

# IMPROVING TRANSFER AT SCALE



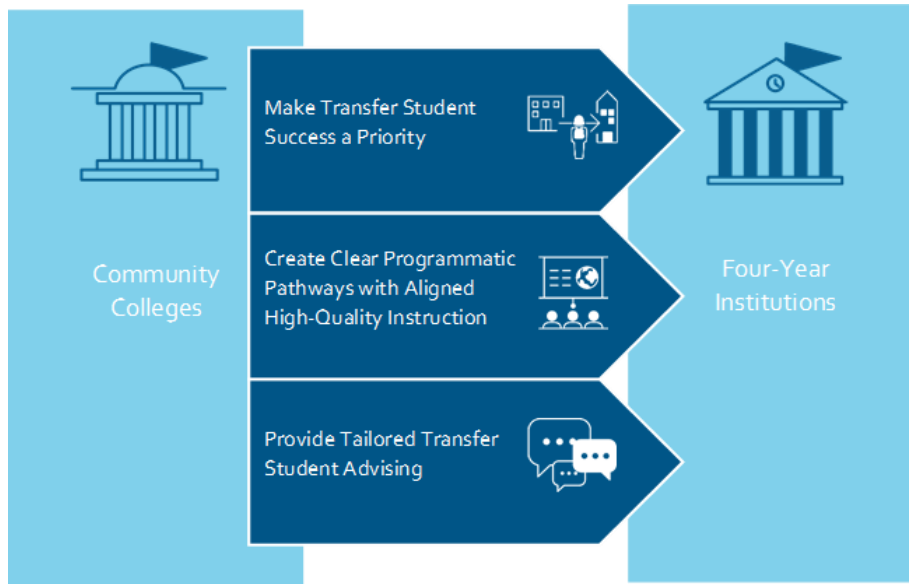
LEADING FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE EXCELLENCE: CURRICULAR RESOURCES

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

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# OVERVIEW



As four-year college costs grow and states decrease their contributions to higher education, tuition for a four-year education is escalating. With these higher costs have come diminished enrollments at many regional public and less selective private institutions. At the same time, selective colleges are increasingly being criticized for being “bastions of privilege” rather than “engines of opportunity.”<sup>1</sup> Both four-year colleges as well as students and policymakers are looking to community colleges to address these challenges. Many advocate for having students begin at a community college, then transfer to a four-year college, thus saving money but still earning a bachelor’s degree within four years. In theory, it sounds like a win-win.

In practice, however, it isn’t so easy. While more than 80 percent of community college students indicate a desire to transfer, only 14 percent successfully transfer and complete a bachelor’s degree within six years.<sup>2</sup> Today’s transfer processes impede student success. They are generally far too uncertain and complex, and reflect a lack of trust and major differences in culture between two- and four-year colleges. Even so, a number of two- and four-year colleges have made transfer work at scale—and we believe their methods are replicable. In 2016, the Aspen Institute’s College Excellence Program and the Community College Research Center (CCRC) published *The Transfer Playbook: Essential*

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<sup>1</sup> Bowen, W. G., Kurzweil, M. A., Tobin, E. M., & Pichler, S. C. (2005). *Equity and excellence in American higher education*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press.

<sup>2</sup> Jenkins, D., & Fink, J. (2016). *Tracking transfer: New measures of institutional and state effectiveness in helping community college students attain bachelor’s degrees*. Community College Research Center, Aspen Institute, & National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. Retrieved from <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/tracking-transfer-institutional-state-effectiveness.html>

*Practices for Two- and Four-Year Colleges*. This playbook—based on the practices of six sets of community colleges and universities that, together, serve transfer students well—lays out strategies and practices that community colleges and universities can implement at scale in order to improve transfer and baccalaureate completion outcomes for students. The practices in the *The Transfer Playbook* have been translated into assessment tools that two- and four-year colleges can use to assess the extent to which they are engaged in practices that align with top-performing transfer partnerships.

This module defines the transfer problem, takes participants through the process of analyzing institutional transfer data, introduces the strategies and practices from *The Transfer Playbook*, and gives participants the opportunity to plan for implementation at their colleges while anticipating potential roadblocks. Throughout the module, readings and activities focus on the president’s role in improving transfer and baccalaureate completion outcomes for students.

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## LEARNING OBJECTIVES & OUTCOMES

**After completing this module, participants will be able to:**

- Define the need for improving transfer outcomes and bachelor’s attainment for community college students.
- Identify and understand good sources for key metrics for analyzing transfer student success.
- Discuss and plan for the implementation of essential strategies to improve transfer outcomes.
- Examine practices used by successful community colleges and four-year institutions to improve transfer outcomes.
- Describe and discuss future challenges and next frontiers for improving transfer outcomes.

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## PREWORK

- Complete the *Tool for Assessing Progress Toward Adoption of Essential Transfer Practices for Community Colleges* (linked on the module homepage, and available for download here: <http://highered.aspeninstitute.org/tackling-transfer-accompanying-materials/>). Ideally, participants will complete the assessment tool with the support of a diverse team from their college, perhaps including deans and faculty members in key transfer program areas, advising and other student services deans or directors, transfer advisors, and financial aid advisors.
- Gather institutional transfer and baccalaureate completion data using the report templates available on the *Tackling Transfer Accompanying Materials* page: <http://highered.aspeninstitute.org/tackling-transfer-accompanying-materials/>.
- Interview five to eight students (either one-on-one or in a focus group) who intend to transfer next year. Participants should take care to select a cross-section of students from different disciplines and degrees of engagement with the college (not just student leaders). Participants should ask them the following questions, and bring their answers to the first session:
  - Have you selected your major? When did you select your major? Whom did you speak with when selecting your major?
  - Do you know which university you will be transferring to? When did you decide? What was the process for making that decision?
  - How many more credits do you need in order to graduate with your bachelor’s degree? How do you know?

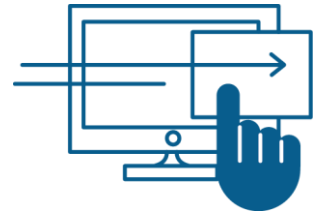
- Do you know which of your credits will transfer? Do you know how many of your credits will transfer to your major? Which courses will count? How do you know? Who helped you find that information?
- Do you know the cost of tuition at your transfer destination? How do you know?
- Who at this college has helped you prepare to transfer?

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## PRE-READING

- Aspen Institute, College Excellence Program. (2017). *Promoting equity and student success through transfer in partnership: A case study of two at-scale approaches*. Located in the Appendix of this module.
- Jenkins, D., & Fink, J. (2016). *Tracking transfer: New measures of institutional and state effectiveness in helping community college students attain bachelor's degrees*. Community College Research Center, Aspen Institute, & National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. Retrieved from <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/tracking-transfer-institutional-state-effectiveness.html>
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- Shapiro, D., Dundar, A., Wakhungu, P. K, Yuan, X., & Harrell, A. (2015, July). *Transfer and mobility: A national view of student movement in postsecondary institutions, fall 2008 cohort* (Signature Report No. 9). Herndon, VA: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. Retrieved from <https://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/SignatureReport9.pdf>
- Wyner, J., Deane, K. C., Jenkins, D., & Fink, J. (2016, May). *The transfer playbook: Essential practices for two- and four-year colleges*. Aspen Institute & Community College Research Center. Retrieved from [https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/2016/05/aspen-ccrc\\_transferplaybook\\_05-2016.pdf](https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/2016/05/aspen-ccrc_transferplaybook_05-2016.pdf)

# KICK-OFF ACTIVITY



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## KICK-OFF ACTIVITY: WEBSITE INVESTIGATION.....40 MINUTES

This activity will serve as participants’ introduction to the module and allow participants to think about the student experience of transfer by putting themselves in the students’ shoes. This activity is appropriate for all audiences. For participants who are not currently working at a community college, suggest a local community college and four-year university for them to investigate.

**1. Provide participants with the following directions, included on Handout 1:**

Imagine you are a student who is about to register for classes at your community college. You want to study business administration and transfer to the local four-year university so you can attain a bachelor’s degree. Go to your college’s website, and find the information that you need to select your community college courses and transfer successfully into the business program at the four-year institution. Then, go to the four-year university’s website and try to confirm that you are taking the right classes.

**2. Participants should think about the following questions from the perspective of the student:**

- What classes will you need to take in your first semester if you want to transfer into the business program at the local four-year college? How easy or difficult was it to find this information? How many clicks did it take?
- Is there a structured pathway—often reflected in a program map—to transfer to the four-year college and study business?
- What career options are available to you after you transfer and complete the degree? What do salaries look like for these career options? Is this information available to you on either website?
- Whom would you need to see to help you register for classes aligned to your transfer goal? Where would you go on campus to find that person? How easy or difficult was it to find this information on the website?

**3. Allow participants 15 minutes to explore the websites, then bring the group together and have a few participants share what they found.**

**4. Now, encourage participants to think about why it was difficult for students to figure out how to transfer. This is not a website problem—encourage participants to think critically about what is going on at their colleges that is causing the difficulties and gaps that they see manifested on the website.**

**5. Ask participants to look at the assessment tool that they completed for pre-work. Allow 15 minutes for discussion of the following questions in small groups:**

- Where did your college score “minimal” or “beginning”?

