

Guided Pathways 2025-2026

Introduction

In Fall 2025, Jessie Garcia (counselor) and Kristin Lui-Martinez (mathematics instructor) became the new co-leads of the Guided Pathways (GP) Initiative at Santa Monica College (SMC). With support of the Equity, Pathways, and Inclusion (EPI) Division members Llanet Martín and Paige Glaves, the leads set out to assess the college's current initiatives and student supports, particularly in how they are serving first-time in college (FTIC) Black and Latine students. A workgroup, called the Guided Pathways Collaborative, was created in the late Fall semester, and worked together to understand the student journey at SMC and provide recommendations for change. This report provides a brief background of the intention of implementing the Guided Pathways Framework in the California Community College system, an overview of the activities of the Guided Pathways Collaborative, and the main recommendations developed for the college.

Background

In 2017, the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (Chancellor's Office) provided five years of funding to the California Community College system to implement the Guided Pathways framework. After the many years of implementation since the initial work of Guided Pathways, we redirect our attention back to the intention of the Chancellor's Office for implementing the Guided Pathways framework to center on the student's journey and experiences in a community college.

At a July 2018 California Community Colleges Board of Governors meeting, Executive Vice Chancellor Hope reviewed the early progress of the Guided Pathways framework and its connection to the 2017 *Vision for Success* strategic plan. An impetus for applying the Guided Pathways framework was to align the pockets of innovation that exist within community colleges. According to Executive Vice Chancellor Hope, the programmatic reform in the past resulted in "small level of change for students, or small groups of students who were affected, and those reforms exist as islands of innovation disconnected from the rest of the institution" (California Community College Board of Governors [Board of Governors], 2018, 3:00:45).

Similar to many other California community colleges, SMC created and continues to support pockets of innovation within the institution. Students thrive in these pockets of innovation due to the additional support and resources and the benefits of small group sizes. However, this specialized programming does not reach all students of the institution, particularly FTIC Black and Latine students. In addition to numerous support services, there are many other programs and events that are disconnected from the main student journey. Guided Pathways aims to bring to scale similar supports and resources and to change the structures of the institution, so the college is "student-ready" rather than forcing students to be "college-ready" from the start of their journey.

Executive Vice Chancellor Hope expounded further on the "relentless clarity" of the Guided Pathways Framework that aimed for structural reform, rather than programmatic reform, within institutions. She stated that colleges should ask themselves:

How can we provide clarity for the possible pathways that students might want to pursue but also not [put] such a premium on choice that what we create makes something difficult to navigate or

confusing for students to navigate. Since most of our students are first generation students, they don't necessarily have the cultural capital or the analog of experience at home to really ask about the differences in courses and subtle distinctions within programs. It's not that we really want to limit students' choice, we want to inspire exploration, but at the same time what we want to do is make sure that a student can map where they are and progress towards [their] goal and that goal is clear (Board of Governors, 2018, 3:03:00).

The quote situates the work of the Guided Pathways co-leads for the 2025-2026 year which focused on assessing the current state of the college with respect to the four pillars of the Guided Pathways framework and the student journey.

Creation of the Guided Pathways Collaborative

Starting in Fall 2025, the new GP Leads were onboarded and had a transition meeting with the previous GP Leads. The transition provided an opportunity for the new leads to assess the progress of Guided Pathways efforts at SMC. At the core of the Guided Pathways framework is the student's experience as they journey through the institution to their goal. The GP Leads and GP Project Manager, Silvana Carrion-Palomares, sought the expertise of a group of campus employees who interact with students at various points of their journey at SMC. The GP Collaborative, a workgroup, was created in conjunction with multiple groups which included Counseling, Equitizing Gateway Courses (EGC), Outreach and Recruitment, and Special Programs. The list of members is in Table 1. In addition to the workgroup, college deans were also invited to participate in meetings and discussions. The participating deans were Kiersten Elliot, Jose Hernandez, and Llanet Martín.

