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# From Voice to Action: Putting Students at the Center of College Redesign

Unpacking the Student Experience in Learning Communities Deepens Capacity for Change at Two Colleges

By Career Ladders Project

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## INTRODUCTION

***“We keep focusing on the need for student voice, and this [project] really puts it into action. The key is that we are then making choices and changes based on the results of the student focus group, not just gathering student voice. The action after the focus group is really important. An action plan needs to come from the results.” —Jessica Champagne Hansen, Guided Pathways Facilitator, East Los Angeles College***

Understanding the student experience is essential in student-centered college redesign, a core principle of guided pathways. One way to gain a deeper understanding of that experience is through focus groups. But gathering student perspectives is only the beginning.

El Camino College (ECC) and East Los Angeles College (ELAC) asked Career Ladders Project (CLP) to conduct student focus groups on their campuses in spring and summer of 2019. Instead of conducting the focus groups for the colleges, CLP used a train-the-trainer model to build the capacity of the colleges to conduct this research on their own, from design through implementation and analysis. CLP provided the training, co-facilitated some of the focus groups with the college teams, performed an initial round of coding and analysis, and trained college practitioners in identifying and coding emerging themes and transcript analysis.

Part 1 of this brief outlines the train-the-trainer process and illuminates how conducting the focus groups changed the colleges’ and the participants’ overall practice and approach to college redesign. Part 2 details the findings from the focus groups themselves, including insights gained into how the experiences of students who participate in learning communities differed from those of the general college population. For this project, the two college drew students from their established learning communities such as Puente Project, First Year Experience and Umoja-Project Success. Learning communities are, in this case, cohorts of students who have classes in common, receive focused support services, and belong to a campus community.





## PART 1 | Focus Groups Changed Our Work and Our Practice

Findings from the focus groups created changes in the guided pathways work both of colleges and of the practitioners themselves. College practitioners who participated in this project reported growing in their own capacity as professionals involved in redesign.

*“[Student Focus Groups] really paved the way for our student ambassadors, because this is student voice. We’ve been in so many meetings where student voice just becomes a tagline. I feel like we received great student feedback, which really helped us find the areas we wanted to focus on. That led to all the work with the Student Ambassadors and the amazing projects. All of this progress grew out of the student focus groups.”* —Jessica Champagne Hansen, Guided Pathways Facilitator, East Los Angeles College

At ELAC, the focus groups helped to integrate student voice into the college’s redesign work. ELAC guided pathways work

is led by five guided pathways facilitators who coordinate with 48 guided pathways ambassadors including faculty, classified staff, administrators, and student ambassadors. The student ambassador positions are paid positions. A crucial role of the student ambassadors is to collect student voice to guide redesign efforts, especially when a particular issue is difficult for faculty and staff to resolve. Student ambassadors design instruments to gather student perspectives and analyze results and they serve on the guided pathways work teams and the steering committee. The ambassadors have also designed a student feedback system for program maps.

*“I encourage people to not only find out what the numbers are saying, but to dig deeper and try to include the student voice in the process. People have taken it to heart and are inviting students to committee meetings, even just as visitors. It’s really powerful to hear real students and how this work is affecting them and how it can affect them in the future.”* —Jenny Simon, ESL Instructor, Guided Pathways Lead, El Camino College

At ECC, the focus groups similarly helped to integrate student voice into guided pathways redesign efforts. The shift at ECC is less formal than the student ambassadors structure at ELAC, but it represents a significant change in the campus culture and ways of working.

The ECC guided pathways team was particularly motivated when they learned that students in the focus group placed high importance on having a personalized experience. This has had an impact on the design of ECC success teams, where the college is trying to incorporate more personalized support for students.

***“Most of my prior experience with data has been with quantitative data, but now I have ventured into analyzing qualitative data as well. I also have gained a deeper appreciation for qualitative data and its importance in understanding students’ experiences.”***

—Arpi Festekjian, Guided Pathways Facilitator, Associate Professor of Psychology, East Los Angeles College

Practitioners at both colleges developed a greater awareness of how critical it is to consistently incorporate student voice in their work as a means to understand the student perspective and to ascertain how changes may affect students. Practitioners also mentioned the importance of creating systems to gather student voice so that it becomes incorporated into their daily practices and other programs and initiatives they’re implementing.

