COMPLETE COLLEGE AMERICA

Integrating Purpose First to Promote Student Success

UW SYSTEM STUDENT SUCCESS SUMMIT SERIES

Why Purpose?

When applying to college, too many students are faced with making decisions about a course of study aligned with a career choice that often result in them either delaying their choice of a program or changing majors after the first year. Consequently, these students extend their time to a degree and incur significantly higher direct and opportunity costs. A portion of those who successfully graduate, report lower satisfaction with major choice. Many students, particularly students from historically excluded communities and students from low-income families, find themselves unable to access or are discouraged from academic programs linked with higher wages and social mobility.

Studies have shown that a majority of students attend college *specifically* to secure a good job and assign a greater value to their degree if they understand its relevance to their career. To improve student satisfaction and graduate career prospects, postsecondary institutions must embrace their role in launching students into meaningful careers. To do so, career exploration and planning must be intentional and start early in the postsecondary educational experience.

Purpose First begins with supporting college students to make informed decisions about majors and career aspirations early on. The strategy persists *throughout* the students' academic career. Students need continued support and current information regarding careers and employment. Purpose First helps institutions with specific practices and processes through the duration of the students' academic career. With mindful input and participation of faculty and employers, campuses can support students to fulfill their purpose—from the very first day.

This guidebook is meant as a tool for institutional teams to assess their current practices and identify areas where better intentionality and transparency can be integrated. Use the questions listed in this document to examine your institutional processes and reflect on the impact of your practices. CCA encourages you to answer the questions as a team and to collect relevant information to draw a process map of your students' experiences.

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Section 1 - Getting Started

Building a Team

It is possible that your campus is already undertaking some work toward Purpose First. It is also likely that not everyone on your campus is aware of all the work that is being done. Bring everyone to the table. The effective implementation of strategies must involve stakeholders across campus, even if only to inform them of upcoming changes and initiatives (could use RACI model as guide to identify relevant stakeholders to engage, consult, and inform). To ensure that everyone focuses on Purpose First together, include representatives from many offices, such as those suggested below.

When the group comes together, identify what work is already happening, explore the recommended practices, and, as appropriate, expand the group to include other voices:

- Academic Advising
- Academic Affairs
- Recruiting and Admissions
- Career Services/Employer Relations
- Enrollment Management
- Institutional Research
- Registrar's Office
- Student Affairs
- Student Orientation
- First-Year Experience
- Multicultural Affairs/EDI

Even with a cross-campus working group, communicate often about Purpose First. If your campus understands the reasons, data, and efforts informing this work, the impact will be stronger.

Team Roster

Name	Area of Specialty	Email

<u>Reminder:</u>

In addition to the student success professionals listed above, perspectives of students should be taken into consideration. Throughout the planning and implementation stages, include and consider student voices. Of note, though, remember that students do not experience college the same way. Be mindful to solicit thoughts from a diverse pool of students (race, age, full-time/part-time, first-generation, economic background, etc).

Data and Processes

In recent years, Complete College America (CCA) has led an effort for colleges to improve completion rates. Today, that completion agenda is more tightly focused on serving students who have been historically excluded. Even as we have seen progress in overall graduation rates, institutional performance gaps persist at both two- and four-year institutions. While completion rates may be ticking up, colleges must pay attention to who is completing and who is not, who is attending and who is not, who is transitioning into jobs and who is not.

Before getting started on implementation work, CCA recommends for institutions to collect data and document their current processes not only to establish a baseline but also, and most importantly, to identify opportunities for improvement and to ground decisions into empirical evidence.

Quantitative data

When institutions analyze outcomes data that is disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, age, Pell eligibility, and other available categories, often institutional performance gaps become clear. Purpose First suggests collecting these data as a starting point to understand how well programs are working and the impact on different populations.

As you collect and analyze the following, ask what the data tell you about the different student experiences at your institution. What sticks out from the data? What questions emerge? Where are the gaps? How do your current processes and policies contribute to these numbers?

- Number of students with at least 9 credits associated with program of study after 30 credits
- Number of students who change their major after 30, 45, and 60 credits
- Number of students who do not select a program of study prior to and after first semester
- Student demographics per program of study
- Retention of students per program of study
- Progression of students per program of study
- Graduation of students per program of study
- Other collected data on campus (NSSE, alumni surveys, etc)

Qualitative data

Collecting students' confidence level in their experiences on campus, especially when gathering input from different student populations, allow institutions to pinpoint areas of need and to partly answer questions that arise from the analysis of quantitative data. Being able to identify if BILPOC, women, Pell eligible students, and students from other historically excluded communities report different experiences can provide powerful evidence for the campus to act on. Purpose First recommends collecting students' perspectives to better understand how processes impact students.