- What connections do you see between the practices with limited adoption and the gaps you saw on your website?
  - Where are the biggest gaps in your college's transfer processes?
6. **Allow time for participants to share a few key takeaways from the group. Note that as the group moves through this module, it will be important to keep the student experience of transfer in mind: What we design is not always what the students experience.**

# DEFINING THE PROBLEM



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## KEY LEARNING<sup>3</sup>

**Facilitator’s Note:** Begin the module by sharing a few videos ([Video.1](#), [Video.2](#), [Video...3](#)) from the Center for Community College Student Engagement of students talking about their frustrations with the transfer process. **Ask:** Does what you hear from these students ring true with what you found when you interviewed your own students? Could these students’ perspectives result from visiting your college’s website, based on what you learned when you acted as a student in the website exercise? Remind participants that it is important to keep student perspectives in mind throughout this module.

The vast majority of students—80 percent—who enroll in a community college report that they plan to one day earn a bachelor’s degree, but most never make it. Working with the Aspen Institute and the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, CCRC tracked a cohort of 720,000 community college students who started in the fall of 2007 in pursuit of a college credential. Just 33 percent of those students transferred to a four-year school, and 42 percent of those students graduated. In other words, only 14 percent went on to get a bachelor’s degree within six years of community college entry.

Students lose a lot of credits in the transfer process—just 58 percent of students can successfully transfer 90 percent of their credits, and 15 percent can’t transfer any credits at all. Furthermore, even when credits *do* transfer, they often don’t count toward a major.<sup>4</sup> Two years of general education plus two years of major courses does not always equal a bachelor’s degree. For 2 + 2 to equal 4, two- and four-year colleges need to collaborate and build strong program maps to support students before, during, and after the transfer process. Community colleges must own what happens to their students after they leave, and four-year institutions need to pay more attention to the success of transfer students, rather than focusing primarily on their first-year students.

Community colleges are uniquely positioned to make an impact in this area. Data show that institutional characteristics—program mix, urbanicity, and average socioeconomic status of students—are not predictive of how colleges perform in three primary metrics for measuring transfer outcomes: transfer-out rates, transfer-with-award rates, and transfer-out bachelor’s completion rates. In other words, what community colleges do matters to transfer student outcomes.

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<sup>3</sup> Unless indicated, all data in this section are from Jenkins, D., and Fink, J. (2016). *Tracking transfer: New measures of institutional and state effectiveness in helping community college students attain bachelor’s degrees*. Community College Research Center, Aspen Institute, & National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. Retrieved from <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/tracking-transfer-institutional-state-effectiveness.html>

<sup>4</sup> Monaghan, D., & Attewell, P. (2015). *The community college route to the bachelor’s degree*. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 37(1), 70-91.



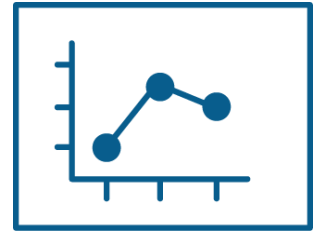
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## GROUP APPLICATION ACTIVITY: MAKING THE CASE FOR TRANSFER.....45 MINUTES

Why do transfer and baccalaureate completion matter to participants' institutions, communities, and four-year partners? There are a number of different cases for transfer, including:

- The equity case
  - The business case
  - The marketing case
  - The political case
1. **Distribute Handout 2 and assign a "case for transfer" to each table. Provide 20 minutes for a table discussion about the following questions:**
    - How would you make this case to the intended audience?
    - What benefit will increasing transfer and completion outcomes have for that audience?
    - How would you convince this audience that it is important to improve transfer and completion outcomes for community college students?
  2. **Next, divide participants into groups of four. Participants should hold up fingers to show what case they worked on, then stand up and make a group of four, one that considered each case. Take another 20 minutes for discussion in small groups. Each person should then share his or her case for transfer with the other group members.**
  3. **Bring the group back together to collect any key takeaways. What was common between these cases? What made them unique? How does this inform how you can make clear the importance of transfer at your own institution?**

# ANALYZING TRANSFER AND BACCALAUREATE COMPLETION DATA



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## KEY LEARNING

The Aspen Institute's College Excellence Program collaborated with the CCRC and the National Student Clearinghouse to publish the 2016 report *Tracking Transfer*.<sup>5</sup> The report identifies five metrics that community colleges and four-year institutions can use to measure and analyze colleges' performance in transfer and baccalaureate completion:

- **Transfer-out rate:** The number of transfer students who started at the community college divided by the total number of students in the cohort measured.
- **Transfer-with-award rate:** The number of transfer students who started at the community college and earned a certificate or associate degree from that college prior to their earliest enrollment at a four-year institution, divided by the number of transfer students in the cohort measured.
- **Transfer-out bachelor's completion rate:** The number of transfer students who started at the community college and earned a bachelor's degree from any four-year institution within six years of community college entry, divided by the number of transfer students in the cohort measured.
- **Transfer-in bachelor's completion rate:** The number of transfer students in the cohort measured who started at any community college and earned a bachelor's degree from the four-year institution within six years of community college entry, divided by the number of transfer students in the measured cohort who started at any community college and enrolled at the four-year institution for at least one term.

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<sup>5</sup> Jenkins, D., and Fink, J. (2016). *Tracking transfer: New measures of institutional and state effectiveness in helping community college students attain bachelor's degrees*. Community College Research Center, Aspen Institute, & National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.

Retrieved from <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/tracking-transfer-institutional-state-effectiveness.html>

- **Community college cohort bachelor's completion rate:** The number of students who started at a community college and earned a bachelor's degree from any four-year institution within six years of community college entry, divide by the total number of students in the community college cohort measured.<sup>6</sup>

While these measures are valuable, they don't tell us everything about how community college students fare after transfer to a four-year institution. Looking at other measures can help community college leaders drill down even further into students' transfer and baccalaureate completion outcomes in order to look for root causes for challenges students face during the pursuit of a bachelor's degree across two institutions. Colleges may consider gathering data on:

- Disaggregated transfer-out rates (with less than 30 credit hours, with 30 or more credit hours)
- Disaggregated transfer-out baccalaureate completion rate (by credit hour accumulation, by credential/degree type)
- Outcomes based on primary four-year transfer destinations
- Fields in which transfer students enter the four-year institutions and ultimately earn baccalaureate degrees
- Number of credits students take

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## GROUP ACTIVITY APPLICATION ACTIVITY: DATA DEEP DIVE.....60 MINUTES

To be prepared to complete this activity, participants should bring their own transfer data to the session using the report templates for community colleges provided by CCRC as part of the Tackling Transfer project, available for download on the Tackling Transfer resource page: <http://highered.aspeninstitute.org/tackling-transfer-accompanying-materials/>.

1. **Participants will break into groups of three or four people to become familiar with and begin to analyze their transfer data using the questions on Handout 3. Participants can use either their own institution's data or one of the provided data sets.**
2. **For 10 minutes, have participants look over their data independently and think about the following questions:**
  - What surprised you about these data?
  - What seemed consistent with what you already knew?
  - What questions do these data bring up for you?
  - How do these data compare to the national findings of institutional performance in the Tracking Transfer report?
3. **For 10 minutes, have small groups of participants discuss the following questions:**
  - What surprised you about these data?
  - What seemed consistent with what you already knew?
  - How have you worked with data like these before? What did you look at? What resources and ideas can you share with the group?

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<sup>6</sup> Jenkins, D., and Fink, J. (2016). *Tracking transfer: New measures of institutional and state effectiveness in helping community college students attain bachelor's degrees*. Community College Research Center, Aspen Institute, & National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. Table 3, p. 8. Retrieved from <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/tracking-transfer-institutional-state-effectiveness.html>

- What processes has your institution used to look at data like these? What resources and ideas can you share with the group?
- What questions do these data bring up for you?

**4. Give participants 30 minutes to work independently on the following questions:**

- What gaps do you see? What hypotheses do you have about these gaps?
- What questions do you have?
- What additional data do you think you'll need to answer these questions? How might you obtain those data?
- How would you find more information regarding equitable transfer and baccalaureate completion outcomes?
- How would you find out if students who transfer out with 30 or more credit hours do as well in baccalaureate attainment as associate degree graduates?
- Based on what you know, what do you believe needs to happen next at your college to improve transfer and baccalaureate completion rates?

**5. Come back together as a whole group and ask, "What questions do these data raise for you?" List the questions generated by the group.**

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**GROUP DISCUSSION: STUDENT VOICES.....25 MINUTES**

**1. Participants will take 20 minutes in small groups to reflect on the following questions on Handout 4, using the student interviews and the assessment tool completed for pre-work:**

- What surprised you most about the responses you heard from students? In what ways did the actual student experience diverge from the transfer process you believed your institution designed? What might account for these differences?
- How certain were students of their major? Of their transfer destination? Of the ability to transfer their courses and credits?
- Where did students get most of their transfer information?
- Look at the transfer assessment that you completed for pre-work. In what areas did your college score highest? Lowest? What connection do you see between these areas and the answers you heard from students?
- What specific parts of your transfer process could be improved to meet students' needs and improve their transfer experience?
- How can your college further capture the student voice as you work to improve transfer processes? Who in your college is the best person to work with in order to capture the student voice and understand the student experience?