Table 1

GP Collaborative Members

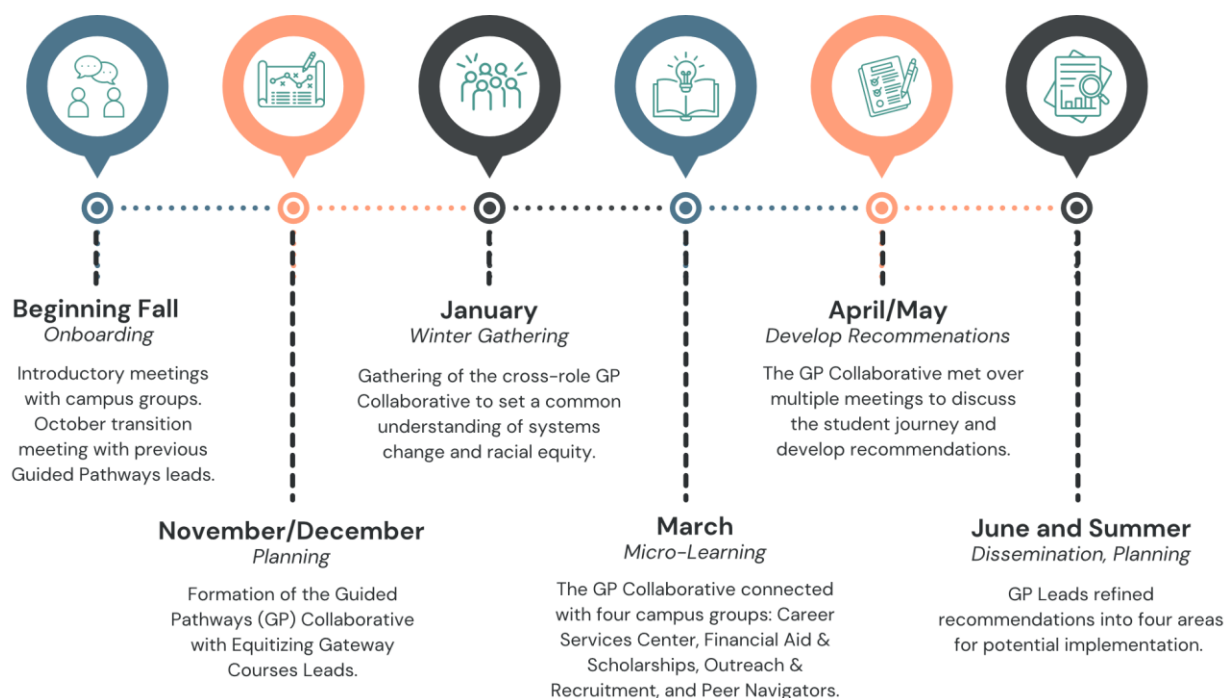
Name	Area
Tracie Bucsa	Outreach and Recruitment
Nancy Cardenas	Counseling
Dr. Lisa Collins	Geology
Dr. Erin Cue	Psychology
Jose Cue	Counseling
Aaron De la Torre	EOPS
Dr. Chanté Deloach	Psychology; EGC co-Lead
Amanda Garcia	Counseling
Jessie Garcia	Counseling; GP co-Lead
Dr. Erika Knox	Counseling
Dr. Philip Lantz	Counseling
Jamar London	Mathematics
Dr. Kristin Lui-Martinez	Mathematics; GP co-Lead
Dr. Marisol Moreno	History; EGC co-Lead
Dr. Keena Mosley	Early Childhood Education
Gladys Preciado	Art History
Dr. Rebecca Romo	Sociology
Flor Sandoval	Counseling
Trisden Shaw	Ethnic Studies

The collaboration with EGC was strategic for two reasons: EGC was able to provide stipends for instructional faculty to participate in the workgroup on top of their full load, and EGC alumni were contacted to be

members of the GP Collaborative. The GP Collaborative consists of Area of Interest (Aoi) counselors, EGC instructors, and classified educators (see Table 1). The Aoi counselors brought their understanding of the Aoi student needs, an understanding of student education planning, and the many facets of the student journey. EGC instructors were selected to roughly pair with Aois to apply and bring their understanding of dismantling structural and systemic barriers in the classroom. The GP Collaborative work provided EGC instructors the opportunity to apply their racial equity lens and identify barriers to student success beyond their classrooms. Lastly, classified educators were selected to provide additional perspectives on the student journey and their understanding of marginalized student experiences and needs.

The work of the GP Collaborative was conducted with pre-work and community building in the Winter 2026 intersession and the main, accelerated work during the Spring 2026 semester. Figure 1 provides a timeline for the work of the GP Collaborative. In January, the group worked on refreshing their understanding of racial disparities experienced by students at SMC as well as how to use a racial and anti-racist lens in examining systems change. During the Spring 2026 semester, the GP Collaborative engaged in micro-learning sessions to understand difference aspects of the student journey from the perspectives of the areas of Outreach & Recruitment, Financial Aid & Scholarships, Career Services Center, and Peer Navigators. Lastly, the group engaged in multiple sessions to develop recommendations for the college to better serve FTIC Black and Latine students.

Figure 1
Timeline



Note. A timeline for the 2025-2026 Guided Pathways Co-Leads and GP Collaborative activities.

