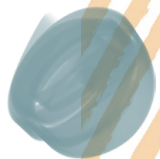


Opportunity by Design

Crafting Pathways to Success
for Adult Learners



EQUIVOLVE
CONSULTING

 Lumina™
FOUNDATION

Introduction

When you picture a “college student,” who comes to mind?

Perhaps you picture a young person fresh out of high school, soaking up the campus vibes—lounging on green lawns with classmates, studying late in the library, cheering at football games, or even engaging in campus protests. This familiar image, often reinforced by movies and media, tells one story of college life.

But there is another story, less frequently told yet far more common. Imagine an adult in their thirties, just home from a full day’s work, seated at the kitchen table with a laptop open as dinner cooks on the stove and kids play nearby. After years of work and life experience, this student has returned to school, seeking the credentials they need to advance in their career and fulfill aspirations for themselves and their family.

This experience reflects the reality for many students today, particularly at community colleges. Almost two-thirds (65%) of community college students are enrolled part-time¹, and more than half (58%) balance work alongside their studies². Even at four-year institutions, where we might expect a more traditional on-campus student body, nearly one in three students (27%) is part-time³, and 44% are employed⁴. Though national data on parental status is incomplete, we know that roughly one in five undergraduates is a parent, with community colleges serving as a primary entry point.⁵ In fact, the median age of community college students is 28.⁶

For students juggling work, family, and academic responsibilities, colleges must offer more than academic instruction—they must foster a culture of support that meets students where they are and



CONTENTS

PAGE #

enables them to thrive. Community Colleges—Historically Black Community Colleges (HBCCs) and Predominantly Black Community Colleges (PBCCs) in particular—provide such environments. These institutions are especially adept at responding to the diverse needs of adult learners, creating systems that support both their ambitions and their daily realities. Through flexible scheduling, practical resources, and a deeply rooted culture of care, HBCCs and PBCCs provide students with a sense of belonging, helping them feel seen and equipped to succeed.

This guide, *Opportunity by Design*, draws on the insights and practices of HBCCs and PBCCs and describes strategies for creating student-centered environments that nurture potential, encourage innovation, and build lasting pathways to success. These learnings offer both inspiration and practical strategies to design systems that actively foster student success. As colleges and their partners ask vital questions, take risks, and build collaborative communities focused on supporting students’ potential, they shape the future of higher education—a future where opportunity is intentional, inclusive, and within reach for all.



Adult Learners

The term “adult learners” typically refers to students who are **25 to 64 years old** and includes **re-enrolling** students who have completed some college, but did not receive a degree or credential. In 2024, 18.1 percent of the total United States population between 18 and 64 years old—36.8 million people—had some college and no credential⁷. Re-engaging in postsecondary education and supporting their progress is a priority for many institutions and states.

What are some characteristics of adult learners?

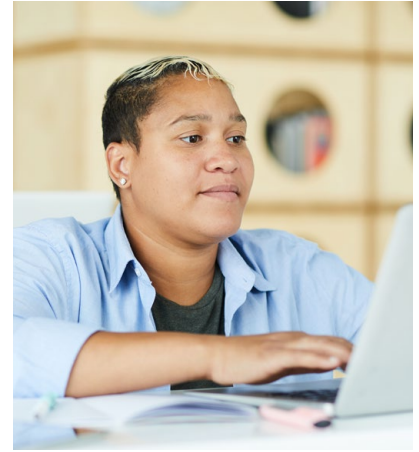
- ✓ Adult learners often bring substantial work and life experience, distinguishing them from students who enter college directly after high school.
- ✓ Many have prior academic records that can present both opportunities and challenges, including financial aid complications.
- ✓ They are often balancing multiple responsibilities, such as working full-time, parenting, or caregiving.

How relevant is the term “adult learner”?

- ✓ Adult learners are a diverse group, and the use and utility of this term varies. Many colleges find it more effective to focus on specific characteristics, such as students who are employed, parents, or re-enrolling, rather than relying on a broad designation. Additionally, many characteristics of adult learners apply to students outside the traditional age range.
- ✓ The strategies in this guide are designed to support adult learners specifically, but their benefits extend to all students.