**2. Explain that the next portion of this module will focus on specific strategies and practices that colleges can implement in order to improve transfer and baccalaureate completion outcomes.**

# STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES FOR IMPROVING TRANSFER OUTCOMES



In 2016, the Aspen Institute’s College Excellence Program and CCRC published *The Transfer Playbook: Essential Practices for Two- and Four-Year Colleges*. This playbook—based on the practices of six sets of community colleges and universities that, together, serve transfer students well—lays out strategies and actionable practices that community colleges and universities can implement at scale in order to improve transfer and baccalaureate completion outcomes for students. In this section of the module, participants will explore each strategy, considering the president’s role in it. After introducing each strategy and the associated practices, use the provided discussion questions help participants think about the role of leadership. Participants can discuss the questions in small groups.

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## STRATEGY 1: MAKE TRANSFER STUDENT SUCCESS A PRIORITY

**Communicate transfer as a key component of the institution’s mission.** Leaders of institutions with strong transfer pathways:

- Consistently and continually make the connection between strong transfer outcomes and their institution’s mission.
- Mobilize stakeholders throughout the institution around a set of shared goals for transfer outcomes.
- Recognize that improving outcomes requires strong relationships with leaders in partner institutions, and work with partners to promote shared accountability and publically reinforce their commitment to improving outcomes.

**Share data to increase understanding of the need to improve transfer outcomes—and the benefits of doing so.** At community colleges and four-year colleges alike, many faculty and staff hold misconceptions about their institution's success with transfer students. These misconceptions likely stand in the way of faculty and staff investment in the practices and policies necessary to improve transfer outcomes. Leaders can share data in order to:

- Dispel myths about transfer student abilities.
- Highlight the importance of transfer students to the institution's mission.
- Dispel misconceptions about institutional effectiveness.

**Dedicate significant resources to support transfer students.** Dedicating institutional resources to support transfer student outcomes does more than simply fund the implementation of practices. It also signifies to the college community that transfer is a priority. Resources may be repurposed to:

- Fund release time for faculty and staff to develop transfer pathways with aligned curricula.
- Offer fair financial aid to transfer students.
- Hire new staff to provide effective advising support for transfer students.
- Create structures for transfer students to access internships, undergraduate research, campus leadership, and extracurricular activities.
- Establish a visible "presence" on a partner's campus.

While many of these practices require the allocation of extra resources, they yield tangible benefits in the form of improved transfer and retention rates. They may also bolster recruitment efforts.

**Discussion questions:** What key actions could a president take to signal that transfer is a priority on a community college campus? What structures or incentives would a president need to change or eliminate?

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## STRATEGY 2: CREATE CLEAR PROGRAMMATIC PATHWAYS WITH ALIGNED HIGH-QUALITY INSTRUCTION

**Work collaboratively with colleagues from partner institutions to create major-specific program maps.** Effective program maps must include the academic requirements and learning-enhancing activities of each major at the four-year institution. Ideally, faculty and staff at the four-year college would initiate the design of these pathways, with faculty and staff at community colleges translating the first- and second-year requirements into coursework and other expectations for their own students.

**Provide rigorous instruction and other high-quality academic experiences to prepare students for four-year programs.** Community colleges must establish high academic expectations for their students, providing them with high-quality instruction both in and outside of the classroom. These colleges may partner with a four-year school to allow students to use lab equipment, redesign lower-level courses to teach students the skills they will need to complete upper-level coursework independently, or offer students the opportunity to co-enroll in courses at a four-year college before transferring.

**Establish regular, reliable processes for updating and improving program maps.** Program maps must be kept up to date—reflecting the most current course requirements and degree pathways—in order to be effective. Thus, community colleges and four-year institutions must work together to establish channels to communicate information about programmatic changes. In addition, partner institutions must meet regularly to review student outcomes in order to identify strengths or gaps in existing program maps. It is also necessary to update and align out-of-classroom activities, such as research opportunities or internships.

**Design unconventional pathways, as necessary.** Conventional “2 + 2” program maps—in which the student spends two years at the community college before transferring to a four-year college for the remaining two years—may not effectively serve all students. When necessary, effective partnerships develop alternative pathways, such as:

- Offering four-year degrees on the two-year campus.
- Establishing “1 + 3” bachelor’s degrees.
- Establishing dual-admission programs.

**Discussion questions:** There is a lot happening around guided pathways reform in the field. Guided pathways are “highly structured student experiences” that help students to complete degrees by creating “clear roadmaps to students’ end goals” and “incorporating intake processes that help students clarify goals for college and careers.”<sup>7</sup> When paired with on-ramps to programs for students who need developmental education, as well as advising supports throughout the college experience, these structured program pathways help to get students on track to complete, and keep them on track throughout their college experience. As you think about this work in your own institution, how can the president connect pathways work to transfer student success? How might a president draw connections between pathways and transfer success to prevent “initiative fatigue” among faculty and staff?

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## STRATEGY 3: PROVIDE TAILORED TRANSFER STUDENT ADVISING

### Community College Advising Practices

**Clearly articulate students’ transfer options and help them determine, as soon as possible, their field of interest, major, and preferred transfer destination.** Community colleges can utilize a variety of practices to encourage and help students to decide on a major and transfer destination as early as possible, including:

- Using the college’s website to encourage students to consider transfer pathways before they arrive
- Encouraging dual enrollment students to declare a program of study, rather than just taking general education courses
- Using advising sessions to support students in goal setting and in choosing a field of study as early as possible
- Supporting students who are undecided through career and major exploration and differentiated advising

**Continuously monitor student progress, provide frequent feedback, and intervene quickly when students are off track.** Institutions must provide both students and advisors with the necessary tools to support students’ progress along their pathways. To do this, community colleges can use a variety of different tools and practices, including early alert systems that notify advisors when a student is in danger of falling off track, and student information systems that allow students and advisors to monitor progress toward completion and transfer.

**Help students plan for and access the financial resources necessary to achieve their goals.** Students who are misinformed about financial aid processes may exhaust their financial aid eligibility in community college, leaving them with insufficient aid once they transfer. To combat this issue, community colleges can provide transfer-focused financial aid advising that helps students map out their estimated costs through the attainment of their bachelor’s degree and informs students of the longer-term implications of loans. Community colleges should also work with four-year colleges to create shared processes that assist students to successfully transfer aid to their new institutions.

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<sup>7</sup> Johnstone, R. (2015, November). *Guided pathways demystified*. National Center for Inquiry and Improvement.

## Four-Year College Advising Practices

**Commit dedicated personnel, structures, and resources for transfer students.** Effective institutions have dedicated transfer advisors who monitor transfer students' progress and identify barriers to their success. These advisors communicate with the advising staff at the community colleges in order to more successfully support students.

**Assign advisors and clearly communicate essential information to prospective transfer students.** Rather than starting the advising relationship once a student has registered at the four-year college, some schools have their advisors meet with prospective students who are likely to transfer from the community college. This practice can help build students' confidence that their credits will transfer, encourage students to complete their coursework at the community college, and ensure that students are receiving critical—and accurate—information about how to transfer successfully. Some schools are even making credit acceptance determinations before students enroll in the four-year college, helping students to choose a transfer destination where they can be successful.

**Strongly encourage transfer students to choose a major prior to transfer.** Four-year colleges can require students to declare a major in order to complete their transfer application, or can give admission preference to students who are "major-ready."

**Replicate elements of the first-year experience for transfer students.** Many four-year colleges plan a set of experiences for their first-year students to help them connect to campus life and develop skills that will help them to succeed in college. Transfer students would likely benefit as much as native first-year students from these experiences, but they rarely have the opportunity to participate in them. Colleges can adapt these experiences into a transfer student orientation integrating transfer students into the college.

**Exercise fairness in financial aid allocation.** Four-year colleges often prioritize incoming freshmen when distributing financial aid and other resources, such as on-campus housing. To help transfer students succeed, institutions can prioritize fair access to these resources and reserve key resources for transfer students.

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## GROUP APPLICATION ACTIVITY: PRACTICE BRAINSTORM.....30 MINUTES

We often describe our institutions as "transfer-oriented" or "transfer-friendly." We sometimes take for granted that the students who transfer to a college know how to do so successfully. Provide each table with a stack of sticky notes and a sheet of chart paper split into four columns: one column labeled for each strategy, plus one marked "other." Hang four additional charts around the room, one marked for each strategy, and one labeled "other." Using the sticky notes, participants will brainstorm about practices that a college could implement to improve transfer student outcomes. This activity is about institutional practice; we'll talk about the leader's role in implementing or encouraging these practices later. For groups made up of college teams, have participants complete the first round of brainstorming in role-alike groups before moving to college teams for the second round.