Race-Conscious and Anti-Racist Approach

Starting in December 2025 and January 2026, the Guided Pathways Collaborative furthered and refined their understanding of systemic change, racial equity, and Guided Pathways by completing the following readings:

- *Examining the Racialized Discourse of Guided Pathways* by Galan et al.
- *The Water of Systems of Change* by Kania, Kramer, and Senge
- *Levels of Racism: A Theoretic Framework and a Gardener's Tale* by Camara Phyllis Jones, MD, MPH, PhD

In *Examining the Racialized Discourse of Guided Pathways* (Galan et al., 2023), the researchers examined institutional discourse of Guided Pathways implementation through the Scale of Adoption Assessment reports submitted by 115 California Community Colleges on the progress of Guided Pathways implementation. The report highlights the use of race-focused and equity-oriented language across the four pillars of the Guided Pathways framework. The reading helped reorient the GP Collaborative to the four pillars of Guided Pathways while also infusing racial equity and racialized discourse within the framework.

Although proponents of the Guided Pathways framework have claimed that the framework addresses equity gaps, it is possible for Guided Pathways to be implemented with race neutral practices (Bond, 2022). The reading *Levels of Racism: A Theoretic Framework and a Gardener's Tale* (Jones, 2000) presented a framework for understanding racism in the three levels of institutionalized (structural barriers, societal norms, unearned privilege), personally mediated (maintains structural barriers, intentional/unintentional), and internalized (reflects societal values, erodes individual sense of value). Through the allegory of a gardener and their preference for red flowers over pink flowers, the author advocates for readers to address institutionalized racism (the garden soil) to change all three levels of racism. Lastly, *The Water of Systems Change* (Kania et al., 2018) provided a framework for engaging in systems change. The authors introduce three levels of institutional change as explicit (policies, practices, resource flows), semi-explicit (relationships and power dynamics), and implicit (mental models). Understanding the three levels of an institution ensures that change is transformative and persists.

Micro-Learning Sessions

Over the Spring 2026 semester, the group engaged in micro-learning sessions with four areas of the campus. The areas were: the Office of Outreach & Recruitment, Career Services Center, Peer Navigator Program, and Financial Aid & Scholarships. Each area presented an overview of their area and student interactions along with ways they saw potential collaboration with the greater campus community.

Office of Outreach and Recruitment

Pillars: Clarify the Path, Get on a Path

Members of this area presented the beginning of the student journey and sometimes the first contact a student has with SMC. Recruiters serve as a vital bridge from high school to college for students by helping students understand the role college can play in achieving their career goals, demystifying college processes, and aiding in application and enrollment.

Career Services Center

Pillars: Get on a Path, Stay on a Path

The Career Services Center lead presented on the ways that the area thoughtfully engages with students to help students identify their strengths, interests and values while exploring potential career pathways. Additionally, the area can connect students to experiential opportunities such as internships and opportunities for employment.

Peer Navigator Program

Pillar: Stay on a Path

Members of the Peer Navigator Program presented the ways in which Peer Navigators, current SMC students, support and guide first year students through peer mentoring support and connection to campus resources.