***“I think [this process] made me more aware of the idea that students must be included in the process because they are the ones that are most affected by any changes we make with guided pathways. So, their voice is key, both in terms of what should be changed and how the changes we make affect them.”***

—Jenny Simon, ESL Instructor, Guided Pathways Lead, El Camino College

The experience of conducting focus groups provided professional development and built capacity at the colleges. Practitioners noted that training in focus group facilitation, coding, and analysis empowered them with skills to gather and analyze data, even if their role or responsibilities within the institution did not include data analysis. Empowering more faculty and staff to collect and analyze data is part of the movement to “democratize the data.”

***“Data seems to be the focus of all of our work this year in GP. I think it helped to frame the qualitative data, which I really value from student voice. It also reinforced the idea that we are able to gather our own data and that data literacy does not mean that we all need to work as a data analyst from 9 to 5 to use data in our projects.”*** —Jessica Champagne Hansen, Guided Pathways Facilitator, East Los Angeles College

## THE PROCESS

***“The most important things I learned were the power of the student voice, and how much it makes an impression and shows the stories behind the numbers. Quantitative data, while powerful, doesn’t really stand by itself. If it’s backed up by stories from the real people involved (students), it’s that much more powerful.”*** —Arpi Festekjian, Guided Pathways Facilitator, Associate Professor of Psychology, East Los Angeles College

The guided pathways teams at ECC and ELAC had looked at a lot of quantitative data from their respective colleges including time-to-completion and credit accumulation. They wanted to better understand how students navigate the college experience and the barriers they encounter. The teams wanted to learn about students’ stories, adding faces and personal experiences to the numbers. They had a hunch that students in learning communities had a better college experience. They also wanted to build their own capacity to conduct focus groups for future inquiry.

Using a Participatory Action Research (PAR) model,<sup>1</sup> CLP worked with ECC and ELAC to understand differences in the experience of students in learning communities and the general population. CLP, ECC, and ELAC focused on basic issues related to guided pathways: choosing a major, choosing classes, why some students stop or drop out, and what colleges might do to improve the student experience.

Together we honed a research question, navigated technical issues such as institutional research board approval and informed consent processes, and conducted focus groups and analysis. The research question was straightforward: Are there successful strategies in learning communities for meeting student needs that may inform a guided pathways framework? The data collection method was clear: student focus groups with learning community and general population students.

CLP and the colleges used the following process in conducting the focus groups and analyzing findings.

## Step 1 - Assemble the Team

The teams of focus group facilitators included instructional faculty, counseling faculty, and an institutional researcher.

## Step 2 - Identify Goals and Focus

Both ECC and ELAC knew they wanted to conduct student focus groups. Both campuses also have strong learning communities and wanted to know more about the experience of students in learning communities as well as the general student population experience. The research team used CLP's focus group protocol from [Bringing Student Voices to Guided Pathways Inquiry and Design](#)<sup>2</sup> and made slight modifications which were vetted with external experts.

## Step 3 - Train Focus Group Facilitators

CLP drew on a focus group specialist to provide in-depth training for the identified campus teams. The training covered the purpose of focus groups, how to recruit students, the focus group protocol, and use of non-leading words and body language. The college researcher-practitioners then conducted a practice focus group with college students to get more comfortable with the process and shared feedback immediately after the practice focus group.

## Step 4 - Navigate Research Approval Process

CLP helped each team navigate their campus' research approval process. One campus had a formal institutional research board; both campuses required informed consent forms for focus group participants.

## Step 5 - Schedule and Recruit Students

College teams identified opportune settings and potential incentives for student participation. One college used an already-scheduled training for a large group of student workers, another setting was a learning community meet-up. Other focus groups were scheduled directly after regularly scheduled general education classes; students were invited to participate in advance.