1. **Encourage participants to think about each of the three strategies discussed earlier: prioritize transfer, create pathways, and effectively advise students. Give participants 15 minutes to work in groups to brainstorm as many practices as they can, placing them on the chart paper where they think they best fit.**
2. **Next, have participants swap charts with another table. In table groups, participants should take 10 minutes to map backwards from each desired outcome, considering the following questions: Which practices brainstormed by your partner group do you think will lead to the greatest transfer student outcomes? Which strategies and practices do you think would have the greatest impact? Pull off the top two or three and put them on the shared whole-group chart for each outcome.**



3. Come back together and gather key takeaways from the activity. What is the president's role in ensuring that some of these practices are put in place? If you were to meet with the president of a four-year partner institution, what topics would you discuss in regards to advising? How might you partner in order to streamline existing transfer processes or create new ones?

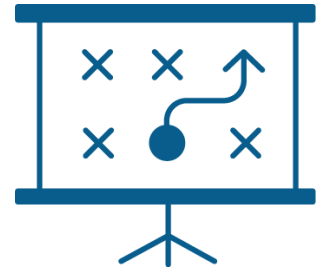
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## GROUP DISCUSSION: CASE STUDY.....60 MINUTES

Participants should read *Promoting Equity and Student Success Through Transfer in Partnership: A Case Study of Two At-Scale Approaches*, located in the Appendix of this module, as pre-reading before this session.

1. Assign each table one of the two programs—DirectConnect or Pathway to the Baccalaureate—to analyze and discuss. Using Handout 5, participants will take 15 minutes independently or with a partner to think about how their assigned transfer partnership demonstrates the essential strategies and practices discussed in *The Transfer Playbook*. Note that not every successful partnership will demonstrate every one of these practices. Encourage participants to think about what strategies or practices could be integrated into their assigned partnership to make the program even more effective.
2. Next, participants should take around 20 minutes to discuss the following questions in their table groups:
  - What were the strengths in the implementation of this partnership? What stood out to you as a key practice or strategy that made this partnership successful?
  - What next steps would you recommend this college take to improve transfer outcomes for its students?
  - What partnerships or programs for transfer currently exist at your college? What practices or strategies from this case study could be used to strengthen those partnerships or programs?
  - What was the role of the community college president in the partnership? What strategies did the president use when working with the four-year college or the K-12 system? How did the president market the college as a solution provider to outside partners?
  - What leadership lessons can you gain from this case study?
3. Bring the group back together. If participants looked at NOVA, they should put up one finger; if they looked at Valencia, they should put up two fingers. Invite participants to find a partner who looked at the opposite case study. Take 15 minutes with partners to discuss findings, recommendations, and implications for leadership.
4. Reconvene and debrief the group, focusing on the leadership lessons learned from these case studies. What is the president's role in creating a strong transfer partnership?

# PLANNING FOR ACTION



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## KEY LEARNING

**Facilitator’s Note:** As you introduce each idea, encourage participants to reflect on the following questions: **What is the president’s role in this step? What actions would a leader need to take to get this done?** Encourage participants to revisit *The Transfer Playbook* to explore each step in more detail.

Improving transfer and baccalaureate outcomes at scale will require a broad rethinking of institutional policies and practices. *The Transfer Playbook* includes an outline of steps—summarized here—that community colleges can use to start improving transfer practices.

**Collect data on transfer student supports, outcomes, and experiences. Form a task force of faculty, students, staff, and administrators to collect and analyze data on your transfer students and their outcomes.**

- Use data from your student information system to quantify which students are seeking to transfer, and identify which programs they are in.
- Use data from the National Student Clearinghouse to gain information about where your students transfer and how they perform.
- Review the support services available to prospective transfer students to assess their quality and the extent to which they are used by students.
- Review the college’s website and those of four-year transfer partners to assess the accessibility and accuracy of information for prospective transfer students.
- Assess your college’s relationship with the four-year colleges to which your students are most likely to transfer.
- Hold individual listening sessions and focus groups with current and former transfer students.

**Build an internal coalition for improvement. Form a “transfer champions” team of faculty, staff, and administrators to engage the college community and build a sense of urgency and commitment around improving transfer outcomes.**

- Hold meetings with academic and student services departments to review the data.
- Review summary information from student interviews and focus groups.
- Create a report summarizing common themes and recommended improvements.

**Build ongoing relationships with transfer destination partners.**

- Establish regular one-on-one meetings with the senior leaders at each partner to initiate the partnership and jointly commit to high-level goals.
- Request data from each partner on the performance and outcomes of students who transfer from the community college to the four-year college.

- Initiate and schedule regular conversations between senior academic and student services administrators at your college and at four-year partner colleges to explore what practices need to be put in place to build a highly effective transfer partnership.
- Initiate and schedule regular meetings between faculty and academic administrators from both institutions to identify common challenges and areas for improvement.

**Create a vision and plan for improvement. Based on the analysis of data and engagement with internal and external stakeholders, and with guidance and support from the transfer champions, the college’s senior leadership should adopt a guiding vision and plan for improving transfer policies and practices.**

- Ensure that the plan assesses current institutional practices and includes recommendations for improvement in the key areas of practice.
- Hold forums where the transfer champions can present draft findings and recommendations, and campus stakeholders can discuss and provide feedback.
- Ensure that the final plan includes defined goals and metrics, a description of how and when to measure and report progress on outcomes, an assessment of resource needs, and a clear communication strategy.

## INDIVIDUAL APPLICATION ACTIVITY: PRIORITIZATION AND GOAL SETTING.....45 MINUTES

This activity will be most impactful if participants have access to their institutional data as well as local labor market data. Depending on the makeup of the group and the time available, this activity may be assigned as homework.

**1. Often, community colleges may have several four-year college partners to which students transfer. Participants can use this activity as they consider which four-year colleges will be the best suited for developing deeper partnerships. Provide participants with 40 minutes to independently reflect on the following questions, using Handout 6:**

- List all of the four-year colleges that are transfer destinations for your students.
  - Roughly how many students transfer to each destination each school year?
- For the top five transfer destinations, consider the following:
  - What are the overall four-year graduation rates at each college?
  - What are the graduation rates for your students who transfer there?
- Among those with relatively strong student outcomes, consider the following:
  - Where do you already have strong relationships with presidents and provosts?
  - Where do faculty and administrators at your college already have strong relationships?
  - Who has shown signs that they care about and are prioritizing transfer student outcomes? How do you know?
  - Where is there a rising demand for workers with bachelor’s degrees? In what fields? In what regions? Which of the four-year partners has strong programs in high-demand fields? Which partner is located in a region with a high demand for workers with bachelor’s degrees?
  - What do you know about how each partner has managed change initiatives in the past? Which partner institutions seem amenable to change?
- Ask yourself the following two questions: Which partner institution seems most ready and willing to partner to improve transfer outcomes? Where do you think students will have the best post-graduation outcomes? Then ask yourself, Which four-year partner do you think would be the best to reach out to first to begin this process?
- Once you have selected your top choice for a partner, list the people you would meet with to begin this relationship.
- Imagine that you are meeting with the president of this university. What SMART goal (Specific, Measurable, Ambitious, Realistic, Timebound) would you hope to achieve as a result of this partnership? (Here’s an

example: Five years from now, an additional 100 students in each of our top five transfer majors will successfully transfer to State University A.)

2. **Gather the group together for a quick debrief. Ask: What did you prioritize most when choosing an institution to partner with?**

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## INDIVIDUAL APPLICATION ACTIVITY: PRE-MORTEM ANALYSIS.....35 MINUTES

If participants have completed a pre-mortem analysis as part of the module *Leading Internal Transformational Change*, refresh their memory of the process rather than having them reread the article. If the group is made up of college teams, this activity should be completed in those college teams.

1. **Participants will read Gary Klein’s article, “[Performing a Project Premortem](#)” from the *Harvard Business Review*. Then, participants should independently take 20 minutes to do the following using Handout 7:**
  - Consider the goal for outcomes of a transfer partnership that you created in the previous activity.
  - Assume that, five years from now, you have failed to achieve that goal (or, if it is a long-term strategy, have failed to achieve the elements you expected to have achieved in five years).
  - On the chart on the handout, identify the likely major causes of that “mortality.” What specifically might happen that could derail the effort? Who are the actors? What are their motivations?
  - For each cause, delineate specific leadership strategies you will employ to anticipate and avert or address the challenges. Add more rows as needed.
2. **Then have participants find a partner and take 15 minutes to provide one another with feedback on their pre-mortem analyses. What causes of mortality did you or your partner miss? What feedback can you offer one another on suggested leadership strategies?**

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## GROUP APPLICATION ACTIVITY: PROPOSING A TRANSFER PARTNERSHIP.....40 MINUTES

1. **Give participants 20 minutes to independently prepare talking points for a meeting with the president of the four-year college that they prioritized as a partner in the earlier activity. Invite participants to consider the following as they draft their talking points using Handout 8:**
  - Put yourself in the shoes of the four-year college president. What problem might his or her institution have that could be solved by partnering with you?
  - What are your goals for this partnership? How might those goals appeal to the president of the four-year college? Which goals in particular might overlap with or complement the goals of the four-year college?
  - Why should the four-year college care about improving transfer and baccalaureate completion outcomes?
  - What resources would your college provide that would be useful to the four-year college?
  - What specifically will you ask for?
2. **Then have participants find a partner and practice their talking points with one another for 20 minutes. They should role-play, with one partner acting as the community college president, and the other acting as the president of the four-year college. Finally, they should provide one another with feedback on their talking points. What worked well? What could be better tailored to the audience?**

# ROADBLOCKS AND NEXT FRONTIERS



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## KEY LEARNING

The colleges and universities described in *The Transfer Playbook* developed high-quality partnerships that have yielded strong transfer outcomes. Yet there are several areas in which even the most successful partnerships can improve. The following emerging practices are described in more detail in *The Transfer Playbook*.