Financial Aid & Scholarships

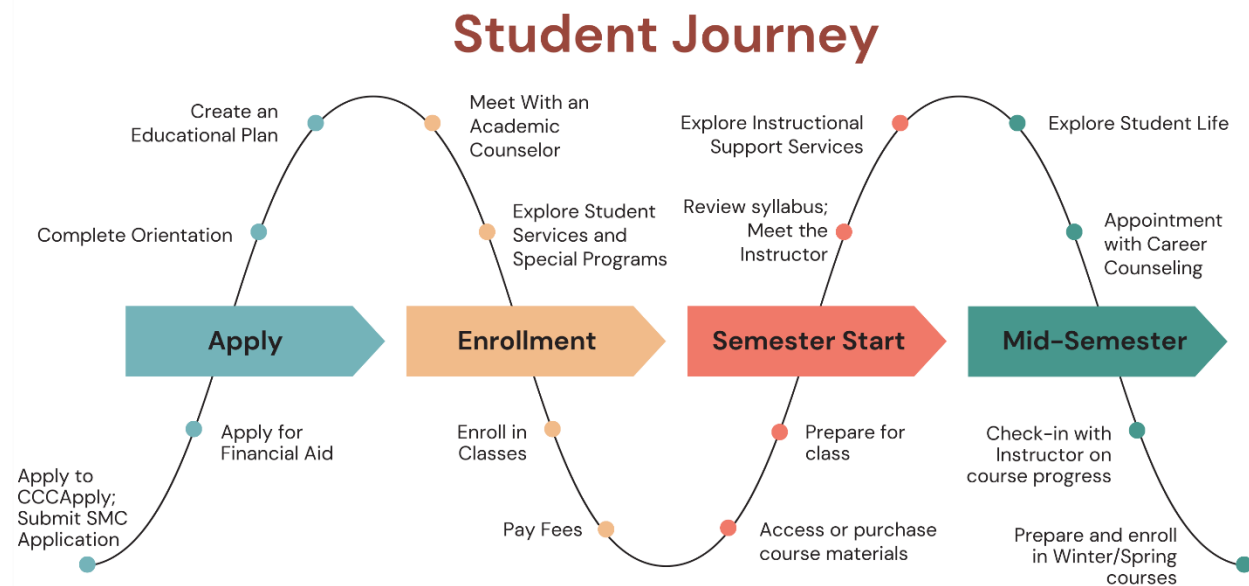
Pillar: Stay on a Path

The leads presented the sources of financial aid that are available to students depending on their status and need. The presentation also included the various deadlines for financial aid and factors that may inhibit student progress and access to aid such as non-passing grades.

The Student Journey

The journey of a new student at SMC follows a general timeline of milestones: application, onboarding, preparation, and first semester. Figure 1 illustrates this general journey and these important milestones that set students up for success. Throughout this journey, the friction points that students may experience include information overload, confusion from college language, and unfamiliar college culture and processes.

Figure 2
General Student Journey



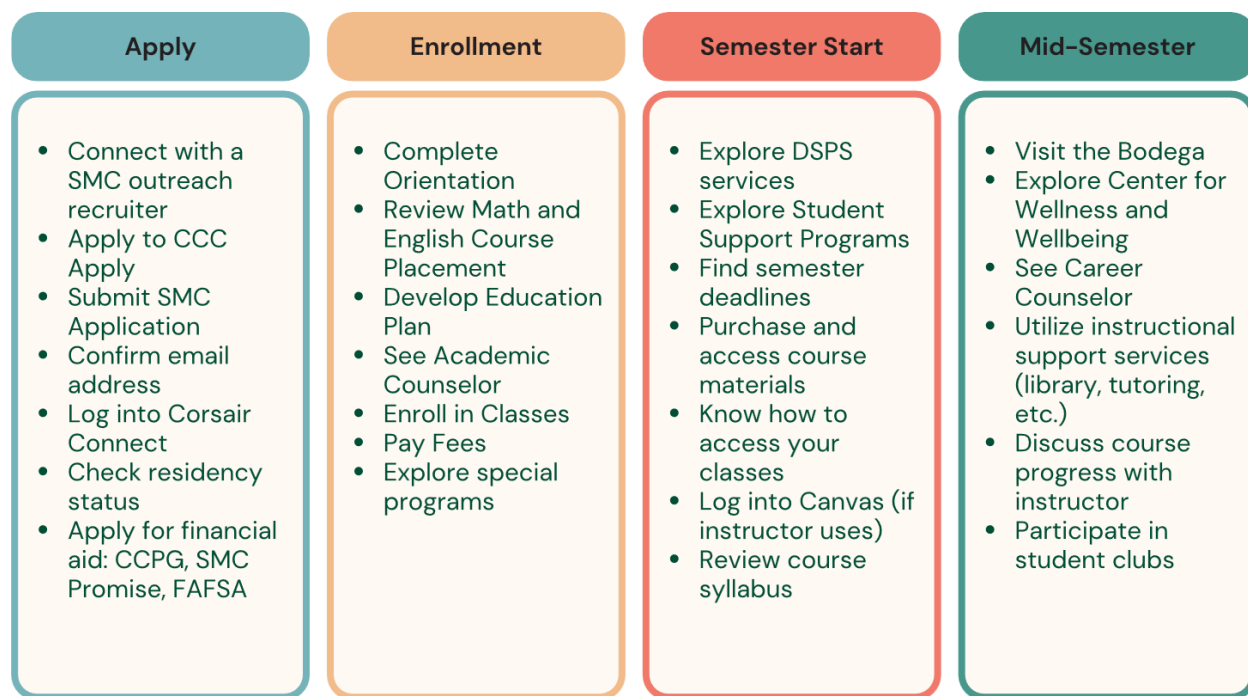
Note. The illustration is a representation of the milestones at the start of the student journey with a sample of tasks SMC asks students to complete. This is not a representation of the official processes at SMC.

Educational institutions are ecosystems of processes, language, and cultures that require time for individuals to become acclimated. Processes may be related to government regulations, such as deadlines for federal financial aid, or are local, such as a class waitlist process. Language includes program names, such as Umoja or Men of Color Action Network (MOCAN), and educational terminology, such as DSPS or office hours. Lastly, the culture and skills of being a student can be brand new and intimidating for students. Adapting and mastering college-level study skills can be opaque and challenging in addition to navigating unfamiliar processes and language.

