

# Transcription

Eloy: Hi, I'm Eloy Oakley, Chancellor of the California Community Colleges. Welcome to the California Community Colleges Podcast. The topic for today is guided pathways in community colleges. I'm very pleased to be joined by Davis Jenkins, a Senior Research Scholar at the Community College Research Center at Columbia University's Teacher's College. Together with Thomas Bailey and Shanna Jaggars, he is the author of "Redesigning America's Community Colleges: A Clearer Path to Student Success." Welcome, Davis.

Davis: Nice to be here.

Eloy: So to begin with, in our community colleges, and particularly in California, we'll talk specifically about California, we've had a challenge with what we call student outcomes, that is the number of years and the time it takes really for a student to complete their educational outcome, whether that's a certificate for a career, an Associate's Degree, or to transfer. In particular this issue affects students of color, first generation students, low income students. How will guided pathways help us refocus attention on these populations and help them get to their degree faster?

Davis: Well, first of all guided pathways help all students, including low income students, students of color, from the start begin in an intentional way to explore their interests and early on, by the end of their first term, develop at least a preliminary full program plan so that they can have a sense of how long it's going to take them to complete what they have to take. If students intend to transfer, ideally that plan should at least have a preliminary indication of what they're going to be taking at the junior and senior level at the university. Right now when students enter community colleges there's hardly any discussion of time to degree, of how long it's going to take. And in fact, students are really misinformed. For example, they're told that 12 credits is fulltime because that's the minimum number of credits you need for full financial aid. However, you cannot finish a 60-credit Associate's Degree in the four terms advertised in the catalog, in four terms, if you start with 12 credits. Now, we're not saying that every student has to take 15 credits per semester or 30 credits per year, but we are saying that every student needs to know where they are in their program and how far they have to go to complete it and what it's going to take. Right now, again, most colleges have no idea where students are or even what program they're in, except maybe to say they're maybe in a general AA program, but if the college doesn't know, the student doesn't know either. This is especially important for first generation students, who tend to be predominantly low income and

minority students, because they don't have the kind of guidance outside of college, family members and acquaintances, who can provide the kind of guidance to them if the college doesn't.

Eloy: So it sounds like you're asking colleges to be more intentional, more directive, and more intrusive in the lives of students and helping direct their way forward. Given that this is not only something that happens in the classroom, but everything that touches the classroom, what is the role of faculty in guided pathways?

Davis: The role of faculty is to help map out this initial process of exploration of students, and then the sequencing of courses and co-curricular learning activities that will prepare the students not only to complete the degree, but to advance to jobs in related fields and to transfer efficiently, that is, without extensive numbers of credits that won't apply toward a major in major fields at the university related to the student's area of interest. So faculty are the mappers. We have found it, working with colleges across the country, faculty have told us that they have found it to be a very powerful professional development experience to come together with faculty from across fields, working with university colleagues, working with employers, and working with college counselors and other student services personnel to map out a guided pathway for students, which again includes opportunities for exploration but really is designed to help students early on explore their field, see if this is something for them, and if so, move ahead. If not, redirect to another path that is a better fit for them. Faculty are also critical in helping advise students, whether or not advising is part of their formal job description.

But faculty are really important in helping guide students who are interested in their field of study, whether it be sociology or criminal justice or whatever, to advise students in the way that faculty do all the time informally, but more purposefully around these maps, "What should I be taking, what kinds of co-curricular activities should I be engaged in, internships and the like, if I'm interested in your field? Who can you connect me with at the university, outside in terms of employers, other faculty at the college who, given my interest as a student, can help me move ahead?" This is another, let's say informal role that is really critical for faculty to play in a much more systematic way. They do this informally, but this is an important role for faculty to play in guided pathways, because they're not only the expert in their subject areas, but they can help guide students along a path toward entering their field and connect them with other folks who can provide the connections that are

really critical to moving ahead in any field.

Eloy: That sounds great. Are there some examples, some colleges across the country that you've run across in your work that have implemented guided pathways and seen tremendous results? And if so, what did they do that we can all learn from?

Davis: So one good example is St. Clair Community College in Dayton, Ohio. It's obviously an urban institution. They looked at their programs. They had over, I think, 150 programs alphabetically listed on their website. Students were coming in from Dayton not really having a good sense of what the options are, and there was no process to help expose students to the programs of the college. So from the start they have reorganized and redesigned the entire intake system from the time the student applies on their website around these six, what they call career communities. Those are broad groupings of their programs, including business, liberal arts, social sciences, and the like. The whole intake system is designed to have students from the start begin the discussion, begin exploring what they're interested in, what they're good at. From the start students are required to take a career interest inventory.