For Purpose First, as you focus on establishing relevance and increasing intentionality into processes and practices, CCA recommends you ask specifically if students:

- Have a clear understanding of careers connected to their programs of study?
- Have meaningful exposure to careers during their programs of study?
- Have access to career and labor market data throughout their academic career?
- Understand the connection between courses and careers?
- Feel like they have the necessary resources to make an informed decision regarding their programs of study?
- Can schedule courses at times and in the modality they need?

Make sure to inquire about the perspectives from a diverse and representative group of students. As with the quantitative data, ask yourself about what sticks out and what needs to be explored further.

Institutional processes

As with collecting and analyzing data, there is great value in recording and assessing internal processes, especially when including the viewpoints of representatives from multiple departments and offices. Examining the expected student experience through your processes not only allows you to identify potential gaps and areas for improvement, but it also provides opportunities for you to question the impact of your practices. As you assess your processes, ask yourself how students navigate through them and who is left behind.

As you focus on Purpose First, pay particular attention to the processes designed to support students making informed decisions related to their programs of study and their careers. CCA recommends the following questions.

Does your institution:

- Provide current and projected regional labor/market data to students?
- List potential careers associated with each program of study (using alumni information, workforce collaboration, professional association, other)?
- Incorporate experiential learning activities within the curriculum for each program of study? (are the activities required for every student, are they paid, for credits?)
- List skills and competencies learned and mastered during the program?
- Highlight skills and competencies acquired on syllabus?
- Integrate career exploration activities/assignments in first-year programs?

- Have students complete an interest assessment survey during the onboarding process (application, orientation, advising, or first-year experience)?
- Include meta-majors that facilitate structured exploration of programs of study and careers while making progress towards degree?
- Identify transfer opportunities to a bachelor's degree in chosen program of study to advance career opportunities?
- Have students complete an interest assessment survey prior to them changing majors?

Section 2 – Redesigning Onboarding Process

As with any complex organization, colleges can maintain antiquated and/or mystifying practices. While the course catalog spells out the academic curriculum, other key features of campus life are not officially published. The "hidden curriculum" can be particularly challenging for vulnerable students, including first-generation students, those from families experiencing financial insecurity, and those historically excluded from higher education. Institutions can improve how they serve students by shedding light on the hidden corners of their campus.

Students thrive when required processes for getting started—applications, new student orientation, academic advising—draw connections between choices of major and future careers. The investment in careful onboarding programs yields strong results with students who are empowered to make better choices. Roanoke College and Goucher College explicitly state this connection on their main websites, where they showcase their respective missions and their commitment to support students find their purpose and launch them into a career that is aligned with their goals and aspirations.

1. **Conduct an inventory of career and interest assessments on campus**

   Career Services, Academic Advising, and Student Affairs offices often have valuable resources and assessments, yet not all students are aware of the resources.

   Questions to Consider:

   On your campus, who has access to career and/or interest assessments? Can these assessments be made available to all current and past students (on your website, in the admissions application, during orientation)? How are students made aware of these resources? How are these resources integrated into existing processes?

2. **Redesign the admissions process to include personal and career assessment**
Students need tools and resources to make informed decisions *before* they choose majors and programs of study. Campuses that embed self-assessment tools into the application process help students explore careers and identify areas that align with their interests, goals, and aspirations.

Following the completion of the tools and assessments, admission counselors, peer mentors, academic advisors, and/or career counselors must follow up with the students. In a text or email, the advisor could describe meta-majors, career options, and explain how meta-majors and/or programs of study connect to future work opportunities.

Questions to Consider:

During the application process, what information is provided to students about majors and careers? Is information provided to all students or only those undecided? Once students select a program of study, what information is shared with them? Who reaches out to students between the admission decision and orientation about results from assessments?

3. **Create meta-majors for students to explore in a structured way**
Too many choices in college can paralyze students, who become overwhelmed by the sheer number of majors and the fine-grained distinctions between similar options. For example, how should a new student distinguish between majors in finance, economics, and accounting?

Grouping programs of study into meta-majors in which similar coursework can lead to multiple career opportunities can help students identify areas of interest *and* provide structured and

intentional career and major exploration activities. As students progress through their degrees, the relevance of their courses reinforces their career choices.

Questions to Consider:

Have you engaged academic advising and academic departments into the creation of meta-majors? How would you group the different programs of study into meta-majors (areas of interest, common math and lab sequence, similar general education requirements, career outcomes)?

> **Standout Practices:**
> The College of Southern Nevada requires all incoming students to select an area of study during the admissions process before meeting with an advisor and identifying a major.