First time in college (FTIC) students may have a steeper learning curve when acclimating to educational ecosystems compared to students who may have family or friends who can assist them. In attempting to assist students in understanding all possible options and institutional resources, SMC may be unintentionally creating institutional barriers. Information overload results in an onus on students to retain and understand all of the information and knowing when to use the information at the time they will need it. It may also obfuscate the general milestones students should be focused on for successful enrollment and onboarding to the college. For instance, it may confuse students during orientation when they are given a long list of special programs when each program serves specific populations and has different application dates.

The information overload manifests at the college through multiple checklists, student guides and an unclear onboarding process. These guides are developed from a sense of care and support from college employees. However, some lists and guides will provide information without context, such as joining a student club, or may include information that is not applicable to all students, such as deadlines for special programs with restricted enrollment. The information overload at the college indicates a lack of alignment along a general student journey. Figure 3 illustrates a sample of extra information students receive from various college areas when starting their journey at SMC.

Figure 3
Expanded Student Journey



Note: The expanded student journey includes additional tasks for students to complete that can obfuscate the general milestones for students. Some tasks do not apply to all students yet printed and web documents are made with these additional and often confusing tasks to reach and inform as many students as possible. Although there are categories separating the tasks (columns), the tasks are not restricted to these specific categories.

The recommendations of the GP Collaborative generally address the information overload by shifting the information dissemination to other points in the student journey and strengthening the informal and formal networks of students at the college to increase student support. Another important aspect is the onboarding to the academic portion of the student journey. Just as learning college language and processes are important for accessing resources and support services, understanding the academic culture and processes of the student journey also requires support and onboarding.

GP Collaborative Recommendations

Over three months, the collaborative worked to develop recommendations to address institutional barriers that impact the Black and Latine student experience. The GP Leads collected the recommendations and organized them into areas of Focus. Each Focus addresses aspects of the student journey and the friction points that students experience as an institutional barrier. Each focus has:

- Identified **institutional barriers** that hinder students' experiences and success.
- An **intention** to guide the long-term work.
- **Metrics** related institutional and California Community College System.
- **Student experiences and comments** from the Institutional Research Validation study.
- **Implementation Steps** for initial actions (over one or more semesters) and long-term integration (additional semesters).

Metrics

The metrics referenced are from the *2025 Institutional Effectiveness Report* by the Office of Institutional Research. Not all metrics from the report are used. The metrics are aligned with the following statewide accountability frameworks:

- Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC)
- Guided Pathways (GP)
- Student-Centered Funding Formula (SCFF)
- Student Equity Plan (SEP)
- Vision 2030

Student Validation

In May 2026, the GP co-leads, the Program Leader for Black Collegians, and the Dean of Institutional Research conducted a student focus group of 20 students from the Black Collegians and Latino Center programs. Students were asked about their perceptions and experiences related to the four Focus areas (called Ideas in the report). We encourage readers to review the Student Validation report from SMC's Institutional Research (Peña, 2026). The report summarizes the one-hour focus group interview based on the students' perceptions of possible benefits of each Focus (Idea in the report) and possible downsides. We sought the student perspective to validate the recommendations and to include Black and Latine student experience and voice into each Focus. The student responses were articulate, multi-faceted, and authentic, which helped deepen our understanding of the student experience at SMC. Key takeaways from the report are:

- Students strongly valued early onboarding and transition support.
- Peer connection and community-building were viewed as essential to student success.
- Students want support integrated into academics – but without reducing academic rigor.
- Faculty relationships have a major impact on student belonging and persistence.
- Students are overwhelmed by fragmented and difficult-to-navigate communication systems (Peña, 2026, p. 17).

Focus 1: Summer Bridge & Orientation Support

Institutional Barrier: Information overload could be overwhelming for FTIC Black and Latine students along with unclear milestones such as enrollment, applying for financial aid, or opting into SMC Promise. Students are expected to navigate systems of higher education without prior knowledge or exposure. This can result in delays or missed steps in key milestones before they begin their first semester.

Intention: Scaffolding and clarifying the orientation process can help students start their college journey with fewer interruptions and complications. Demystifying college culture and processes for students removes the onus of navigating on their own. Aligning campus resources and building greater awareness around milestones in the student journey can provide a structured and proactive onboarding experience. A smooth transition into and start of college can provide confidence to FTIC Black and Latine students in their college journey and minimize distractions, allowing them to focus on their educational goals.