The HBCC/PBCC Adult Learners of Color Initiative

Lumina Foundation launched the HBCC/PBCC Adult Learners of Color Initiative to cultivate more supportive environments for adult learners of color. With [Complete College America](#) (CCA) as the implementation partner and [Equivolve](#) as the learning partner, this initiative focused on driving systemic improvements to increase completion rates and foster enduring academic achievement for these students. The full list of participating HBCCs/PBCCs is available in the table below.



Participating Colleges

Arkansas State University Mid-South
(West Memphis, AR)

Atlanta Metropolitan State College (Atlanta, GA)

Baton Rouge Community College
(Baton Rouge, LA)

Bishop State Community College (Mobile, AL)

Chattahoochee Valley Community College
(Phenix City, AL)

Delgado Community College (New Orleans, LA)

Denmark Technical College (Denmark, SC)

Drake State Community & Technical College
(Huntsville, AL)

Florence-Darlington Technical College
(Florence, SC)

George Corley Wallace State Community College
(Selma, AL)

Lawson State Community College
(Bessemer & Birmingham, AL)

Northeastern Technical College (Cheraw, SC)

Olive-Harvey College (Chicago, IL)

Orangeburg-Calhoun Technical College
(Orangeburg, SC)

Roxbury Community College (Boston, MA)

Shelton State Community College (Tuscaloosa, AL)

Southeast Arkansas College (Pine Bluff, AR)

Southern University Shreveport (Shreveport, LA)

Trenholm State Community College
(Montgomery, AL)

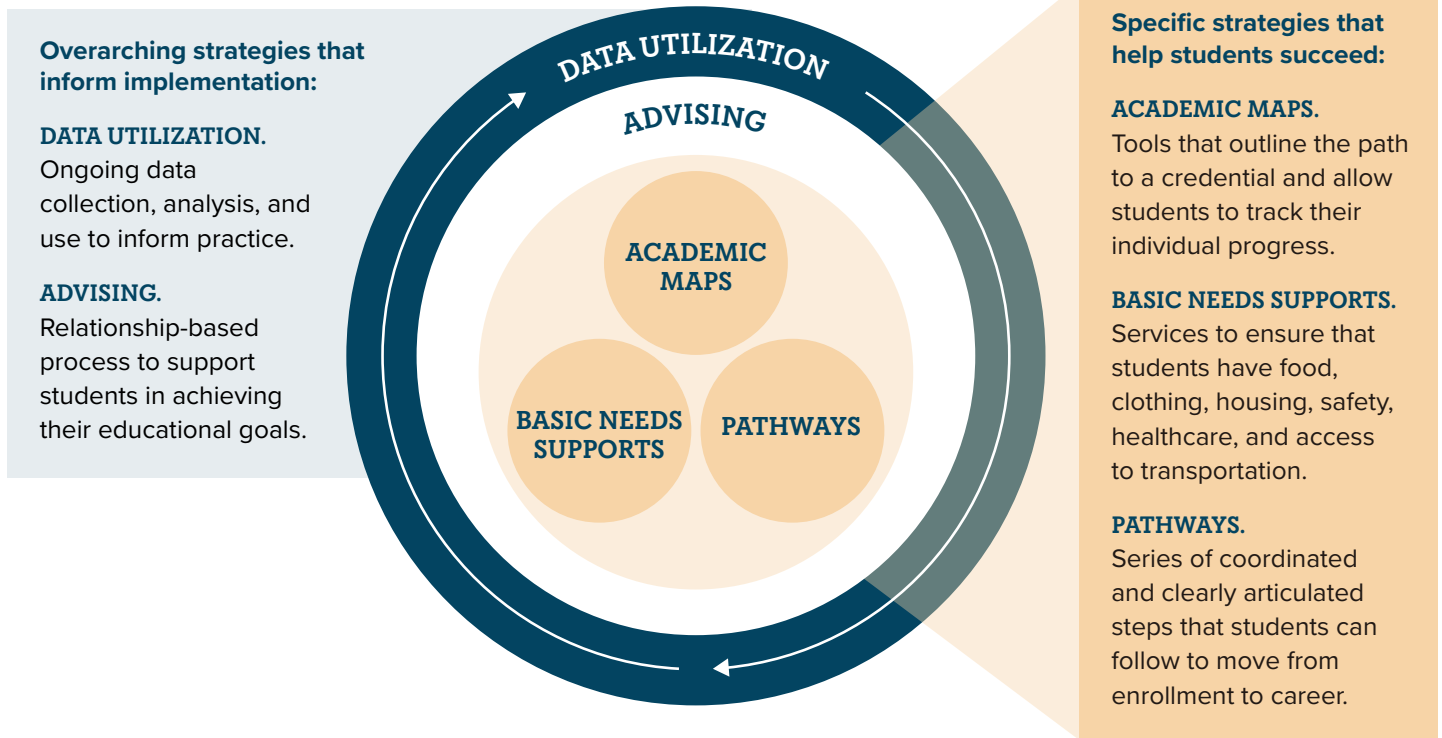
University of Arkansas-Pulaski Technical College
(North Little Rock, AR)