## Step 6 - Conduct the Focus Groups

Each focus group had at least two facilitators and two recording devices. Demographic data of participants was collected via a paper form and students used pseudonyms during the focus groups. Digital recordings of the focus groups were transcribed and the transcriptions were stored in a shared file accessible by the college teams and CLP.

## Step 7 - Code and Analyze Results

CLP did the first round of coding and analysis. Using the categories defined by the focus group protocol, the research-practitioners first looked for evidence in the areas of: choosing a major, choosing classes, and factors in stopping or dropping out. Second, the team looked for additional themes and found work-based learning experiences and mental health issues repeated throughout the transcripts. Finally, the team examined the evidence to identify patterns of similarity among all students and differences between the learning community and general population students.

On completion of this process, CLP facilitated a workshop to introduce the college teams to coding. At the workshop, participants practiced descriptive coding using the transcripts from the focus groups. After the CLP team presented findings from the preliminary round of coding, the college teams took over the coding and analysis process. CLP, ECC, and ELAC reconvened later in the semester to calibrate findings after the college teams reviewed their own and each other's transcripts to identify similarities and differences in their findings.



### Student Feedback on Focus Group Process

Overall, students who participated in the focus groups appreciated the opportunity to talk about the challenges they are facing and hear their peers' experiences. Some students expressed frustration with the timing of the focus groups because they conflicted with work schedules; these students had to take time off from work to participate, creating financial hardship. Other students were frustrated that the focus groups cut into their time to study for midterms.

*"I feel like, maybe be more accessible with timing I guess. Because honestly, this job worker training, like, I know it's mandatory and I get it. But ... I have had to call off work so I can come here. And it's just like, I'm losing money that I need just to come here ... but you know, some people depend on it." (Student)*

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### SUMMARY

The process of conducting student focus groups informed and shaped the work at the colleges. As a result, both colleges integrated students into their regular guided pathways redesign work. ELAC hired student ambassadors to ensure student voice is represented in redesign efforts; when there is disagreement on a redesign issue, the ambassadors step in to gather student input and inform the decision making process. Student focus groups have also become another regular way to gather information to inform campus redesign such as where students expect to find a particular discipline in the meta major structure. At ECC, the college integrated students into their guided pathways work teams. In addition, ECC has placed more emphasis on personalizing student support in their success teams.

*"I think that hearing the experiences of other people who, like us, are first generation, could make us feel like we're not alone. We could support each other, and that's how we could be successful." (Student)*



## PART 2 | Focus Group Findings

Learning communities have a long history of providing integrated supports and engagement, but generally are funded to serve only a small subset of students at a given college. However, as these findings illustrate, students in learning communities report better connection to and engagement with college than students in the general population. While learning communities are often considered too expensive to implement at scale, the guided pathways framework includes many of the characteristic aspects of learning communities.

To learn how the student experience in learning communities is different from that of the general population, and how that experience may inform guided pathways redesign, El Camino College and East Los Angeles College together with CLP created a joint inquiry project. The two colleges conducted nine student focus groups with a total of 59 students. Four focus groups included students from the learning

communities Puente Project, Umoja-Project Success and First Year Experience. The other five focus groups included general population students.

Many similar experiences were reported by students in all of the focus groups, regardless of learning community participation. There were also some dramatic differences between the experiences of students in learning communities and the general population student experience.

### SIMILARITIES IN THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

**Overall, students view higher education as an opportunity to achieve more for themselves—in their personal lives and in their careers.**

When asked why they decided to go to college, students said they view higher education as a step to fulfilling careers that allow them to contribute to their families and communities.

They see college as a means to advance within a career field and achieve long-term financial security, while exploring their academic and career interests.

Students were influenced by family and close relatives to continue their education beyond high school; first-generation students, in particular, said they wanted to set a positive example within their families.

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**A majority of students consider their personal career and academic interests when choosing a major. Still, several other factors come into play.**

In addition to personal academic and career interests, students consider long-term employment and financial prospects upon graduation as a motivating factor when choosing a major. Other factors students reported include: family influence such as a relative who exposed them to a specific career field, a personal desire to give back to others, and whether course content was engaging and easy to digest.