**Improve bachelor’s degree outcomes for high school “dual enrollment” students.** Dual enrollment students face additional roadblocks to successful transfer and baccalaureate completion. Some universities question the quality of instruction for dual enrollment courses and have considered limiting the type and number of credits that will transfer from these programs. Additionally, dual enrollment students often do not select their courses strategically, leaving them at a disadvantage when they attempt to transfer into a specific program or major.

**Define transfer requirements in terms of competencies.** Competencies describe the skills and knowledge that students should have acquired at the conclusion of their coursework. Demonstration of these competencies could ideally provide a useful indicator of students’ preparation.

**Monitor student progress across the entire transfer pathway.** Community colleges and four-year institutions can create systems to better share data—about students’ interest in transfer and students’ performance after transfer—across institutions, allowing both partners to benefit.

**Connect transfer pathways to regional labor market needs.** Community colleges and four-year institutions could work together with employers and economic development groups to identify career fields in demand in the local economy. This information could be used to design aligned programs and pathways that extend from the K-12 system, through the community college and the four-year university, and to the workforce.

**Discussion question:** Which of these next frontiers is your college best situated to address? Why?

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## GROUP APPLICATION ACTIVITY: DILEMMAS OF A COLLEGE PRESIDENT.....50 MINUTES

1. Explain that the following dilemmas will allow participants to put themselves in the shoes of a college president. For their assigned dilemma, encourage participants to draw on the strategies, practices, and next frontiers for improving transfer outcomes that we have discussed in this module.
2. Assign each table one of the scenarios (A-C) on Handout 9. Give the group 30 minutes to discuss the scenario and think of next steps for the president to take, using the following questions:
  - What should be the role of the president in this situation?
  - What are the right kinds of questions the president should be asking, and to whom should the president be addressing these questions?
  - How can the president help the college understand the “why” in dealing with this issue?
  - In what ways should the president help the college keep the end goal in mind?
  - Should the president be thinking through issues of scale, resources, sustainability, and outcomes? If not, how does the president make sure these issues are addressed?
3. If groups finish early, they can begin to work on the next scenario.
4. Bring the group back together. Quickly discuss each scenario and the proposed next steps. Encourage participants to truly view the scenario through the eyes of a president—not another administrator. Ask: What kinds of questions should this president be asking, and of whom? Record questions from across scenarios on chart paper.

# APPENDIX: PROMOTING EQUITY AND STUDENT SUCCESS IN TRANSFER THROUGH PARTNERSHIP

## A CASE STUDY OF TWO AT-SCALE APPROACHES

This case study describes and compares partnerships developed by two large community colleges—Valencia College in Orlando, Florida, and Northern Virginia Community College in Annandale, Virginia—that have dramatically increased the numbers of students who successfully complete an associate’s degree and transfer to a four-year university. Both programs are nearly a decade old, and both have been tremendously successful. They share a focus on guaranteeing students’ access to a specific partnering four-year institution and on supporting their ongoing success after transfer. Both programs were implemented at scale—that is, immediately serving hundreds or thousands of students—rather than starting as pilot programs. And both partnerships were designed to make the transfer pathway between partnering institutions more equitable—to ensure that more students of color, first-generation students, low-income students, and students from other underserved populations would successfully transfer from community college and go on to earn a bachelor’s degree. Indeed, Valencia’s and Northern Virginia’s transfer programs illustrate the kinds of student outcomes that are possible with bold leadership and well-managed program design and execution.<sup>8</sup>

At the same time, the structures of the two programs differ in critical ways that illustrate the kinds of choices leaders must make in designing and pursuing such cross-sector partnerships. One of the fundamental differences between the two is their design, which can be characterized as *universal versus targeted*. With neighboring University of Central Florida, Valencia College developed a partnership, DirectConnect, to provide *universal* access to a guaranteed transfer pathway. All students enrolling at Valencia or three other participating community colleges can elect to participate by checking a box at the time they apply to the college, and then must complete requirements that include attainment of

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<sup>8</sup> Details about each transfer program were drawn from interviews with the respective presidents and from publicly available documents (as cited). We are grateful to Sandy Shugart, president of Valencia College, and Bob Templin, former president of Northern Virginia Community College, for assisting in the development of this case study. All content is the sole responsibility of the Aspen Institute’s College Excellence Program and does not reflect the policy, opinions, or endorsement of any institution profiled or individual quoted herein.

an associate's degree. By contrast, Northern Virginia Community College partnered with K-12 school districts and George Mason University to design a recruitment-based transfer pathway program, Pathway to the Baccalaureate, which specifically *targets* underserved and at-risk students, who are the only students eligible.

The difference in strategy reflected in these two programs provides an opportunity to examine the benefits, strategies, risks, and outcomes of targeted versus universal program designs. In this case, the programs focus on advancing student success in transfer, but we believe the lessons are also applicable to other student success and reform initiatives.

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## DIRECTCONNECT

In 2004, Valencia College president Sandy Shugart received a phone call from John Hitt, president of the University of Central Florida (UCF). Shugart remembers that call: "I told him, 'You've got a problem, John, local people can't get into your university anymore.'" "I know," Hitt replied. The conversation between Shugart and Hitt that day, and many that followed between the two presidents, resulted in the development of one of the nation's most effective transfer partnerships between a community college and a four-year university.

The call Hitt placed to Shugart that day was in response to a meeting the day prior in which presidents from a consortium of Florida's community colleges and public four-year universities had gathered to talk about a growing set of tensions threatening the relationship between sectors. Although Florida's public higher education system had been built on a 2 + 2 architecture—that is, designed so students could move seamlessly from their first two years at community colleges into a state four-year university—the four-year institutions had over time been growing increasingly selective in admissions. The acceptance rate at UCF, for example, had dropped from the high 60s to around 40 percent in less than a decade. The changing character of UCF and other public four-year institutions in the state meant that more and more students who started in community colleges like Valencia were not benefiting from the transfer pathway intended by the state's 2 + 2 policy.

To pick up the excess demand for four-year degrees among students unable to transfer to their local universities, several community colleges across Florida began (with much national attention) to offer bachelor's degrees—essentially competing with their neighboring four-year institutions. That competition and the risk of what some viewed as "mission drift" in the two-year sector had begun to put pressure on the relationships between institutions—all of which was coming to a head when the presidents met in 2004.

At the same time as the tension around community colleges offering bachelor's degrees was coming to a head, Shugart and other administrators at Valencia were concerned about stagnant completion rates of students pursuing associate of arts (AA) degrees. Graduation rates for students in associate of applied science (AAS) programs at Valencia had always been very strong, reflecting in part the tendency nationally for terminal degrees linked to specific fields or careers to have higher rates of completion. AA degrees, however, are primarily designed as academic preparation for transfer. Shugart was worried that the relatively low graduation rates for Valencia's AA degrees were a function of Florida's 2 + 2 policy, which conveyed to students that they could transfer and be successful *whether or not* they completed an AA first. Many students would thus transfer early from community colleges into four-year institutions, showing up in community colleges' completion-rate cohorts but never seeing a reason to complete the AA.

If students who started at Valencia went on to attain a bachelor's degree at high rates, low AA completion rates might have been acceptable. But that was not the case. Students were finding it increasingly hard to find spots at universities as freshman or sophomore transfer students, as a result of the rising selectivity and shrinking capacity at those institutions. In addition, data showed that students transferring without first completing an AA were at much greater risk of failing to complete a bachelor's degree. Indeed, studies have shown that completing a transfer-oriented AA



degree before transferring *significantly* improves the odds of successfully completing a bachelor's degree.<sup>9</sup> In other words, the 2 + 2 policy in Florida was creating incentives that negatively impacted students—by allowing them to transfer before completing an AA and thus decreasing their chances for success—and in turn hampering community colleges' completion rates. As Shugart puts it, there was no “value proposition” made to students about the completion of an AA before transfer—and both students and institutions were suffering as a result.

With students failing to benefit from the completion of AA degrees at community colleges and failing to find seats (and to succeed) at four-year institutions, Shugart and Hitt designed a solution that they hoped would meet the needs of both of their institutions, their various stakeholders, and most importantly, the students and the economy of their region. Shugart did not want to go in the direction of other community colleges in the state and start creating bachelor's degree programs to compete with UCF. Instead, he wanted to create something *with* UCF that would offer to students a “stronger value proposition” about transfer and guarantee their success. Following their first meeting, Hitt sketched out (“literally on the back of an envelope,” Shugart recalls) the design of a partnership that would create sustained, large-scale access for Valencia's graduates to transfer as juniors into UCF. Those ideas became the core elements of the DirectConnect program that today guarantees the transfer of thousands of Valencia students directly into UCF bachelor's degree programs, many offered right on Valencia's campuses.

