td>Engaging with programs after prerequisites</td>
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| À la carte high school dual enrollment coursetaking | Dual enrollment as an on-ramp to a program pathway |**

What do students want from onboarding?

- The opportunity to explore programs and careers thematically through meta-majors.
- To interact with other new and current students who share similar academic and career interests.
- To network with faculty and professionals in their field of study.
- Students who have clear career goals need different kinds of support than those who don’t.
Why Personalized Support Matters
Defining personalized support

• **Targeted**: differentiated types or intensity of support based on students’ needs, interests, academic focus, etc.

• **Individualized**: one-on-one interactions, support designed for or tailored to a specific individual
Why focus on personalized support?

• **Targeted**
  • Efficient and effective way of delivering support given limited time and resources
  • More relevant to students than generalized support

• **Individualized**
  • Students need personal connections
  • Establishing relationships builds a foundation for addressing more challenging issues with which students may need support
How Colleges are Using Guided Pathways to Provide Personalized Onboarding
Overview of how Ohio community colleges are personalizing support during onboarding

- **Program and career exploration**
  - *Targeted*: Orientation and FYE courses based on meta-major
  - *Individualized*: Small group orientations

- **Program selection**
  - *Targeted*: Exploratory majors
  - *Individualized*: One-on-one advising
Targeted program and career exploration: Organizing orientation by meta-major

• Allows students to “put faces” to departments and start making connections early
• Allows students to meet peers with similar interests
• Creates the opportunity for more personalized discussions about students’ strengths, and program and career interests
• More enriching and satisfying experience for students and faculty
Individualized program and career exploration: Small group orientations

- More attentive to student needs
- More time for establishing relationships with students
- More time to connect students to resources
- Greater opportunities to discuss long-term career goals
Targeted program and career exploration: FYE courses connected to meta-majors

- Multiple strategies for contextualizing FYE courses:
  - Dedicated course sections for different meta-majors
  - General course sections with meta-major specific assignments

- Prepares students for their program while helping them understand employment opportunities.
Targeted program selection: Exploratory majors

- Rather than allowing students to be undecided, asking students to select an exploratory major tied to a meta-major provides a structured opportunity for students to explore their interests and understand their options.

- Being able to identify which students are uncertain about their program selection enables colleges to provide more targeted advising.
Individualized program selection: One-on-one advising

- Colleges are using multiple strategies to confirm students’ program choice through individual advising
  - Requiring an appointment with a meta-major advisor prior to orientation
  - Using career assessments as the basis of discussion for initial advising appointments
  - Having students complete an intake survey
  - Requiring an additional advising appointment midway through the first semester for undecided students
How Institutional Context Affects Strategies for Personalizing Support
Personalizing support in small and large colleges

- Small colleges may have an easier time offering \textit{individualized} support due to size.
- Regardless of size, meta-majors offer a key strategy for \textit{targeted} support.
- Meta-majors may also make it easier to identify undecided students, providing an opportunity to offer additional \textit{individualized} guidance, even in large institutions.
- Regardless of size, assigning advisors by meta-major offers a means of providing both \textit{targeted} support (advisors are experts in their field), and \textit{individualized} support (one-on-one meetings).
CCRC Resources

Thank you!

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