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**Students consistently suggested that work-based learning opportunities would be most helpful in choosing a major because they would provide chances to practice their skills or explore a field of interest.**

Students said that work-based learning opportunities would be beneficial when choosing a major. They mentioned examples such as panel discussions, workshops, guest speakers and classroom presentations--as well as volunteer work and internships. Students see value in being able to interact with professionals who have worked in a particular field at the beginning of their college experience. In addition to work-based learning, students also suggested career assessments as tools that could be helpful when choosing a major.

*“You got to be introduced to it. You don’t know what you want until you’re introduced to it. That’s why a lot of times people flip because they’re like ‘well I’m really not really that interested.’”*

*“Getting experience in the field. To volunteer in the field of study and to get my feet wet, in order to experience what it’s like.”*

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**Students reported that, most often when their peers stop/drop out, it’s due to financial and emotional concerns that impact motivation.**

It was common for students to say their peers decided to stop or drop out of college because they lacked financial resources and felt a strong need to work. Based on how both sets of students--those in learning communities and those in the general population--responded to this question, it is also evident they understood that being in a learning community or a program for specific student populations was key to getting financial and emotional support at the college, and that access to these programs is limited.

Participants also identified a lack of information on how to access on-campus resources, including financial and mental health resources, as contributing to the decision to stop or drop out. Participants identified lack of access to services as an acute challenge for students taking evening classes, when many student support operations are unavailable.

*“A lot of students need counseling, they need to let out their emotions, what they’re feeling.”*

*“I think because especially at a community college you have students that are playing multiple roles in their lives. They’re not just students, sometimes they’re caretakers, and sometimes they’re head of households. They’re working full-time so it’s just being able to manage all of those things and go to school at the same time, it’s probably difficult.”*

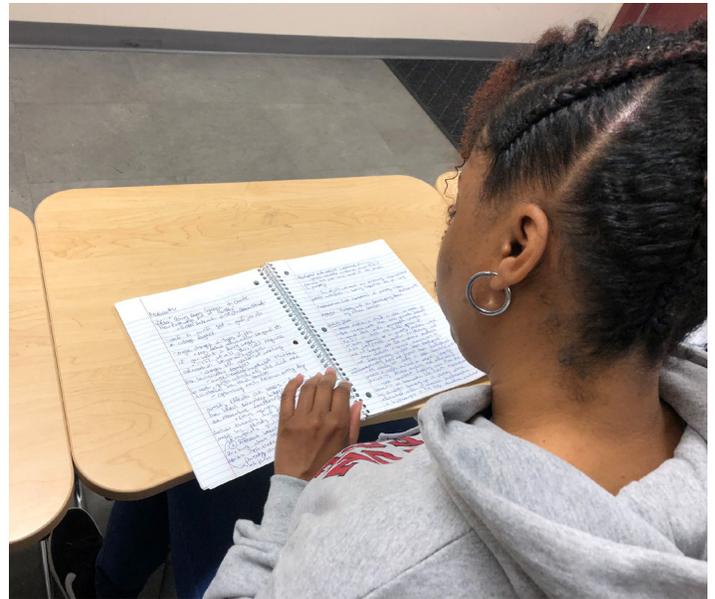
*“A lot of students don’t get out of work until six or they don’t start classes until later. So it’s really difficult for them to come if offices close at five. And this isn’t just one student, it’s more than that. It’s multiple people who are working during the day. They cannot make these available office hours or attend these programs and services and take advantage of them. And I feel like they might need [them] the most too. If they’re really busy, then they should have access to them.”*

**Information about courses provided by peers is vital for students as they consider what classes they will take in the next semester.**

The “Rate My Professor” website was named in almost every focus group as an important tool that students use to gather information about courses from their peers.

Students value insights from their peers about the rigor of course content and how engaging professors are. This knowledge influences their decision to enroll in a course and helps them balance their schedule with a combination of more and less rigorous courses.