4. **Include career and major discussions/activities during new student orientation**
   Student engagement with career information should not be limited to interest or career assessments. Students should be required to interact with career and labor/market data, as well as other information available, using online modules. This work could occur *prior* to attending orientation or *during* orientation. Campuses can design different opportunities for student engagement: peer discussion groups, meta-majors breakouts, or faculty panels, for example. To deepen the impact of connecting coursework to careers, students should receive follow up contact from someone in the college—career services, a faculty member in the major, or an academic advisor, for example. Even "decided" students will benefit from learning more about their choice of programs.

Questions to Consider:

What activities designed to engage students in their major and career decisions are integrated in the new student orientation? Do those activities engage all students? Who leads those activities?

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5. **Provide anti-bias training**

   Institutions should provide continuous training on identifying and combating biases, especially when addressing career and major choices. Black and Latinx students are severely underrepresented in programs of study that lead to in-demand careers with higher salaries. Institutional practices that direct and advise certain students into lower-paying careers is a significant problem that contributes to the persistence of inequitable social mobility.

   To create a culturally inclusive and responsive campus that fosters the success of all students, particularly those from historically excluded communities, anti-bias and anti-racist training should be required for *every* employee. Training could be tailored by role (culturally responsive pedagogical practices for faculty, culturally relevant practices in advising for advisors and counselors, for example).

   Identifying key performance metrics and data collection/analysis allows institutions to monitor change over time and direct additional training/support to areas that need it.

   Questions to Consider:

   What resources are currently available on your campus that address biases? Are these resources relevant to roles? Do these resources meet the needs of your campus? Why or why not?

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6. **Implement First-Year Experience**

   First-Year Experience (FYE) programs explicitly unveil the hidden curriculum, teaching students how to navigate college while building social and cultural capital. Acquiring this capital is particularly important for first-generation students, students from low-income backgrounds, and students from historically excluded communities. Often, FYE programs consist of a college success course. However, the exploration, activities, and resources built into a course should be made available beyond the confines of any specific syllabus. If your institution does not require

or have an FYE course, mindful practices to help students reveal the hidden curriculum should take place throughout the first year and be made available through different modes, including orientation, advising, housing, co-curricular opportunities, among them.

The FYE program should be required and integrate career exploration assignments so students can actively engage with their purpose in college: developing skills, credentials, and capital to pursue careers that are aligned with their goals and aspirations.

Questions to Consider:

What career exploration activities and/or assignments are integrated into the first-year student success course?

What cocurricular activities designed to engage students in their major and career exploration are available on campus? How are students made aware of these opportunities? How are they made to engage with these activities?

> **Standout Practices:**
> Columbia Basin College and Florida State University's ProfessioNole Ready program developed modules that support career development and that are integrated into the student success course and academic experience.

7. **Include career counseling in academic advising curriculum**
   Academic advisors play a crucial part in guiding students into appropriate programs of study. Academic advisors need the tools and resources to help students explore; for example, your campus could facilitate cross-training between academic advising and career services or have both offices share office space. A stronger partnership between these two important offices could also yield a curriculum that spans the student's academic career and embed specific career activities/discussions at specific milestones.

Questions to Consider:

How do academic advising and career services offices collaborate? How is major exploration and career information integrated into the academic advising curriculum? When and how often do career counselors meet with students during advising sessions?

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Standout Practices:
College of Coastal Georgia combined its academic advising and career services offices to improve advising for their students about connections between majors and careers.

8. **Support continued exploration and information through graduation**
Students need access to information and resources throughout their college experience. As their experiences and education mature, they need to deepen their career readiness and understanding of relevance between degree and career. Mindful planning for co-curricular outreach, activities, and classroom assignments can support students' continued development of career readiness. Examples include career fairs, guest lectures from employers, professional student organizations, and experiential learning activities. These activities must be integrated into the curriculum for all students. Institutions should include measures to identify and combat potential inequities of access.

Questions to Consider:

What career readiness activities or assignments are included in the curriculum? Are career readiness and development activities integrated into every program of study? How are cocurricular activities designed to further students' career development integrated into the student experience?

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Section 3 – Jobs, Skills, & Competencies

1. **Identify jobs and careers currently in demand** by region or state and provide an employment market forecast

   Some tools that might already be available on your campus include O*Net, MyNextMove, Steppingblocks, and Handshake. Collect tools and information from career services, employers' relations, and academic departments into a central repository or, if relevant, promote your state's employment projections. When sharing information or outside resources, it is crucial to provide context and instructions on how to use the tools.

