

South Seattle College
Case Statement
Institute #1

Instructions: *With your college team, develop a “case statement,” answering the question, “What is the evidence and the experience that convince us it is both urgent and important to commit to work as challenging and transformational as implementing guided pathways at scale, for all of our students?”*
Maximum length: 750 words.

Our students come to us for many reasons, some want to earn a transfer degree and move on to a university, some want training in a technical field, and some come to build language skills. Currently, 38% of our students are in academic transfer, 43% in professional technical programs (including apprenticeships), and 22% in Basic and Transitional Studies (AY1011-AY1415). However, one thing they all have in common is the desire to transform their lives through education, and successfully complete their goals. We know that “completion” can mean many things: graduation, taking prerequisites toward a program elsewhere, or even completing the one course they needed to perform better at their job. And, we know that approximately 90% of our students come with the intention of completing a certificate or degree.

The reality is that 8 out of 10 of these students leave without accomplishing that goal. Our current completion rate for students in all programs is approximately 12%, well below the Washington state average of 29% and below the national average of 19% for two-year institutions. Meanwhile, students can go to nearby colleges with much higher completion rates: Highline at 32%, Green River at 36%, Edmonds at 27%, and Shoreline at 26%. The top performing community colleges in the nation achieve rates above 60% (2013 cohort; Chronicle of Higher Education).

The focused attention on completion rates calls for an evolution of the two year college approach; historically, two-year colleges focused primarily on increasing access to education for a broad range of students. We have done so by providing a virtual cafeteria of education and training options. Here at South, we have been proud of offering 100+ degree and certificate options for students to choose from. We now see both the successes and failures of this approach. Enrollments are up and more students attend our colleges than ever before. In fact, our country’s diverse populations are concentrated in our community colleges. Unfortunately, however, many students do not find a path to completion, but instead find themselves lost in a maze of options. We embrace an open-access commitment, and we must increase our focus on student success and guiding students to complete their goals.

Other colleges have addressed this problem by implementing guided pathways. A guided pathways approach starts with clearly designed, coherent, and well-communicated programs; ample support for career exploration; and informed program selection. A student in a guided pathway sees very clearly the map of courses required to complete the program, develops a personalized, comprehensive plan to reach their goal, and receives structured support to ensure they stay on the path.

We all work at South because we are passionate professionals who care deeply about impacting our community with educational opportunity. Our current structures and technologies reflect who we *used* to be, but we now must embrace the change for where we are heading. By focusing on student success and completion in ALL corners of our institution, through program and resource redesign, we will fulfill our enrollment demands AND fulfill our values as a student-centered organization. It will also set us up for success in an environment that values accountability and rewards performance around persistence and completion. We are already well positioned because of all of YOU, your expertise, your effectiveness, and your passion.