Related Institutional Metrics:

- Successful Enrollment Rate (SEP)
- Number of Students Enrolled (Vision 2030, SCFF)
- Financial Aid Application Rate (Vision 2030)
- Number of CCPG Recipients/Percentage of Total Headcount (SCFF)
- Number of Pell Grant Recipients/Percentage of Total Headcount (SCFF)
- Number of AB 540 Students (SCFF)

Pillars: Clarify the Path, Get on a Path

Student Experiences and Comments

Students' perceptions of a summer bridge and onboarding were highly supportive. The students expressed feeling: more confident, more connected, less overwhelmed, better prepared academically and socially (Peña, 2026). Students expressed the:

- Benefits from physical tours to become familiar with the campus and resources.
- Helpfulness of Peer Navigators and peer mentorship.
- Value of Counseling 12 and Counseling 20 courses.
- Need for community-building with other students.

The student group also voiced concerns over the logistics of summer bridge experiences. In particular, requiring in-person orientations may be too restrictive for students with summer plans or work. The students offered a suggestion to have flexible options. Furthermore, online-only and international students may also be excluded from in-person orientations.

The students' concerns centered on the following:

- Information overload from orientations.
- Need for continued support once the semester begins.
- Confusing to navigate websites and resources.
- Unclear how to access peer support.

Implementation Steps

Initial Start Actions

- Engage the campus community in conversation about a student's journey to create a shared understanding of the students' experience and provide an opportunity to reflect on practices.
- Clarify the milestones in the student journey from applying to the first semester and through the first year.
- Simplify and organize information on college processes and resources, so information is easier to navigate.
- Align information on the website and across areas to avoid duplication of efforts and information.

Long-Term Actions

- Develop a coordinated first-year onboarding model that supports students from orientation through the end of the first year through scaffolded information.
- Align areas of the college on the milestones in the student journey.
- Institutionalize a shared first year student journey framework that is used across the campus (instructional and student services) to align services, programming, and communication.

Input	Activities	Output	Outcomes
• Outreach and Recruitment • Financial Aid • Counseling • Career Services • Peer Navigators	• Develop a summer bridge that can continue into the fall semester • Provide multiple days throughout the summer • Provide various modes of delivery • Information sharing and community building • Instructional faculty/ first day of class tips • Find classrooms, get course material, etc.	• Successful Enrollment Rate (SEP) • Number of Students Enrolled (Vision 2030, SCFF) • Financial Aid Application Rate (Vision 2030) • Number of CCPG Recipients/Percentage of Total Headcount (SCFF) • Number of Pell Grant Recipients/Percentage of Total Headcount (SCFF) • Number of AB 540 Students (SCFF)	• Information is scaffolded to guide FTIC Black and Latine students into college processes and culture. • Milestones of the beginning of the student journey are clarified and supported. • Students are introduced to the hidden curriculum of college processes, language, and skills that will specifically help them be successful.

Focus 2: Strengthen Classroom Community in Aol Gateway Courses

Institutional Barrier: An onus is placed on students to navigate college culture and find community on campus on their own, which can be challenging for first-time in college (FTIC) students who are not familiar with college culture. Instructional faculty spend the most time with students and can provide a high “touchpoint” of support and care to students. Most FTIC students will take a gateway class in their first year.

Intention: Shift support to be in gateway courses to ensure FTIC Black and Latine students are receiving information on campus resources, aided in demystifying college culture, forming and finding community, and exploring related majors and careers. Focusing on gateway courses reaches students where they spend the most time at the college in their first year and provides earlier support in their journey.

Related Institutional Metrics:

- First to second semester persistence rate (SEP)
- Transfer Math and English Completion in First Year (SEP, SCFF)
- Course success rates (ACCJC)
- Percentage of Students Completing 30+ Units in First Year (GP, Vision 2030)
- Completed 15+ Degree-Applicable Units in First Year (Guided Pathways)

Pillars: Ensure Learning on a Path, Stay on a Path

Student Experiences and Comments

Classroom support of student career interests and developing skills was viewed favorably by the focus group. Furthermore, the students noted that there is a distinct difference between access and awareness of campus resources. Students expressed the importance of **connecting coursework to careers, diverse faculty, and classes that allow for clear development of career skills** (Peña, 2026).

The students discussed how “supportive faculty behaviors significantly impact student success” (p. 6). Supportive faculty behaviors mentioned in the focus group included:

- Being knowledgeable about student resources.
- Referring students to support services.
- Showing care and understanding.
- Creating welcoming classroom environments.

Although students pointed out that Counseling 12 and Counseling 20 cover many of the career and study skills discussed, they also recognized structural barriers in accessing these courses. For instance, some useful courses felt “optional” to students, and they often choose classes based on transfer and general education requirements. Thus, not all students will have access to learning these skills “unless they are integrated more intentionally into pathways” (Peña, 2026, p. 7). This highlights the importance of bringing more support to gateway courses to ensure more students are exposed to student success skills.

The students’ suggestions fell into the following themes:

- Practical integration into academic classes of support and career examples.