**A value proposition about transfer—and completion.** Making a value proposition to students meant two things for Shugart and Hitt. First, it meant that the solution they designed had to go beyond the existing parameters of the state's 2 + 2 policy and create a direct and definite linkage between the community college and the four-year institution; in other words, it had to give transfer-aspiring students a specific and tangible destination. Shugart believed that a clear, guaranteed path to achieving the goals students had when they enrolled—that is, to transfer to a four-year institution—was critical to ensuring the success of the same first-generation and low-income students who were most likely to get squeezed out by the rising selectivity of UCF and other public universities. To be compelled to change their college-going and completion patterns, those students in particular needed something more than the state's 2 + 2 policy alone provided, something as close to guaranteed four-year access as possible.

In addition, students needed a reason to complete an associate's degree at Valencia, and UCF needed to ensure that students who completed the associate's degree were in fact academically prepared. In the end, requiring an associate's degree prior to transfer was the solution. Ensuring that students were enrolled long enough to successfully earn an AA degree—unlike when students were enrolling for only a few courses before attempting to transfer—allowed Valencia, using Shugart's analogy, “to guarantee the product.” Moreover, requiring students to complete the associate's degree before transferring has facilitated greater collaboration between faculty and administrators from Valencia and UCF, who now work together more deeply than before to align Valencia's degree requirements with the academic expectations of faculty and departments at UCF. After years of work together, the schools now have a system where students can be confident that if they earn an AA at Valencia, they are prepared to transition directly into upper-level courses at UCF. UCF administrators and faculty can also be assured that Valencia transfers are as academically prepared for those courses as rising UCF juniors. The proof is in the data: Though Valencia transfer students are more likely to attend part-time than native UCF students, their final cumulative GPAs at UCF are comparable to those of native students (3.15 and 3.20, respectively), and their completion rates (around 66percent) actually meet or surpass the six-year graduation rates of native students (around 63 percent). In other words, DirectConnect has given students a concrete pathway to transfer and developed structural bridges to ensure their success once they do.

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<sup>9</sup> Crosta, P. M., & Kopko, E. M. (2014). *Should community college students earn an associate's degree before transferring to a four-year institution?* CCRC Working Paper No. 70. Columbia University, Teachers College, Community College Research Center. Retrieved from <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/associate-degree-before-transfer.pdf>. The study found that completion of an AA degree before transfer was associated with a 50 percent greater likelihood of bachelor of arts completion within four years after transfer.

## STATE CONTEXT

Florida has long been a frontrunner in policy efforts to facilitate transfer from community colleges to four-year universities, including a statewide 2 + 2 program that guarantees that an associate's degree from a community college in the state will be accepted as equivalent to the first two years of a four-year program at the state's public universities. While policy measures like articulation agreements and 2 + 2 programs may ease some of the barriers to transfer, evidence shows that policies alone have limited impact in prompting more students to successfully transfer.<sup>10</sup> In Florida, as is the case nationally, rates of transfer from community colleges are low, even for those students who declared the intent to earn a bachelor's degree. And rates are even lower among low-income and first-generation students. Florida's open-access community colleges serve around two-thirds of the state's high school graduates, but they serve 82 percent of freshman and sophomore minority students.<sup>11</sup> Without mechanisms to ensure equitable transfer access, the increasingly limited capacity (and rising selectivity) at public universities thus threatened to create a serious bottleneck in the state's higher education and workforce development pipeline, while at the same time dramatically exacerbating inequities in college access and attainment.

## ELEMENTS OF THE MODEL: UNIVERSAL DESIGN

DirectConnect students are guaranteed admission to UCF if they successfully complete an associate's degree at Valencia. To reach all interested students, UCF now offers more than a dozen of its bachelor's degree programs on Valencia College's West and Osceola campuses. This enables DirectConnect participation from students who might find it difficult to commute from their homes near the community colleges to UCF's main campus more than an hour away. The courses are taught by UCF faculty and identical to those offered at the main campus. Thus, while the program is open to all students, from the beginning it was very much focused on creating a more equitable and accessible pathway to a bachelor's degree for the predominantly low-income, first-generation, underserved minority students in the region.

In addition to guaranteed admission to UCF, DirectConnect participants receive joint advising from Valencia and UCF staff about admission and financial aid to ensure a smooth transition. As part of the DirectConnect partnership, UCF provides dedicated academic advisors for participating students after they transfer. The institutions also conduct joint fundraising for scholarships and have built two shared buildings, including a joint-use facility for engineering instruction.

All Valencia College students are eligible to participate in DirectConnect, regardless of their socioeconomic status or academic background. Interested students simply have to check a box on their Valencia application indicating that they intend to transfer to UCF. Valencia and UCF have committed to not implementing a GPA requirement or other criteria that might put conditions and limitations on students' access to transfer. The open-access nature of the program has not limited student success: DirectConnect students graduate from UCF at the same or higher rates than other transfer students.

The decision to build DirectConnect as a broad-based, universally available intervention, rather than one targeted to particular groups of students, was rooted in the commitment of Shugart and his staff to making changes that benefit all students. "A lot of the targeted efforts we were seeing around the country had at their core a sense of scarcity, and we didn't want to fall into that way of thinking," Shugart says. "We wanted an assumption of abundance, that whatever needed to be done for any student could be done for large numbers of students. We were predisposed towards thinking about scale, and that disposed us to thinking about a broad-based design."

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<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., Anderson, G., Sun, J. C., & Alfonso, M. (2006). Effectiveness of statewide articulation agreements on the probability of transfer: A preliminary policy analysis. *Review of Higher Education*, 29(3), 261-291.

<sup>11</sup> Quinton, S. (2014, February 10). Why Central Florida kids choose community college. *National Journal*. Retrieved from <http://www.nationaljournal.com/next-america/education/why-central-florida-kids-choose-community-college-20140210>

Despite its broad-based design, DirectConnect is fundamentally an equity-focused initiative, reflecting Valencia's vision of its commitment to the economic and social health of the region. The program disproportionately serves students who are low-income, Hispanic, and first-generation college-goers given the demographic composition of the region and those students' greater likelihood of enrolling in community colleges rather than four-year institutions. "One of the purposes of this program," Shugart reflects, "was to help us make our contribution to diversifying the professions in Florida." In a statement to the State Board of Education and UCF trustees, Shugart emphasized that thinking just about how to diversify the freshman class, at UCF or elsewhere, was short-sighted. "What matters much more is who gets to be a lawyer, or a doctor, or into other professions." Enrolling nearly 80 percent of Florida's students of color, community colleges are vital to ensuring the diversity and quality of the state's future workforce. That diversity can be fully achieved only by ensuring equitable access to a transfer pathway to a meaningful bachelor's degree for all freshmen who start at colleges like Valencia.

## IMPLEMENTATION

Underlying the straightforward elements of DirectConnect—guaranteed acceptance to UCF for Valencia graduates, shared responsibility for advising, and co-located bachelor's degree programs—there were many complex and interwoven practices, policies, and structures that had to change in order to make the program work. Leaders at both institutions had to contend with friction between the collaborative values of the partnership and the distinct cultures of their institutions.

At the outset, the two presidents had to gain board approval for the partnership plan. "What we were proposing was a policy change, not just a new program," says Shugart. While his board was fully supportive of the concept, making the partnership work on the ground required Shugart to strategically allocate resources in ways that caused some concern among his board and other senior leaders. For example, Shugart invited UCF to co-host Valencia's long-held annual fundraiser for scholarships and split the proceeds to benefit DirectConnect students after transfer. Some at Valencia wondered why the community college should share resources with the larger and wealthier four-year institution, but Shugart maintained that building a sustained partnership required a commitment not only on paper but in practice as well. Jointly raising and utilizing funds for scholarships was, to Shugart, symbolic of both institutions' shared commitment to and investment in DirectConnect students, not just to their own organizational stakes in the partnership.

Implementing guaranteed transfer acceptance and sharing responsibility for students' success after transfer also meant that faculty at both institutions had to align their expectations and curriculum so that students could experience a seamless academic transition—a tremendous challenge for all transfer initiatives nationally. Differences in prestige, resources, and mission between community colleges and public research universities can create tensions that can deeply confound efforts to align curricula. At four-year institutions, for example, disciplinary cultures often lead faculty to believe that "those students" from community colleges are not prepared to succeed in their classes unless they have learned the basics in the curricular pathways of their own institutions (despite the fact that faculty often do not know which students are transfers from community colleges). And at the two-year institution, faculty often rightfully resist having their counterparts from the four-year sector come and "tell them how to teach" their subjects.

Shugart relied on data to provide clear evidence of the need for the program and of Valencia students' success after transfer. He presented data on transfer rates, equity gaps, and the academic success of transfer students. Doing so helped depersonalize and ground conversations about levels of preparation among transfer students, build a case for the urgency of the problem, and get everyone on the same page about what could and should be done.