*“Really inviting professors make it really engaging to come to class every day. I’ve had a few who don’t really care if you come to class or not, but the ones who are really engaged with their students, who know everybody’s names, everybody really kind of wants to go to class. You feel like you’re important when you’re in the class. Then you feel like your presence matters.”*



*“What has also helped me are my really great professors. I feel as if I can go up to them and talk to them about just about anything really, and that’s really helpful as well, knowing that somebody not only grades your papers but really wants to know who you are and cares about your personal life as well.”*

**DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE LEARNING COMMUNITY AND GENERAL POPULATION STUDENT EXPERIENCE**

The focus groups revealed that general population students are having a very different community college experience compared with their peers in learning communities.

**Students in learning communities reported having a support system of peers and educators on campus and having a stronger sense of belonging.**

Students in learning communities more often reported having personal connections with professors and counselors. It was through counselors and instructors that students learned about other supports.

*“If my professor hadn’t told me about EOP&S, I wouldn’t have known. So, if the campus or teachers just say, hey, the first week of school, go apply for this program. It might fit you.”*

They also felt more comfortable counting on their peers for support. Peers, instructors and counselors together helped create a sense of belonging associated with learning communities. Students identified that sense of belonging as important in their success.

*“As long as you have that mindset [of being involved], you will feel like, yeah, this is somewhere that you call home too, that you really want to go every day. Not only for classes but having the sense of belonging that’s to help more people. Which is very important. And I also think it’s a motivation for me to stay in school.”*

*“I really liked FYE ... We always are connecting with each other outside of class as well and we’re planning events together. So just having that support group with me is really nice.”*

*“Finding Puente, finding my community. Finding my community that felt similarly to how I felt and how we just motivate each other to say that this is our second chance to reach higher education. It really enforced these bonds that I’ve had with my friends to continue the path.”*

General population students did not share in these sentiments. They were more likely to see professors as “inaccessible” to them. And while all students generally agreed that instructors serve as key conduits for communicating information to students, general population students reported feeling less satisfied with the information they received about on-campus resources to support student success.

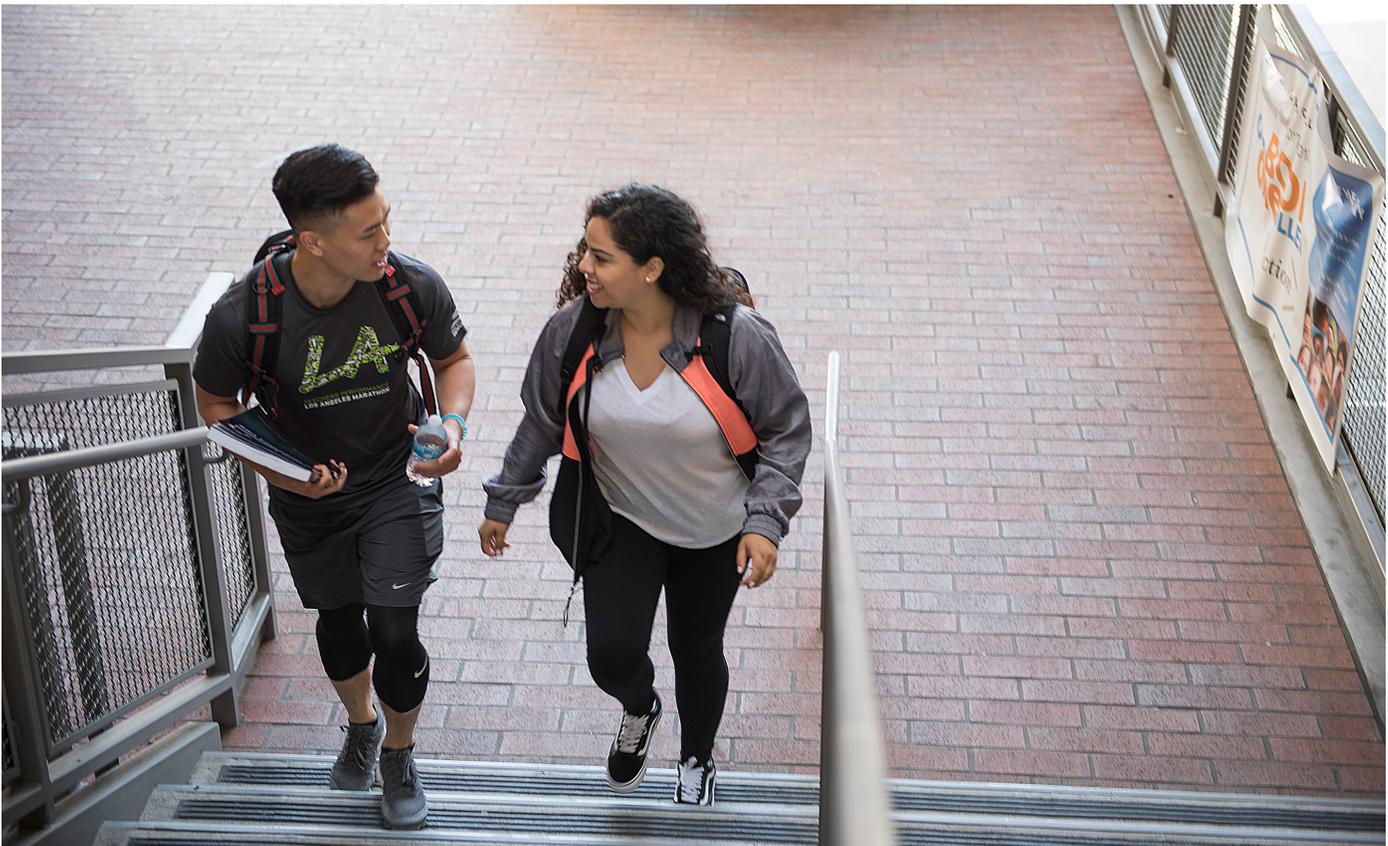
### **Students in learning communities decided on a major earlier in their community college experience.**

