

South Seattle College 2019 Guided Pathways Evaluation Feedback Memo

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This memo summarizes our observations from our June 2019 Guided Pathways evaluation site visit. (It also takes into account South Seattle's five year implementation work plan, submitted to College Spark Washington in May; annual progress report, submitted in July; and data reflections report, submitted in January.) The memo focuses primarily on those Guided Pathways essential practices where deliverables were due and notes progress made, work remaining, and outstanding issues and concerns.

Areas where significant progress has been made:

- Institutional change
- Engagement
- Technology
- Equity work
- College math

Areas where we continue to have many questions:

- Exploratory sequence
- Intake and advising

Institutional change. Three years into the Guided Pathways Initiative, we thought it would be a good time to take a look at South Seattle's Guided Pathways work from the perspective of institutional, transformational, systemic change. From the outset, we've noted that Guided Pathways is not only about the "what" of change (e.g., the essential practices that cover meta-majors, program maps, intake, advising, college level math and English within one year, etc.), but also the "how." Some key components of this include:

- *Visionary, active, and ongoing leadership provided from the top.* South Seattle has recently experienced multiple changes in top leadership, including a new president (hired from within), vice president for instruction, and associate vice president for equity, diversity, and inclusion. They are all knowledgeable about both Guided Pathways goals and equity work and are actively committed to having equity at the center of Guided Pathways. Throughout our site visit, it was our distinct impression that these leaders are having an inspirational and energizing impact on South's Guided Pathways work. It will be important for them to bring this energy to bear on helping to recognize and work through the problems as well as reward the achievements as Guided Pathways moves along here.

- *Shared, distributed leadership and broad, deep engagement.* As we noted in our College Spark Washington post-Achieving the Dream study issue brief on institutional change, it's important that top leadership support leaders throughout the college who are engaged in the work; that the college intentionally and strategically expand this leadership over time; and that engagement of faculty and staff be both broad and deep. (The institutional change issue brief can be found at [http://collegespark.org/grantee-results/achieving-the-dream/.](http://collegespark.org/grantee-results/achieving-the-dream/))

A notable component of Guided Pathways work at South during the first few years of the College Spark grant has been the involvement at the dean level. We see this as important, since deans can be critical movers of change in divisions and departments. However, in the first year or so, faculty engagement seemed much lower than we expected.

This seems to have improved in this last year. English faculty member Tish Lopez has been added as Guided Pathways co-lead, with two-thirds release time. In the last year, a dozen new faculty became involved in mapping work; advisor/faculty teams were created and tasked with helping to review maps; and the Guided Pathways Guiding Team has been using strategic, intentional approaches to getting specific faculty involved where needed. And there seems to be a renewed focus on related professional development, which is a priority of the new vice president for instruction. Thus, engagement work also seems to have become re-energized and more active, although there is still much room for expansion.

With regard to the advising/faculty mapping teams, we heard during the site visit that this was a collaborative process that helped promote relationship building between faculty and student services staff and greater understanding of each other's worlds. This kind of cross function, cross department collaboration is critical to the kind of systemic institutional change that Guided Pathways requires. Another example of this is the planned collaborative early alert design workshop with faculty and student services staff, mentioned below in the Technology section of this memo.

- *Case making.* South has now been involved in Guided Pathways work for almost five years. One general observation we have about case making—why is our college undertaking this heavy lift of transformational change?—is that colleges often spend up-front time and effort on this and then it tends to recede into the background. We have found that effective case making is an ongoing, iterative process, both to refresh the perspectives of people who have been involved in the work since the outset and to provide context and motivation for newcomers to the work. Therefore, we encourage South to continue such activity.
- *Equity-related work.* South sees Guided Pathways as a way to operationalize equity based approaches to student experiences and outcomes. They will be offering a science, equity, and social justice course this fall. A number of their people have gone through Puget Sound ESD's Racial Equity Framework training. Interest in this kind of work is spreading to the other district colleges. We will be interested to see where this goes in the next year or so.

Outstanding issues and concerns:

Because broad (across campus) and deep (significant involvement in the work) engagement is such an essential underpinning of institutional transformation, we wonder if South's coaches could help in continuing to strengthen this area. One example includes developing ways to engage faculty in advising systems design; faculty do not participate in advising at this college but their views on advising needs from the teaching and learning perspective could still inform advising redesign.

Overall, the kind of institution-wide transformation that is part of Guided Pathways is unlikely to occur without broad faculty buy-in and involvement in the work. To help colleges assess and reflect upon the extent to which they are implementing practices to fully engage the college community in Guided Pathways, the Initiative has developed an engagement rubric which is available from the SBCTC Student Success Center.