With the foundation of shared understanding and goals, faculty at Valencia and UCF went about the deep work of aligning their curricula and their expectations course by course. This required each department to look at data on students' success in UCF's gateway courses, acknowledge strengths and challenges, and then—where data showed that student success needed to be improved—devise a plan to ensure better alignment. Not every professor in every academic discipline welcomed these conversations, leading to varying progress across departments. And leaders at Valencia and UCF recognize that the deep and effective structural changes that came about through DirectConnect

have to be maintained by reiterative and routine practices of collaboration, inquiry, and evaluation. But data on the success of Valencia's transfer students offer promising indications that the changes have made a huge difference for students. Moreover, DirectConnect has demonstrated its effectiveness as a sustainable, large-scale structure for providing greater equity in transfer opportunity for Valencia's students.

## OUTCOMES

- Since 2006, more than 46,000 students across the four participating community colleges have completed a prospect card signaling their desire to transfer to UCF through DirectConnect.
- More than 12,000 of those have since enrolled at UCF.
- More than 5,000 Valencia graduates have transferred to UCF through the DirectConnect program.
- Of newly enrolled students at UCF in 2011-12, 35 percent of those who transferred from Valencia College were Hispanic, compared to only 20 percent of first-time (non-transfer) freshmen.
- Between 2006 (when DirectConnect was implemented) and 2012, the number of AA degrees awarded at Valencia College increased by 97 percent. By contrast, the number of AS degrees and certificates increased by 60 percent, and enrollment increased by only 40 percent.
- Associate's degree completion rates for Valencia's Hispanic students have surpassed those of all other groups, increasing from 33.7 percent to 45.5 percent in just a decade.
- Valencia DirectConnect transfers to UCF have a 66 percent graduation rate (within four years after transfer), compared to the 63 percent six-year graduation rate of first-time full-time (native) students at UCF.
- At the time they graduate from UCF, Valencia DirectConnect transfer students have a cumulative GPA of 3.15, nearly identical to the 3.2 average GPA of native students.

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# PATHWAY TO THE BACCALAUREATE

As president of Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA) in the early 2000s, Bob Templin observed a convergence of trends that worried him immensely: "The economy was shifting very rapidly, and the region faced a significant shortage of middle-skilled employees," says Templin. "There was a concern in the business community about where we were going to find these new workers." The college's 2004 strategic plan, titled *Strategic Vision 2015: Gateway to the American Dream*, described the problem precisely:

Northern Virginia has one of the most vibrant high-end knowledge economies in America, fueled by arguably the best educated workforce in the world. More than 300,000 new jobs and 300,000 job vacancies are expected to be created in Northern Virginia in the next 10 years. Critical worker shortages are projected in the life sciences, financial services, homeland security, nursing and other health care fields, as well as teacher and front-line technical work, threatening to stall the region's continued prosperity. This threat stems not from a shortage of people, but from a shortage of educated workers with the right skill sets. Limited worker

training capacity in the region translates into increasing worker shortages that threaten our region's economic growth and competitiveness.<sup>12</sup>

At the same time, Templin had long been acutely tuned into the dramatic population growth and demographic shifts taking place in Northern Virginia, which were due in large part to waves of immigration from diverse Asian, African, and Latin American countries. While the combination of a growing population and a booming economy should have meant a flourishing labor market, businesses were still struggling to find workers equipped with the necessary levels of training and education. "A significant portion of the immigrants in our community were languishing on the periphery," says Templin. "The fastest growing part of our population was unable to participate in an economy that had significant unmet demand for middle-tier skills."

There is perhaps no sector better suited than community colleges to addressing a mismatch between the needs of the growing economy and the education levels of the growing population. Community colleges nationally serve as the on-ramp to higher education and job training for populations of all ages and backgrounds—and disproportionately for those from low-income, first-generation, immigrant, and other marginalized groups. Templin saw the situation in the early 2000s in Northern Virginia as one his institution was uniquely responsible for addressing.

But Templin's vision for NOVA's role in the Northern Virginia region has always extended beyond a singular institution operating in isolation. Throughout his tenure as president, Templin and his staff strategically built partnerships with businesses, educational institutions across sectors, government, and nonprofit organizations—all to ensure students' success not only while enrolled at the college, but also before and after transferring to four-year universities and in the labor market after completing associate's or bachelor's degrees. According to Templin, effective partnerships like these must be designed to solve the different problems that each potential partner may be facing, while also enabling the collective to achieve something that could not have been accomplished working in isolation. Businesses need more educated workers, governments need fewer citizens relying on social assistance programs, colleges and universities need greater diversity, and so on. Templin looked for the convergence of these needs as opportunities to build fundamentally new structures that tie together multiple partners around a shared set of objectives.

Such an opportunity arose when Virginia Governor Mark Warner issued a challenge to educators to make better use of the 12th-grade year in an effort to improve the state's educational outcomes and strengthen the workforce. That challenge, with the promise of funding to support innovative ideas, prompted Templin to set up a meeting with the president of neighboring George Mason University (GMU) and the newly appointed superintendent of the largest school district in the region, Fairfax County Public Schools. Templin suggested that the three organizations put forth a joint proposal to the Commonwealth. Together they created the Pathway to the Baccalaureate partnership, which today helps thousands of low-income, first-generation students move seamlessly from high school into community college, and then directly into a four-year university.

"We started with their issues." Early on, Templin could see how a partnership between neighboring high schools, NOVA, and GMU could support the mission of his institution. More and more jobs of the future required a bachelor's degree, which his college did not offer. Yet the growing parts of the population had little direct access to a four-year college.

The existing transfer relationship between NOVA and GMU wasn't enough to bridge this gap. So, Templin devised a working theory of what could be: By finding students in high school and leading them along a seamless transfer pathway, partner institutions could fundamentally change the transfer success rates of thousands of low-income and minority students.

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<sup>12</sup> Northern Virginia Community College, Office of Institutional Research, Planning, and Assessment. (2010, November.) *Strategic Vision 2015: Gateway to the American Dream*. Retrieved from <http://www.nvcc.edu/about-nova/directories--offices/administrative-offices/college-planning/planning/NOVA2015GatewayStrategicPlanrevisionNov2010.pdf>

Rather than leading with what he hoped to accomplish from the perspective of his institution, Templin’s strategy for building a new cross-sector partnership was to anchor the conversation with his colleagues from the other institutions in their own concerns about achievement gaps, diversity, and equity in student outcomes. Templin worked with leaders at the Fairfax schools to better understand their concerns, particularly about the low college-going rates of historically underserved populations relative to the high college-going rates of other students. “I believed that if we started with their concern, it would end up being the same thing as ours—and indeed it was.” The Pathway partnership offered the high schools a way to provide targeted support to many of their students who might not have otherwise considered college a possibility.

On the four-year institution side, NOVA and GMU already had in place a strong transfer relationship and mechanisms to ensure the successful transfer of NOVA graduates. But Templin knew that leaders at GMU had a strong personal commitment to further diversifying the university’s student body. Templin presented the idea at a meeting with top GMU administrators, focusing on how a new robust transfer pathway starting in 12th grade could ultimately bring more of the region’s low-income and underrepresented minority students into the university via transfer. The dean of admissions agreed and volunteered to spearhead a team to help implement the program at the university.

In the end, the partnership met a perceived need of each institution and allowed them, collectively, to dramatically expand access to a bachelor’s degree for bright, motivated, low-income and first-generation students from the region.

## REGIONAL CONTEXT

NOVA serves more than 75,000 students every year across seven campuses in the Washington, DC, metropolitan region. NOVA is one of the most internationally diverse community colleges in the nation, serving students from more than 180 countries. Its student body is 18 percent Hispanic, 17 percent African American, and 14 percent Asian. And NOVA students come largely from working-class and low-income families in the region—40 percent of all full-time entering students receive federal Pell grants.

While the Virginia suburbs of Washington, DC, have for many years been among the nation’s most prosperous communities, the rapid growth of a high-skilled economy has created stark inequality between the educated and uneducated segments of the populations that live there. As Templin and his staff looked at the growing segments of their community unable to participate in the region’s robust economy, they recognized that too many individuals never even made it to community college. While all community college presidents are concerned about the success of the students they enroll, Templin was concerned about the success of the many marginalized students who *were not* enrolling at his institution and might never access higher education at all.

Templin knew that bringing those students into higher education and onto a path toward economic mobility would require starting in high school—finding them where they were—and creating a structure of support that would make the transitions into and through community college much clearer and more certain than they had been.

