

Transcription

Eloy: Hi. I'm Eloy Oakley, Chancellor of the California Community Colleges, and welcome to the first podcast produced by the California Community College system. The topic for today is Guided Pathways in community colleges, and I'm very pleased to be joined by Davis Jenkins, a senior research scholar at the Community College Research Center at Columbia University's Teachers' College. Together with Thomas Bailey and Shauna Jagers, he is the author of "Redesigning America's Community Colleges: A Clearer Path to Student Success". Welcome, Davis. How are you doing today?

Davis: I'm doing great, Chancellor, nice to be here.

Eloy: Well, it's great to have you, and it's great that you are our first podcast, because I can't think of a more relevant topic, a more contemporary topic, in our community colleges and Guided Pathways. And, of course, you've been a big part of it. So, first let me begin by saying thank you for all your great work, and to the Community College Research Center, you guys have really done an outstanding job of helping us in colleges throughout this country to really think about how to redesign our colleges.

So, to begin with, let me ask you, what are guided pathways, and how do they actually improve student outcomes?

Davis: Well, Guided Pathways are a systematic effort to change the student experience, and they do this by clarifying what are the various programmatic options that students can take at the college, where they lead in terms of careers and further education, that are mapping out those paths to jobs and further education. And, re-thinking the whole intake experience, so that students can be exposed to what the college offers, can get a taste of it, and develop a plan to explore and then move ahead in a field of interest to them. It also is an effort to track students' progress along their plans, and make adjustments when students maybe change their mind or when they're not making progress and need to redirect. And finally, it's an effort to make sure students are learning, not just within individual courses but they're building skills across the curriculum that will enable them to succeed both in the workplace and when they transfer, for example, to a university.

Eloy: Well, that's great. So, for many of our listeners, you know, I'm sure some of the questions might be, "Well, haven't we always had Guided Pathways? Don't students progress toward their goal? And, if they wanna take different classes, isn't that okay?" What has your research

found that really highlights the need for Guided Pathways?

Davis: Well, in general, for many students, they're really...coming into a community college, they're not helped to really explore what the options are and to develop a plan and follow it. If you just look at a community college website, you often see an alphabetical list of scores of programs, and there are lots of options there. And, if you drill down into them, the information about where they lead and what you should take is not there. And, of course, community colleges are constrained in their advising resources. So, we find that many students, if you just ask them, you know, "Where are you in your program? How much further do you have to go," many can't answer that.

And so, Guided Pathways is really an effort to make, you know, the exploration process more intentional, to use maps created by faculty and advisers to help students develop a plan. So, in many ways, it's...well, fundamentally, it is not about limiting students' choices. It's about making the choices clear to them and giving them experiences that they can use to explore fields to see if they're interested, to see if they're good at it, and, if so, to move ahead in a way that will lead them, in a timely way, an affordable way, toward their end goals.

Eloy: That's a great example. Now, I know some people would say and, certainly, I was guilty of it as a community college student, I took more credits than what I needed to transfer, and so do many of our students throughout the country. What if a student wants to take a course in economics even though they're majoring in, let's say, a health care field, or they want to learn different things that are not related to their particular major? Does Guided Pathways prevent them from doing that?

Davis: Absolutely not. In Guided Pathways, every student has their own plan that's customized, not only to what they may bring in in terms of previous credits but in terms of what they wanna study. I mean, say they're interested in, you know, business and marketing with, maybe, an emphasis in behavioral psychology. They can work with their adviser to put together a plan that would create an interdisciplinary kind of program of study. But, the key point there is they would work with the adviser who, in turn, would work with these maps, which are, sort of, general guidelines from faculty and advisers, to customize for the student a specific plan.

And, if the student, say, wants to take a course in, you know, some extra courses in psychology, even if their main area is business, that would be

fine. But they need to understand the implications of that. Is this a transferable course? Are they gonna get financial aid for this course? Right now, students are, sort of, putting together their own plans, navigating on their own, without the kind of guidance that can be provided by maps, and then talking with their advisers, putting together a plan that's customized to their need, but understanding what the implications of different choices are in terms of what they wanna take. And, if they change their mind, how can they redirect to another path that makes more sense to them, without losing credits and a lot of time [inaudible 00:06:18].

Eloy: Well, thanks for that explanation. So, we have a few minutes left, Davis. Let me ask you this. For those just coming into the community college world, and certainly for the people outside of higher education listening to this, it's hard to imagine how we got here. How do you think we got to this point where this is so much choice, where this is this sort of cafeteria style at community colleges? What, sort of, got us here that's forced us to this point where we're rethinking the design?

Davis: Well, I think it's partly our community college success in doing what we as a society asked colleges to do in the '60s and '70s and '80s, which is provide very low-cost access to people who, in the past, never would have experienced higher education. But, over the years, and for various historical reasons, this has led to a lot of offerings of courses without a lot of reflection about how does this add up to a program of study. Students these days have less time and money to explore, and, at the same time, as we've discussed, many more students, perhaps, that, in the past, need help with the exploration process from the start, they're not getting it from family members and others outside of school. College is an opportunity to provide them with this.

So, the combination of the changing economics of higher education, sort of a built-up focus on access rather than access and completion, and changing an increasingly disadvantaged student body, are causing colleges around the country, in California and across the country, to take a step back and look at our programs. And, again, we're finding the colleges that do this in an interdisciplinary way, with the faculty taking the lead but also getting input from advisers and others. We're finding it, first of all, in some ways, surprising when you try to put yourself in the students' shoes and see how unclear the paths are, and how what we've required for various reasons over the years doesn't necessarily help create a coherent program of studies for students. But, on the positive side, provides an opportunity to really rethink and make much more

coherent...and strengthen both the rigor and the relevance and the quality of the instruction we're offering.

Eloy: Thank you, Davis. I've been talking with Davis Jenkins, a senior research scholar at the Community College Research Center at Columbia University's Teachers' College. Thank you for joining us, Davis.

Davis: My pleasure, Chancellor. Thanks so much for your leadership, and good luck.

Eloy: All right. You've been listening to Eloy Oakley, Chancellor of the California Community Colleges, on our first podcast. Hope you join us again in the future. Thanks a lot.

Man: Be sure to join us for Part Two of our interview with Davis Jenkins, author of "Redesigning America's Community Colleges: A Clearer Path to Student Success", on the next California Community Colleges podcast. This has been a California Community Colleges presentation.