Areas of Study/Program maps. South's program mapping work has gone through several iterations, from its initial efforts during AACC Pathways to its first full set of 40+ draft maps with faculty participation. This past year, these maps were assessed by faculty/advising leads working together and using tools designed by South and by SBCTC, looking for patterns of overrepresentation and underrepresentation of courses, working to align math with pathways, etc. After this work, a campuswide email went out soliciting feedback on the maps. Other feedback opportunities were provided through drop ins, at division meetings, etc.

A couple of notable positive elements of this work in the past year include strengthening faculty/advising relationships during the creation and review of maps, and the inclusion of general education courses (English, math, etc.) into prof-tech maps. An additional interesting note is their report to us that the Seattle School District has adopted the district's eight Areas of Study and that related conversations are occurring with area four year institutions.

Outstanding issues and concerns:

It is not clear how these program maps will be used and how systematic their use will be; how maps will connect to ed plans or when/how students will be developing ed plans. We are not referring to technology challenges or delays here, but rather to what the plan is with respect to implementing program maps in a thorough and campuswide way.

Exploratory sequences. The state of this essential practice at the time of our visit was confusing and unsettled.

South attended the First Year Experience conference in Oregon last year and looked at a variety of options, from Area of Study FYE courses to a Career Day. They thought they had reached an internal agreement to have a required college success course, including a Guiding Team vote to do so. Then objections arose from some parts of the college. When we visited, the subgroup working on this indicated that the model had shifted to a modularized, competency based one; that they were starting by defining desired learning outcomes common to the three colleges; that each college might opt for different approaches; and that they would talk about approaches and assessments this summer. The intent is to design it this year and implement it in fall 2020.

We also heard it said that including a content course in the first two quarters might cover this practice. However, if the program maps are not going to be formally used, it is not clear how this

would apply; and it does not address the requirement that all undecided students must engage in exploratory experiences. As we talked to different people throughout the day, as well as on a subsequent follow up visit to hear more, it was clear that there continued to be different viewpoints and beliefs on this.

Other Cohort I colleges have adopted a multi-pronged approach to exploration, including online tools as part of onboarding, mandatory entry advising, mandatory college success course, and program maps, with content courses early on.

South might want to consider asking their coaches for help in working through this issue.

Technology. Significant progress has been made in this area. The process is district-driven and the district is providing resources for training, database, and coding work. There is a district-level technology committee with representation from all three colleges that has been empowered to plan and move technology implementation forward.

The first phase of Starfish (appointment making and note taking) is now operational. In early September, there will be a collaborative Early Alert workshop with faculty and student services staff, with the intent to pilot EA in fall. The career discernment piece has just been turned on, which would offer a student interest inventory and career matching. For now, students must be enrolled to be able to use this, but they may try to open this up to any admitted student to allow for early exploration. Specific plans for how this career discernment tool would be used and by whom have not yet been developed. The district-level committee plans to look at Ed Planner this summer as well.

Working as a district has helped move Starfish implementation and it may also boost individual college efforts to redefine task territories such that student needs are prioritized and addressed over previous structures of task “ownership” within the organization. This is an important advantage of having an “external” actor—in this case, the district—providing the impetus for change. More generally, the district’s push to have its three colleges be more aligned (a student success policy in itself, since many students cycle among the three colleges in their course-taking) is helping by promoting more direction and buy-in at South. And South has been able to lead and help shape the district’s framework based on its accumulated knowledge and experience in Guided Pathways.

Outstanding issues and concerns:

A significant concern for all Cohort I and II colleges is whether the state will be able to work out the necessary connections between the technologies already purchased by colleges to support Guided Pathways (e.g., Hobsons Starfish, EAB, and Civitas) and ctcLink.

Intake and advising. We continue to find the work in these areas somewhat confusing, both in the work plan and during our site visit. On our most recent site visit, it was not clear what all students would experience for intake. South was not yet sure about orientation content and expected to have multiple orientations based on their entry paths (reduced from 40+ to about 10 in their work on this in the last year or so). We also heard that there was a new districtwide online orientation, but the relationship between this and South’s possible orientations was not clear.

As with the exploratory sequence essential practice, there is a heavy emphasis here on individualization of intake and advising. Plans for intake design are based on defining common

learning outcomes and designing assessments—or self-assessments—to determine where students are with respect to these outcomes and how thus to direct them further. This was similar to the proposed FYE/college success course approach—start with identifying common learning outcomes; devise ways to assess or self-assess on these outcomes; and then find ways to individualize intake services to meet student needs. For example, South is wondering if students could apply the directed self-placement approach to entry advising.