I think they use the Focus 2 product, but there are other ways of doing this. They have days set aside that they call deciding days where they meet with faculty and others in the different career communities to talk about what they're interested in, and then in the first semester they take a student success course, one assignment of which is to create a full program plan. They work with advisers to make sure this is consistent with program maps that have been developed by the faculty. And then finally the college works to really help students get experience in their field of interest through internships, through class projects, through service learning and the like, so that early on students can get a taste of the field they think they're interested in and see, "Is this a good fit for me?" and we think even more than that, can begin to connect to people who can guide them along the way, both inside the college and outside in terms of employers and perhaps other people in the community that they would get in touch with. So it starts with exploration, moves to planning, helps students get experience, and then they help provide them with the information they need to finish strong.

That is, so that if they're intending to go into the workplace, they help students get their resumes in order with the job search, similarly with transfer, make sure they've got applications in and that they've taken the courses they need not just to transfer generally but to transfer with junior

standing in the major field of interest. St. Clair started this work probably in 2012-2013, and in the last couple years in particular they've seen dramatic increases in what we call early momentum. That is, students completing credits in their program of study in the first year, more credits in the first year, including the right math and the appropriate English, and students taking fewer credits in courses that are off their plan. They are beginning to see an increase in the number of credentials that students are earning, both certificates and Associate Degrees. So these are very substantial improvements that we haven't seen in the past with more discrete programmatic interventions.

Eloy: So it sounds like, really, although we're reorganizing ourselves and putting this focus on student preparedness and getting them the supports that they need to continue to progress, we're not talking at all about changing or watering down academic standards. We're going to continue to expect the very best from our students. Am I correct, Davis?

Davis: Absolutely. This is about making the standards in a given field clearer for students. Right now they have to find their own way. Part of this is identifying the critical courses that the faculty and statistical analysis have identified as critical to a given program area. So for example in healthcare it would be Biology 101, Anatomy and Physiology, Math, probably Statistics, and English. And for example in business it might be Econ 101, Management 101, Accounting 101. These are courses that really are critical to students succeeding in a given field. We actually find, other people find that students have to do well in these so-called critical courses if they're going to be likely to succeed in the field. So this makes very clear for students on these maps what are the critical courses, what do you need to get in these courses, and colleges are beginning to move the academic supports that they have, which to date are generally focused on math and English, which of course are important, but also to integrate supports into these other critical courses as well.

Eloy: Right. We have a few minutes left, Davis. So a last thought. California is embarking on this systemwide guided pathways initiative. It will undoubtedly be the largest experiment with guided pathways in the nation. What advice do you have for us out here in California?

Davis: I'd start with the mapping process. Again, we've found it to be and we've heard from faculty and counselors and others that this is a really rewarding and provocative experience to step back and take a look at our current programs, how they're mapped out for students, what

the look like on the website, which of course many students go to, and working with faculty across disciplines, between academics and student affairs, working with colleagues at universities in the relevant fields and with employers, to more clearly map out a path for students that isn't necessarily lockstep, that provides for exploration, including electives, but that is guided, not just sort of the students cobbling together their program on their own, that relies on the guidance of faculty advisers and our colleagues in the industry as well as universities to create this path of exploration and then advancement for students. If you do that and you find that everything is clearly mapped out for students, that the paths are already there and that they make sense educationally, that students are able to transfer with junior standing in a major, then I don't think you have to worry about pathways.

On the other hand, if you put yourself in the student's shoes, if you look at this from an educational standpoint, is this a coherent education that's allowing students to explore, giving them the breadth and the rigor that they need, and you find out otherwise, well, then I think this is a great opportunity to work with your colleagues to strengthen the education we're offering and improve opportunity for the students we serve. Given where we are as a country, this is some of the most important work nationally. California, which has been a leader in higher education across the decades, with this initiative and your leadership, Chancellor, and the leadership of everyone at all levels in the system, I think, is going to teach us a lot and once again lead us into a better future for higher education nationally.

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 Teacher's College. If you haven't read the book, it is, "Redesigning America's Community Colleges: A Clearer Path to Student Success." It's the best example that I've seen in writing about what we're trying to accomplish. Thank you for joining is, Davis.

Davis: My pleasure, Chancellor.

Eloy: You've been listening to Eloy Oakley, Chancellor of the California Community Colleges, on the California Community College Podcast.

Speaker: Be sure to join us for the next California Community Colleges Podcast. This has been a California Community Colleges presentation.