RESOURCE SPOTLIGHT: For further reading, see [The Great Eight](#), a series of case studies showcasing the work of HBCCs and PBCCs in Alabama. The series was developed by Alabama Possible, a partner in the HBCC/PBCC Adult Learners of Color Initiative.



The initiative centers on five core strategies: **data utilization, pathway creation, basic needs supports, academic mapping, and advising.** College teams are paired with Strategy Coaches—hired by CCA—who assist with planning and implementation. Together, these strategies have the power to strengthen student engagement, boost retention, and improve completion rates⁸.



What are HBCCs and PBCCs?

- **Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU):** Institutions that were established prior to 1964 with the principal mission of educating Black Americans.⁹
- **Historically Black Community Colleges (HBCC):** Two-year HBCU.
- **Predominantly Black Institutions (PBI):** Accredited institutions serving at least 1,000 undergraduate students at least: (1) 50% of whom are pursuing a bachelor's or associate's degree; (2) 40% of whom are Black Americans; and (3) 50% of whom are low-income or first-generation college students.¹⁰
- **Predominantly Black Community Colleges (PBCC):** Two-year PBI.

To learn more and see a map of HBCCs and PBCCs, visit [Mapping Opportunity: The Importance of HBCCs and PBCCs](#).



Opportunity by Design: About this Guide

This guide offers insights from HBCCs, PBCCs, and their supporting coaches to help postsecondary administrators, faculty, and staff enhance the experiences and outcomes of their students, especially adult students of color. Based on CCA’s technical assistance, Equivolve identified five core strategies. The guide provides insights on applying these strategies across diverse institutional settings.

HBCCs and PBCCs play a critical role in expanding access to higher education and, despite often being under-resourced, they consistently prioritize student care and support. The insights in this guide are especially relevant to HBCC and PBCC contexts, but hold value for a broad range of institutions. Learnings from these contexts can benefit any two- or four-year institution seeking to improve outcomes for students.

While this guide focuses on adult learners of color, the practices and recommendations are widely applicable, offering effective strategies for supporting students of all ages and backgrounds.

We hope you find valuable insights in the following pages that will serve your students, regardless of your campus setting or specific goals.

Sections

The sections that follow include **descriptions of each of the five core strategies, examples of promising practices, key considerations, potential challenges, and a list of questions to consider** as colleges engage in planning and implementation.

Implementing these strategies requires a cyclical process of planning, action, and evaluation, with overlapping steps that often happen simultaneously. This guide encourages continuous learning and adaptation, using insights gained at each stage to refine approaches and better support student success.



Implementation Questions

Basic Elements



This guide offers lists of questions to consider when preparing to implement each of the five strategies. Across all strategies, implementation questions focus on the same essential elements, with the goal of promoting a comprehensive and responsive approach:



ASSEMBLE YOUR TEAM. Successful implementation relies on strong, collaborative teams that include decision-makers from all relevant departments. Building a well-rounded team ensures diverse perspectives and unified action.



ANALYZE THE DATA. Let data guide your strategy. Begin by examining data to uncover specific needs, inform your approach, and shape implementation plans. Ongoing data collection will support continuous improvement throughout the process.