One piece of advising resources South has developed in the last year is an advising syllabus for students. This was developed using NACADA principles of actively engaging students as responsible participants in an advising relationship and informed by practices at several colleges in the country. It is not clear exactly how this would be implemented or who would take what actions on the advising end to ensure that students actually get the advising they need.

South does not have faculty advising at all. Thus, they are resource-limited in advising in a way that most other colleges are not. It is possible that this best-practices-based advising syllabus is meant to be used by students primarily as a DIY approach to advising. We simply do not have enough information at this point to understand how South plans to use the syllabus and whether it will be used in a way that is systematic and assessable with respect to meeting real student needs. How will South know that students are getting the advising they need? How will participants—whether student or advising staff—be trained in its use?

It's also not clear what, if anything, is required. For example, the syllabus makes reference to advising appointments and ed plans, but are these required? (According to South's Guided Pathways implementation work plan, only one third of students currently have ed plans.) In addition, it's interesting to note that the syllabus makes no reference to related Guided Pathways essential practices (e.g., areas of study, exploration, program maps, etc.) and expectations (e.g., selection of an area of study upon enrollment and a program of study within two quarters, etc.).

The common element in South's intake and advising work is a focus on identifying desired learning outcomes as a foundation for design—which on its own merits makes good sense and is a way to try to tie together the bits and pieces of advising resources there. The plan for moving from design to implementation, though, seemed considerably less clear to us.

College math and English within one year. South was recently awarded a College Spark Washington Community Grant to develop and implement corequisite math with mandatory additional support. The first project year focuses on investigation of successful corequisite math programs at other colleges to see their models and hear about the nuts and bolts of creating and sustaining a program. The next two years will include determining course sequencing, course and support course structures and content, and revising placement and advising systems to support this.

South has made significant changes to its English pathway, making it possible for all students to reach college level English in one quarter or less. And it reports its equity gaps have closed. This work has involved curriculum redesign, professional development, and updating of placement practices. South might want to consider documenting its work in this area and sharing it with other Guided Pathways colleges.

Outstanding issues and concerns:

The Guided Pathways grant expectation is that a majority of students will earn college math in their first year. While the award of this grant is an encouraging development, South is just getting

started on the work and it is likely to be a challenging endeavor. We appreciate the developing will at South to tackle this.

As part of our College Spark Washington post-AtD study, we produced an issue brief on math reform that analyzes the lessons learned from AtD and their implications for policy, practice, and systems. These lessons may be helpful for South to consider as part of their work in this area:

- Set goals that target completion of college math, not just acceleration of precollege math.
- Take a comprehensive approach to math reform (e.g., placement, changes in curriculum and instruction, supports, etc.).
- Embed math reform in broader systems change (e.g., Guided Pathways).
- Focus not just on the “what” of change in terms of math reform, but also the “how.” This includes applying some of the institutional change lessons noted earlier to a concerted effort to improve math outcomes for students, particularly:
 - Active, engaged, intensely focused leadership from the top so that it is clear math reform is a serious priority for the college.
 - Shared, distributed leadership so that vice presidents, deans, division heads, and chairs are involved, as appropriate.
 - Broad, deep engagement and cross function, cross department collaboration to ensure that other faculty and staff for whom student math achievement is important have a voice in the work and can offer their perspectives.
 - Case making for why change needs to occur in math (including examination of institutional data on outcomes, with data disaggregated to identify equity gaps, and of math completion rate changes at colleges who have instituted major math reforms).
- Evaluate math reforms regularly as part of continuous improvement to see what’s working and what might need to be changed to meet the Guided Pathways expectation that a majority of students earn college math in their first year.

(The math reform issue brief can be found at [http://collegespark.org/grantee-results/achieving-the-dream/.](http://collegespark.org/grantee-results/achieving-the-dream/))

General comments: Because Guided Pathways is now being done at the district level, in some ways South’s work has been boosted even as it’s been perhaps slowed down a bit. There is a district governance structure that helps to reduce “noise” from the individual colleges.

At the district level, work is being done on self directed placement for English, Area of Study coding with the SBCTC, in addition to the Area of Study and Starfish committees mentioned earlier in this memo. Other areas of district-level coordination include precollege pathways, placement scores, aligning advisors with Areas of Study, and some joint mapping work between

South and North. There's a growing realization that it would be helpful for students if the three college websites looked more alike.

Challenges includes variability in resources and timing, as well as different organizational structures among the three colleges.