General population students in the focus groups reported that it took them between 1 to 1.5 years to decide on a major. Students in learning communities reported having decided on a major within the first semester of their community college experience. These students were also more likely to say career-oriented experiences helped them explore their interests, whereas general population students explored their interests by engaging with professors and peers. General population students were more likely to report changing their major during their time at the college.

### **Students in learning communities were more likely to rely on college-based support when making decisions about their education.**

Learning community students most frequently talked about being able to get support from their professors and counselors. Students in the general population reported substantially different experiences. General population students looked to their friends or family members to make decisions about college; they were more likely to report not having a specific counselor, instructor, or on-campus figure to turn to for assistance. These students talked about needing to be more self-reliant as they navigated their education.

*“I myself am first-generation ... a lot of the time we’re figuring out the resources on our own ... we do play a lot of different roles in our lives so a lot of the time our priorities are elsewhere and we don’t always have a network of people that, in our family, or friends, who have been through the same thing and have the similar goal.”*






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**Students in learning communities reported having more positive counseling experiences compared with their general student population peers.**

Students in learning communities were more likely to see a counselor regularly and reported receiving higher quality counseling sessions with specialized information related to their academic and career interests. They also reported fewer barriers to scheduling appointments. General population students reported receiving very generalized and sometimes inconsistent information in their counseling sessions. Because of long wait times and short appointments, these students were also more likely to report that they selected courses independently, without a counselor's guidance.

*"I would say that it wasn't until maybe my third counselor appointment where I actually felt like I had a concrete plan. Just because thirty minutes is really fast and you feel the rush. Both of you are talking really fast and you're trying to get in what you want to do here and I think thirty minutes is way too little."*

*"Sometimes I feel like the limited time, because we are such a big campus, sometimes I'll need more than 10 minutes. I feel like as a student, if you don't walk in with the right questions, you don't get the information that you need, because they just specifically tell you about your courses. Oh, these are the classes you want, your general eds, bye. But, if you don't ask them, 'Hey, what could help me with my major? What could help me with my career? Do you have any internships?' they don't necessarily put it out there if you don't ask."*

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**Students in learning communities reported having a much easier time enrolling in classes than their peers in the general student population.**

Because of access to priority registration, students in learning communities had an easier time enrolling in the courses they needed. They were also more likely to meet with a counselor to receive guidance during or just before their registration period. Their general population peers were less likely to know what courses they were going to take in the subsequent semester. They also reported challenges with courses filling up quickly and finding courses to match their schedules.