- Stronger faculty training and institutional support.
- Greater attention to student well-being.

Implementation Steps

Initial Start Actions

- Instructors who teach gateway courses and counselors for each Aoi identify practices that create community within classrooms and connect students to campus resources. These will be a set of practices that can be implemented across all gateway courses but can be customized according to instructor preference and discipline.
- Develop a professional development plan to introduce instructional faculty to these practices and provide opportunities to learn from others already implementing similar practices.
- Identify gateway courses in each Aoi that enroll a high proportion of FTIC students and prioritize them for implementation.

Long-Term Actions

- Provide and promote professional development opportunities for instructors to learn and embed practices into all gateway courses.
- Develop an instructional faculty support model for new instructors embedding these practices.
- Establish long term and sustainable partnerships between instructional faculty, counselors, career services and student support programs to coordinate shared learning and collaboration in support of FTIC students.

Input	Activities	Output	Outcomes
• Instructors, especially those who completed or are participating in EGC • Aoi Counselors • Career Services Center	• Embed student success strategies into gateway courses. • Provide structured information on campus resources. • Embed community-building discussions and events. • Develop counselor visitations or sessions. • Create faculty profiles to facilitate student relationships.	• First to second semester persistence rate (SEP) • Transfer Math and English Completion in First Year (SEP, SCFF) • Course success rates (ACCJC) • Percentage of Students Completing 30+ Units in First Year (GP, Vision 2030) • Completed 15+ Degree-Applicable Units in First Year (Guided Pathways)	• Increased student awareness and usage of campus resources • Demystify hidden curriculum • Build a sense of community to SMC by starting with classrooms

Focus 3: Centralized Communication

Institutional Barrier: Student information such as academic support, financial aid, deadlines, events and more is shared through multiple communication platforms and is decentralized. Sharing information depends on district employees relaying the information to students or on students reliably reading their emails and possibly social media. Without a centralized information hub, students may miss important deadlines, resources, or opportunities for support.

Intention: Develop a centralized and student-friendly information hub that helps students navigate college more clearly and consistently. A unified communication structure can improve awareness of resources, deadlines, and events that support students, staff, and faculty. These hubs can be centered around a student's Aol to utilize and enforce the structures we have and enhance unified community around the student journey.

Related Institutional Metrics:

- First to second semester persistence rate (SEP)
- Percentage of Students Completing 30+ Units in First Year (GP, Vision 2030)

Pillars: Stay on a Path

Student Experiences and Comments

In Focus 1, summer bridge and orientation, students expressed frustration in navigating the college's website and campus resources. The frustration was echoed when discussing this Focus area as well. Students noted that they "receive information from too many disconnected sources, creating confusion and frustration" (Peña, 2026, p. 9). Students explained that they often had to search through PDFs for information, webpage information was outdated, links were broken, and information from counselors conflicted with information on webpages. The student indicated that they "stop trying to seek help after repeated failed attempts to locate information" (Peña, 2026, p. 10). Additionally, they were overwhelmed by constant emails and too much scattered information.

The students supported:

- One consistent place for information.
- Clear deadlines and updates.
- Easier navigation.
- Better organization of resources.

Implementation Steps

Initial Start Actions

- Identify a platform on which communication can be centralized for the entire campus (students and employees).
- Determine common events and deadlines of which the entire campus community is aware.
- Determine who oversees maintaining the platform and coordinating updates, possibly exploring creating campus communication standards or a workgroup.

- Map a first-year communication journey that reflects milestones, deadlines, events, and resources that FTIC students should receive in their first year.

Long-Term Actions

- Align and simplify information on the website to be more student friendly and improve accessibility, clarity and ease of navigation.
- Develop consistent AOI-specific events that are similar across AOIs, such as career panels, transfer workshops, faculty and SMC program spotlights, and networking opportunities to help build community.
- Regularly assess campus communication effectiveness and student engagement to improve messaging, increase student resource awareness, and reduce information overload.

Input	Activities	Output	Outcomes
• Campus Events • Marketing • Various Student Services areas • Student Life • Student Equity Center	• Identify a central platform for communicating important deadlines and campus events to students (possibly Canvas). • Align campus to common events to avoid duplication and increase collaboration.	• First to second semester persistence rate (SEP) • Percentage of Students Completing 30+ Units in First Year (GP, Vision 2030)	• Students are more aware of important deadlines and campus events. • Events are intentionally created and areas collaborate to avoid “competing” events. • Campus community is aligned to student journey milestones and deadlines.

Focus 4: Hone Instructional Faculty Support Skills

Institutional Barrier: Instructional faculty are the most consistent point of contact students have and may be the first to recognize when students need additional support. However, instructors may not be aware of campus resources or be comfortable connecting with campus areas and support systems. This can lead to inconsistent student experiences and missed opportunities for connection and care.