   Questions to Consider:
   What resources do you have on campus that you can share with students?

   Does your state or the local/regional chamber of commerce have labor/market data that you can use? How often does your campus update the data it shares? Who does the updating and reporting? How do stakeholders find/receive the updates?

   How does your campus communicate with new and current students about local/regional anticipated workforce needs and growth opportunities? What office(s) communicate with students? How effective is the process?

2. **Align programs of study with jobs and careers**

    Students need more and better information about how programs of study lead to career opportunities; not all linkages are evident at first sight. Campuses must share career information linked to each degree and program of study. It is not enough to simply list careers and jobs, however; stakeholders must provide an explanation as to how programs of study lead to these professions (skills, competencies, abilities, etc.—see next bullet).

    Questions to Consider:
    Do you know your alumni employment information from fist job to more long term? Relevant details might include job titles, company/organization, field, salary. How is this information shared?

    On your website and publications, how explicit is the connection between career and majors?

    Standout Practices:
    University of Delaware collects alumni information and uses the data to inform incoming students about potential careers associated with individual programs of study. https://www.udel.edu/apply/career-outcomes/

    City University of New York (CUNY) built a Wage Dashboard that connects income information with each program and student demographics: https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/stephen.sheets/viz/CUNYWageDashboard2020/Dashboard

    The Commonwealth of Kentucky reports data about majors and careers, financial aid, and graduation rates. https://kystats.ky.gov/Reports/Tableau/2021_KCSRK

    Dennison University (Ohio) connects the students' academic experiences to professional development; throughout a student's time on campus, Dennison

> integrates experiential learning activities with each student's degree.
> https://denison.edu/career/denison-advantage

3. **Identify and align competencies and skills associated with programs of study**

To strengthen the connection and relevance between a college degree and careers, showcase how each program of study provides the skills and competencies that are relevant to the workforce and associated jobs and careers.

To support this alignment, NACE, among other organizations, lists preferred common skills and competencies that have been identified by the workforce.

Involve faculty members, admissions and recruitment counselors, and, whenever possible, workforce leaders in this process. The information collected needs to be shared with students in a format that is easy to understand and access.

Be mindful that skills and competencies can be acquired outside the classroom through various activities and experiences. Highlight these opportunities for each program, and whenever possible, ensure that all students actively engage in these practices.

Questions to Consider:

Does every program of study list competencies and skills that graduates of programs will learn and master? How and where is this information shared?

Does the curriculum map demonstrate relevant, intentional, and scaffolded opportunities for students to develop and become proficient in major-appropriate skills?

4. **Identify and incorporate skills and competencies in syllabus**
   Communicate why the course matters to the student's degree and future work (for example, highlight the skills and competencies students will learn, or connect coursework to workforce).

   Name learning outcomes clearly and directly, so students understand why they need the course. Scaffold learning outcomes/course competencies from core curriculum to major courses and through credential completion.

   Questions to Consider:

   What information, resources, or tools from the workshop on aligning career competencies and learning outcomes (Dr. Mary-Ann Winkelmes from TILT) will you integrate in courses and syllabi?

5. **Align class assignments and activities with desired skills and competencies**
   Engage faculty to explicitly and intentionally explain how assignments, activities, and coursework help students gain desired skills and competencies.

   Partner with your campus Center for Teaching and Learning to design assignments and activities that align with desired skills and competencies. Identify multiple ways students can demonstrate progress toward proficiency.

   Institutions should collect learning artifacts from students to demonstrate their progress toward mastery of identified skills and competencies. These artifacts can also support continuous improvement.

   Questions to Consider:

   Is there a crosswalk between skills and competencies and learning outcomes? Do syllabi and assignments explicitly state the relevance of the course and activities in developing abilities? How will students demonstrate skills gained in the course?

6. **Identify and integrate experiential learning activities for *each* program of study**
   Studies have shown that graduates achieve better outcomes in the workplace if they have opportunities *as students* to practice their skills in a real environment. In addition to specific workplace skills, experiential learning offers a window into how professional settings work. Furthermore, experiential learning introduces students to multiple work venues for their skills, for example non-profits, local businesses, Non-Governmental Organizations, and start-ups.

   Experiential learning activities should be widely available to all students and could be embedded as part of a required milestone course.

   Consult Strada's report on Career Preparation Experiences on the importance of integrating experiential learning activities.

   Questions to Consider:

   How many of your programs of study include experiential learning activities? How many of your students/majors participate in these experiential activities? Are students required to complete an experiential activity prior to graduation?