## SUMMARY

Overall, students from both learning communities and the general student population believe that education is critical for future personal and professional success. While they take into account the opinions of their families and peers when determining their career interests and education choices, including which courses to take, they are most likely to prioritize their own lived experiences when selecting majors and deciding on career goals.

Students also generally agreed on what they believe community college practitioners should consider to improve students' persistence and achievement. To help future students make informed decisions related to majors and careers, focus group participants recommended incorporating more work-based learning activities throughout the community college experience to help students explore their interests. They agreed that better communication about on-campus financial and mental health resources could help students feel more connected to the college. Considering that participants also reported that they believed their peers stop or drop out because they felt a greater need to work and earn income than to stay in school, this may offer a key for supporting students to stay in college.

While it was evident across focus groups that there were many commonalities in students' community college experiences, it was also clear that the students in the two groups reported very different experiences. A notable difference had to do with the sense of belonging that students feel on campus. Students within learning communities felt more connected to the college than their general population peers. Students within learning communities reported more positive relationships with their peers, professors, and counselors—

and they reported being more connected to on-campus services and resources. General population students reported otherwise; they felt professors were “inaccessible” to them and reported negative experiences in their sessions with counselors. In some instances, students reported receiving too generalized or even inconsistent information regarding their course sequences.

The lack of connection that students outside of learning communities describe permeates their focus group responses. For example, these students often talked about navigating course and major selection independently, with little support from the campus community. They also were more likely to turn to sources outside of the college for guidance. Compared with their peers in learning communities, they spent more time figuring out what major to choose and experienced more difficulty getting into the courses they needed.

Insights from focus groups at ECC and ELAC confirmed the research-practitioners' original hunch that students participating in learning communities had a better college experience than those who did not. A central question now being considered at each college is how they can incorporate these learnings into their redesign efforts so more students can experience the deeper support and engagement with college faculty and staff often reported by learning community students. ELAC has integrated student ambassadors into their redesign process and ECC is investigating ways to personalize the support that students receive through success teams.

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### Endnotes

- 1 James, E. A., Milenkiewicz, M. T., & Bucknam, A. (2008). *Participatory action research for educational leadership: Using data-driven decision making to improve schools*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc.
- 2 Retrieved from: <https://www.careerladdersproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Bringing-Student-Voices-to-Guided-Pathways-Inquiry-and-Design.pdf>

## Appendix 1: Focus Group Protocol

Adapted from Career Ladders Project, [Bringing Student Voices to Guided Pathways Inquiry and Design](#)

Thank you for agreeing to talk with us today. We have been asked to include student voices and experiences in discussions with your college's leaders and faculty about how the college can better serve students.

Would it be OK to record the conversation, so that we can capture your ideas as you present them? As we write this up, we will not be using your names. We want you to know that we think everything you have to say is important, and we are here to learn from you and your experiences here at College X.

We would like to hear from everyone, whether your experiences are similar to or different from others.

### Introduction

1. Let's go around, introduce yourself, and please just tell us a little bit about why you decided to go to college.

### Choosing a major

2. How many of you have chosen a major already? How many of you feel you have not made a decision about your choice of major yet? (Look for a show of hands, say the number out loud for the recorder)

3. Let's begin with those of you who have decided on a major already. How did you go about making that decision?

Probes:

- How long did it take you to choose a major?
- Have you changed your major along the way? (Look for a show of hands from people who changed their major multiple times)
- What was helpful in exploring what your interests were?

4. For those who have not decided on a major, how do you think you will go about making the decision?

Probes:

- How much do you know about your areas of interest?
- What other information do you need to make a decision?

5. What do you think the college could do to help you and other students decide on a major early on?

6. Who are the people that have been the most helpful to you when you are trying to make decisions about college like choosing a major or more generally staying in school?