Intention: Strengthen instructors' ability to support FTIC Black and Latine students by equipping them with tools, information and strategies to better connect students to campus resources. All instructors on campus will have the knowledge and ability to support students and connect students to resources based on their needs. The increased collaboration between instructional and student support areas can reinforce shared responsibility for student success.

Related Institutional Metrics:

- First to second semester persistence rate (SEP)
- Transfer Math and English Completion in First Year (SEP, SCFF)
- Course success rates (ACCJC)
- Percentage of Students Completing 30+ Units in First Year (GP, Vision 2030)
- Completed 15+ Degree-Applicable Units in First Year (Guided Pathways)

Pillars: Ensure Learning on a Path, Stay on a Path, Get on a Path

Student Experiences and Comments

A strong sentiment from the students was that “faculty support is one of the most important factors shaping student success, belonging, and persistence” (Peña, 2026, p. 12). The students’ experiences and perceptions of faculty support manifested as **cultural awareness, relationships and personal connections, classroom community-building, and promotion of campus resources**. Another facet of the importance of faculty is from Focus 3, centralized communication, where the students emphasized instructional faculty serving as a communication point for students (Peña, 2026).

The students’ suggestions centered on:

- Increasing the cultural awareness of faculty.
- Bringing awareness of and connecting to campus resources.
- Creating community within classrooms.

Implementation Steps

Initial Start Actions

- Identify professional development training for instructors to learn cultural awareness and increased student support within the classroom.
- Develop an instructional faculty resource toolkit with information on campus resources and ways to effectively share with students.
- Develop and gather practices that build community between students in the classroom.

- Increase collaboration between instructional faculty and student services through department presentations, community lunch and learns, and informal and formal opportunities for cross collaboration and engagement.

Long-Term Actions

- Create and offer on-going professional development opportunities that increase the cultural awareness of instructors (can be tied to evaluations and department goals).
- Develop a shared framework that defines an instructional faculty's role in the first-year student experience. In addition, having a campus conversation on what our student support ecosystem entails.
- Develop faculty peer mentors who can support colleagues in implementing student centered and equity minded practices within their departments.

Input	Activities	Output	Outcomes
• Professional Development • New Faculty Institute • Equitizing Gateway Courses	• Onboarding new faculty (FT & PT) of equitable teaching practices, • PD on building or strengthening meaningful relational connections with FTIC Black and Latine students • Continued seminars/workshops on campus resources	• First to second semester persistence rate (SEP) • Transfer Math and English Completion in First Year (SEP, SCFF) • Course success rates (ACCJC) • Percentage of Students Completing 30+ Units in First Year (GP, Vision 2030) • Completed 15+ Degree-Applicable Units in First Year (Guided Pathways)	• Instructional faculty connect students to campus resources. • Students have an increased awareness and utilization of campus resources. • Students build community connection to the college and persist.

Discussion

When asked which Focus the college should spend time and resources on, Focus 1, 2, and 4 emerged as higher priorities for the GP Collaborative and the student focus group (Peña, 2026).

An overarching connection between the four Focus areas is to increase FTIC Black and Latine students' connections to formal and informal support networks. Formal networks include support from college staff and faculty (Focus 1, 2, 4). Investing in instructional faculty is key since students spend the most time with instructors in the classroom, and this influences much of their SMC experience. Informal networks include student clubs and student connections within the classroom (Focus 2, 4). These networks can be unstable and unstructured but can also be sources of community and support. Informal and formal networks increase students' sense of belonging, the flow of information of campus resources, mental wellbeing, and mentorship from peers and college employees (McPherson et al., 2025).

Arguably, elements of Focus 2 and Focus 4 can be combined since there is significant overlap such as community-building and awareness of campus resources. We emphasize the importance of focusing on gateway courses to reach FTIC Black and Latine students. Although there are elements that can be combined to benefit FTIC students in gateway courses, there are also elements that we would want to help embed in all classes such as community-building and connection to campus resources.

Focus 3, centralized communication, offers the benefit of creating an information hub that will align campus areas and campus events as well as increasing student awareness of campus resources. However, the measurable outcomes are not direct to student success. In other words, investing in this Focus would be an investment in a structural component of the student experience.

All four Focus areas are a collective campus effort that requires long-term investment and endurance to ensure cultural and structural change is embedded in the institution. Supporting the cultural change of instructors' mindsets and practices connects directly to the student experience and student success. Additionally, the Focus areas show that creating a more connected and supportive student experience will entail collaboration between student services, instructional faculty, classified professionals, and administrators.

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