## ELEMENTS OF THE MODEL: TARGETED DESIGN

The Pathway to the Baccalaureate is both a structure and a package of services. Structurally, the partnership creates a framework for shared resources between the three institutions, alignment between academic curricula and expectations, and a guarantee of admission to GMU for NOVA graduates with a 2.85 or higher GPA. Within that

structure, the Pathway program provides a continuous stream of “intrusive, developmental advising” to students to help them manage all of the academic and social factors involved in staying enrolled and on track to transfer.<sup>13</sup>

Specifically, once students are accepted into the program in 12th grade, they meet with a dedicated Pathway advisor (located in the high school) to complete an individualized academic plan. They continue to meet regularly with their advisor and attend workshops and social events, which all take place during the school day, to prevent students from having to choose between those opportunities and their after-school job and family commitments. When it comes time to apply to NOVA, participants receive early placement testing and course registration on-site at their high school.<sup>14</sup>

Once they arrive at NOVA, Pathway students continue to receive dedicated advising. They participate in university visits, career and academic enrichment programs, service-learning opportunities, and cultural events. The program provides a specific package of academic supports and structures designed to minimize the obstacles that threaten the success of many community college students nationally. For example, many Pathway students have been placed in innovative “fast-track” remediation courses designed to help students get into college-level courses as soon as possible and stay on track for transfer. In the first semester, Pathway students are also required to take a College Success Skills class, which focuses on effective study habits and strategies for navigating the academic responsibilities that sit on top of the students’ many other responsibilities. The Pathway program even has a dedicated “early-alert” tracking system that notifies Pathway advisors when students have below a C average at mid-semester.<sup>15</sup>

While at NOVA, Pathway students receive individualized assistance with every aspect of preparing for transfer, including applying for financial aid, completing the application for admission, and choosing a university and major. After transfer, dedicated Pathway advisors at GMU continue to meet with participants to ensure that they are transitioning smoothly and offer ongoing academic and cultural enrichment opportunities.

Because the Pathway program never received the significant outside funding Templin and his colleagues hoped would come from the governor’s initiative, the program required that the educational institutions themselves share responsibility for program costs. Of course, none of the partnering institutions had significant extra resources available to shoulder the entire cost of the program, but all three partners nonetheless agreed to a funding arrangement in which each pays for the services needed to support students on its campuses. The high schools pay for NOVA advisors who work on-site at the high school during the school year, and provide space for advising and events. NOVA pays for the dedicated Pathway advising staff across its campuses and for the training and orientation that high school advisors receive during the summers on NOVA campuses. GMU, in turn, commits resources to supporting students after transfer. Despite the equal intent of the funding arrangement, Templin acknowledges that NOVA often ends up dedicating more of its resources to ensuring that the program is successful.

As described above, the Pathway program was designed to address concerns among public school administrators about college-going rates of underserved populations, and Templin’s goal of bringing more students from the region’s most marginalized populations to his institution. Initial conversations about the program’s design thus focused on which students would be targeted for the program and how they could best be identified and recruited. Templin and his colleagues wanted to cast a wide net in order to integrate as many of the most marginalized students as possible. They also wanted to ensure that they reached students who would be most likely to benefit from the program—students with both the aptitude (though not necessarily of the sort measured by standardized tests) and the aspiration to earn a college degree.

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<sup>13</sup> Pathway to the Baccalaureate College Success Consortium 2013-2014 Fact Sheet.

<sup>14</sup> Whitmire, R. & Esch, C. (2010). Pathway to the baccalaureate: How one community college is helping underprepared students succeed. *New America*. Retrieved from: <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/policy-papers/pathway-to-the-baccalaureate/#>

<sup>15</sup> Whitmire & Esch (2010).

The criteria for selection into the program were initially anchored in the high school's data on achievement gaps—particularly for students of color—but broadened to include a range of students who were “at risk” for not going to college, including low-income students, students of color, those in foster care, and students with disabilities. In lieu of GPA or test score requirements, students are selected by teachers and counselors, who are asked to recommend those who show the promise to succeed in higher education but who might fall through the cracks of the conventional college application process. As a way of indicating that they intend to commit to the program, recommended students must complete an application.

Targeting the Pathway program to particular segments of the population has, not surprisingly, involved some tensions and compromises. Operationalizing the criteria of “at risk,” for example, has required ongoing judgments of the staff at both NOVA and its public school partners about the students most in need of the substantial resources the program offers. Balancing the “at risk” criteria against the need to recruit students with the right mix of desire and aptitude, measured in unconventional and largely subjective ways by school staff, also poses challenges. And even with the hundreds of additional students enrolling at NOVA through the program, Templin sometimes worries that the recruitment criteria may be leaving out large numbers of students that could benefit from the Pathway services—those who may not have the most severe or prevalent risk factors but still need targeted support and, without it, may never make it to college.

## IMPLEMENTATION

Focusing on how a structured “pathway” partnership could help address concerns at each of the three institutions was a major component of Templin's strategy for getting the collaboration off the ground. But in fact, the strategizing started before Templin even made the call to the new superintendent of Fairfax County Public Schools. Templin knew that not all superintendents of districts in the region were likely to be immediately amenable to the idea of having a specific community college intervening and recruiting students within their schools—particularly if it required them to also bring their own scarce resources to the table. He also knew, though, that he had something to offer the newly appointed chief at Fairfax: a substantial new initiative to help define him as a new leader. “You start where you can find common interests or address somebody else's concerns with what you're trying to do,” Templin says of his strategy. Later, when resources get tight or implementation hits a bump, that common ground helps keep everyone invested.

After nearly a decade, eight school districts are now part of the College Success Consortium underlying the Pathway to the Baccalaureate program. But even as additional districts came on board—often as a result of hearing about the success of the program from parents and students in other districts—Templin and his staff repeated the same strategy within districts, looking for receptive principals and schools with large proportions of low-income and underrepresented minority students. The endorsement of superintendents and principals was critical to the success of the partnership at each stage of its development. Templin and his staff also took care to listen and gain buy-in as they implemented the program *within* high schools. As Templin candidly acknowledges, bringing NOVA staff into the high schools required a slow process of trust building and avoiding a potential collision of cultures. “There were both policy and cultural issues that had to be negotiated carefully and diplomatically,” recalls Templin. “Policies with regards to who can be in the school and meeting with students, and cultural issues like meeting during the school day, which is a key part of the program. . . . Many of the teachers considered that a disruption.” Templin and his staff carefully hired advisors who had public school experience to ensure that they understood the concerns of teachers and administrators within the schools.

Implementation of the Pathway program met fewer challenges on the two-year-to-four-year transfer side. The long-standing transfer relationship between NOVA and GMU, and the well-documented academic success of transfers, helped mitigate cultural challenges often related to questions about merit and academic caliber. Administrators and faculty at GMU, for the most part, welcomed the opportunity to bring more NOVA students to their campus. “If we hadn't had that successful history,” Templin notes, “we might have had to have a conversation about quality.”

Even so, the dramatic growth in the number of transfer students coming through the Pathway program did prompt some resistance—largely because of the unanticipated scale of the program. The dean of admissions at GMU was an early and passionate proponent of the program; yet, like most leaders at selective universities, he also faced pressure



to help the institution rise in the rankings by enrolling an ever-more exclusive freshman class. At the same time, others in the university, even those committed to the goal of diversifying the student body, believed that GMU needed to maintain its character as a traditional, residential, four-year institution. By 2007-08, enrollment in the Pathway program had far exceeded what anyone expected, testing both the will and the capacity for GMU to guarantee admission to ever-greater numbers of transfer students from NOVA. Despite these pressures and discussions about the potential need for capping program enrollment, no limits have been put in place and the program has been maintained as originally designed—an outcome Templin attributes to the strong and enduring support from top administrators at GMU, who helped design the program and maintain a sense of ownership of it.

## OUTCOMES

During the 2013-14 academic year, more than 8,000 students were participating in the Pathway program. The exceptionally high rates at which these students transition from high school to college, are retained and academically successful in college, and go on to earn associate's and bachelor's degrees have earned the program national recognition.<sup>16</sup> Among the most impressive statistics:

- Of participating students, 88 percent enrolled in college directly after graduating high school.
- Of participating students, 81 percent were retained from the first to the second year at NOVA, compared to 72 percent of all first-time, full-time students.
- The rate at which Pathway students complete an associate's degree (required for transfer to GMU) is more than 50% higher than that of NOVA's overall AA completion rate.
- Nearly 80 percent of the first few cohorts of Pathway transfers to GMU have graduated with a bachelor's degree.
- Between 2005 and 2012, 1,180 additional minority students transferred from NOVA to GMU (more than double).
- The number of minority transfer students who earned their associate's degree from NOVA prior to transfer to GMU increased sixfold.
- The number of minority students who transferred to GMU with Pell awards tripled.

Witnessing the tremendous success of Pathway students has prompted administrators at NOVA to think about ways to provide the most effective elements of the program to all students at the college. For example, now all first-year students are required to participate in new student orientation and to take a First-Year Success Seminar—both elements of the Pathway model that proved highly effective. Though targeted in design, the Pathway program has allowed administrators to develop and demonstrate the efficacy of practices and policies to promote retention and completion for all students.

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<sup>16</sup> See, e.g., Anderson, N. (2014, April 11). Community college pipeline eases higher-ed route. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from [http://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/magazine/community-college-university-pipeline-eases-higher-ed-route/2014/04/10/fb783934-a561-11e3-a5fa-55f0c77bf39c\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/magazine/community-college-university-pipeline-eases-higher-ed-route/2014/04/10/fb783934-a561-11e3-a5fa-55f0c77bf39c_story.html)