Probe:

- Who else do you find yourself reaching out to for advice, direction, information?

### Choosing classes

7. How do you decide which courses to take?

Probes:

- Do you know which courses you need to take next semester? If not, how will you find out?
- Where can you get the most helpful information on which courses to take every semester?
- What has been your experience in choosing courses? Can you usually register for the courses you need?
- Are you able to get the advising/counseling that you need?
- What do you think works well when it comes to choosing your courses every semester?
- What do you think could improve?

### Closing

8. Do you know anyone who has had to stop or drop out before finishing their program? Why do you think that happens?

9. What kinds of things can the college do to help students overcome their biggest challenges and stay in school?

Probes:

- Are there supports at the college that are helpful? If so, which ones?
- Are there people that are helpful? If so, who?

Now, we are close to the end. We have talked about a lot of things. Let's take a moment to think through what might be most important when it comes to helping more students hang in there and finish their programs of study or degrees. Let's go around and share any final thoughts you may have on this—maybe something we talked about, or something that just occurred to you.

## Appendix 2: Informed Consent Form Example

### INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

*Bringing Student Voices to Guided Pathways Inquiry and Design [name of the project here]*

[College lead on this project] at the [college name] in conjunction with the Career Ladders Project is conducting a research study.

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are a current student at [college name] and you are over the age of 18 years old. Your participation in this research study is voluntary.

#### **Why is this study being done?**

The purpose of this research study is to gain an understanding of the current student experience within [college name] as it relates to their enrollment, completion, entrance and learning. We hope to use this information to develop a clear and streamlined process for students to achieve their goals.

#### **What will happen if I take part in this research study?**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, your experience will include the following:

- You will be asked to participate in one interview/focus group that will be audiotaped.
- You will be asked to bring an image... which will be photographed with your permission.
- You will be asked to answer demographic information about yourself.
- You will be asked questions about your experiences here at [college name].
- The interview will take place in a private location on the [college name] campus.

#### **How long will I be in the research study?**

Participation will take a total of about 60 minutes. We may contact you following the interview/focus group to ask for clarification about any questions you answered during your interview. If necessary, you would be contacted no later than one year after the day you participated in the interview.

#### **Are there any potential risks or discomforts that I can expect from this study?**

There are minimal to no risks if you choose to participate in this study.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you will only share information that you feel comfortable sharing. You can, at any time, request to skip a question, to stop the interview, or to withdraw from the study without consequences.

#### **Are there any potential benefits if I participate?**

You will not directly benefit from participation in this study. Potential benefits to society are a greater knowledge of the student experience at [college name]. Benefits to students include informing college innovation and changes to help students achieve their goals more efficiently.

#### **Will I be paid for participating?**

You will receive a \$20 gift card for your participation in the interview that would be given to you immediately following the completion of the interview. You will also receive snacks or a meal depending on the time of your interview. You can also receive a copy of your audio file interview if you request it.

#### **Will information about me and my participation in this research be kept confidential?**

Your personal information (your name) will be kept confidential. The photograph of your image and the audio file of our interview will be stored separately from any identifying information about you. An alias (made-up name) will be substituted for your real name. Any photographs or audio files will be destroyed one year after completion of the study.

#### **What are my rights if I take part in this study?**

- You can choose whether or not you want to be in this study, and you may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time.
- Whatever decision you make, there will be no penalty to you, and no loss of benefits to which you were otherwise entitled.
- You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.

## Who can I contact if I have questions about this study?

- [College Name]

If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, you can talk to the director of the Career Ladders Project or [college name]. Please contact:

[Contact information here]

- Institutional Research & Planning Office at [College Name]

If you have questions about your rights while taking part in this study, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the researchers about the study, please contact:

[Contact information here]

*You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.*

## Consent to participate

*By signing this form, you are agreeing to be interviewed and have your interview audio-recorded.*

I understand the procedures and conditions of my participation described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I affirm that I am at least 18 years of age and I agree to participate in this study. I have received a copy of this form.

## SIGNATURE OF STUDY PARTICIPANT

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## SIGNATURE OF PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Person Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date