7. **Collect this information into a comprehensive repository (academic maps)**
   Campuses must communicate clearly the relevance of college credentials and the program structures that support and guide students towards their careers. Using academic maps as a shared, centralized tool for admissions, student affairs, academic advising, career services, academic affairs, enrollment management, and alumni relations can showcase the value of a college degree and guide students to make informed career choices during their degree paths.

   Effective academic maps *live outside* the catalog and depict the student's entire journey. Maps that include academic and co-curricular resources, activities, and information can support students to credential completion. Academic maps can improve equity by highlighting ways to successfully navigate the college experience.

   Questions to Consider:

Do you have comprehensive academic maps for your programs of study? How easily accessible (how many clicks) are your academic maps? How are the maps organized on your website (all in one page, across multiple pages by departments or colleges)?

What other information is available to your students on the same webpage as your curriculum plan?

How is the information for each program of study shared with recruitment and admissions counselors?

Standout Practices:

Marshall University provides students with a curriculum plan, a four-year plan, involvement opportunities, associated careers, and other relevant information for each of their programs of study.

For every program, the Community College of Denver lists academic support, online availability, transfer agreements, internship opportunities, job outlooks, stackable credentials, and program outcomes in an easy to navigate web page.

Section 4 – Exemplary Practices

Based on institutional size, resources, structure, and demographics, not all programs and processes will look the same. Regardless of institutional context, though, here are some of the elements that processes should include to best support students in their pursuit of a degree of value that is aligned with their interests and aspirations.

Recruitment

- One-pager (either printed or on the web) summarizing each program of study that includes relevant information, such as time to degree, description of program, stackable credentials, and careers associated.

- Information connecting programs of study and associated careers is easily accessible (1-2 clicks from main page).

- Information for each program of study includes:
    - Description of program (particularly useful to differentiate similar programs)
    - List of courses students need to complete to obtain degree and preferred path/order
    - List of courses needed to earn stackable credentials and preferred path/order
    - Skills and competencies students will learn throughout program (could be highlighted throughout academic map)
    - Cocurricular activities and support services available to complement academic experience
    - Internships and experiential learning opportunities
    - Career information (labor/market data, salaries, job titles)
    - Transfer agreements (if applicable)

Admissions

- Application process integrates personal inventories and/or career assessment tools.

- Continued communication and outreach plan for students following the application/admissions decision that provides additional information regarding program of study (and similar programs), careers associated, competencies, and support. Communication and outreach plan carries through until orientation, where it can be integrated in advising and career services curriculum and communication calendar.

- Reports of relevant information collected through application process is automatically shared with relevant offices and departments (advising, career services, student affairs, multicultural affairs, disability services, etc)

Student Orientation

- Every student experience an onboarding process that includes orientation to services available to students and personal connection with academic advisor.

- Different tracks/requirements are designed to support needs of different populations (returning adults, first-generation, historically excluded communities), such as virtual and in-person, all virtual, and/or embedded in learning management system.

- Purposeful activities designed to inform students about majors and careers (discussions, panels, major fair, career assessment tools, small group discussion with career services, meta-majors) and integrated into orientation.

First-Year Experience Programs

- First-year experience/student success course is required for every student (different curriculum and mode of delivery for adults and/or online students).

- First-year experience/student success course integrates career exploration assignment and activities (informational interview, research on majors, development of elevator pitch, creation of one-pager on potential career, among other examples).

- Modules on career exploration and development (professionalism, résumé building, "soft skills" development, etc.) are developed and made available in learning management system (preferably embedded in FYE course).

- Cocurricular activities that support career and major information are organized throughout the year (e.g., major fairs, career fairs, student organizations, faculty panels, living learning communities, etc.) on different days, times, and formats.

Academics

- Programs of study integrate experiential learning activities in curriculum for every student to complete.

- Faculty members regularly attend professional development workshops on cultural relevant pedagogy, transparency in teaching, and anti-bias.

- Syllabi include skills and competencies for course and assignments.

- Communication with career services and admissions counselors is frequent to discuss competencies, job/career information, cocurricular activities, and career development opportunities associated with each program of study.

As noted previously, your institution might already have implemented or be in the process of implementing these strategies and practices. As you map the processes and answer the questions above, however, ask yourself how these practices, initiatives, resources, information, and tools are shared and communicated to students and to your colleagues across campus.

The effective implementation of Purpose First, as with any strategy, relies on clear communication and empowering everyone to play their respective part. This means starting with data, including a diverse group of individuals, and assessing objectively how our existing processes actually impact our students, especially those from historically excluded communities. A comprehensive team should lead this effort to get it done, with those most impacted most involved, including especially, students, advisors/counselors, and faculty.

Through this effort, you can help students achieve their personal goals, assuring an equitable educational experience for all.