FORGE PARTNERSHIPS. Strengthen your efforts through external partnerships. Engaging with organizations outside the college—other institutions, nonprofits, and community groups—can provide additional resources and insights that fill internal gaps.



CENTER STUDENT VOICES. Students are at the core of this work and must be actively involved. Their perspectives are essential at every stage. Clear, consistent communication with students about new initiatives and available services will drive engagement and improve outcomes.



ENGAGE FACULTY AND STAFF. Faculty and staff are crucial to bringing strategies to life, so their buy-in is key. Equip them with comprehensive training and ongoing communication to ensure they are aligned and actively involved in planning and implementation.



BUILD ACCESSIBLE AND ADAPTIVE SYSTEMS. Guided by data and feedback, develop systems and processes that are tailored to students' needs, easily accessible, and flexible enough to respond to changing circumstances.



EVALUATE AND EVOLVE. Implementation is just the beginning. Regularly assess the effectiveness of your systems and processes through data analysis, making adjustments as needed to continuously enhance student learning and success.

I Data Utilization

Data utilization is an overarching strategy that should inform all aspects of a college's work. Colleges should initially analyze performance metrics and other forms of student data to identify areas for improvement, then use data to inform their choice of policy and strategies. Ongoing data collection and analysis are critical to effectively implement and continuously refine strategies to promote student success.

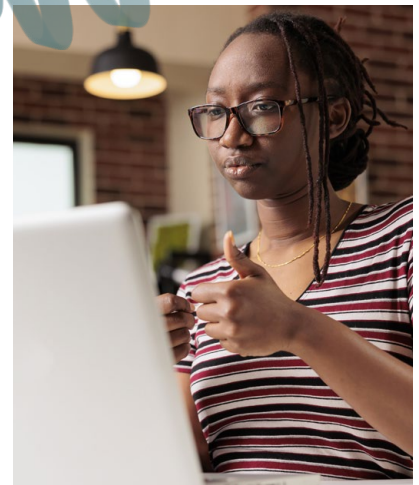
Data takes many forms, including standard measures (e.g., retention rates, graduation rates, enrollment, utilization of services) and others that are more nuanced or context-specific (e.g. student employability X years post-graduation, socioeconomic status X years post-graduation, satisfaction with life).

Student voice is an essential form of data and must be used to inform decision-making. Students' opinions and input may be collected formally (e.g., interviews, surveys) and informally (e.g., conversations, communications received by staff) and can help ensure that strategies are being implemented with fidelity or changes need to be made.

Promising Practices

OLIVE-HARVEY COLLEGE utilizes multiple tools to assess how to best deliver basic needs support to its students, including (1) The [Hope Center Student Basic Needs Survey](#), a tool created by Temple University to gather data from students around economic insecurities, (2) an in-house local climate survey that focuses on student experience, and (3) an environmental scan of their local community

Student voice is an essential form of data and must be used to inform decision-making.



and neighborhoods students live in. Together, data from these tools inform which student basic needs supports to invest in and how best to deliver those supports.



TRENHOLM STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE works with their student ambassador group to gather feedback directly from students on specific initiatives or programs. Trenholm also disaggregates their data beyond race and gender to better understand which student groups may need additional support (e.g. traditional vs non-traditional, full-time vs part-time).

ORANGEBURG-CALHOUN TECHNICAL COLLEGE established a President's Student Leadership Council that meets monthly with President Walt Tobin to discuss specific strategies for promoting student well-being and success. Input and feedback from this group was instrumental in the college's transition to seven-week semesters. Direct access to student input was essential to ensure that this major, campus-wide shift was a fit for OCtech and implemented in ways that best served students.

Challenges & Considerations

DATA CAPACITY & UTILIZATION: A common challenge arises when colleges focus primarily on collecting and reporting data without translating it into meaningful action. This often happens when data responsibilities are siloed within departments, such as the Office of Institutional Effectiveness or Registrar's Office, where a data expert is dedicated solely to collection and analysis. Limited data capacity is another challenge; smaller institutions may have just one data specialist tasked with managing all data collection, analysis, and requests across the college, making it difficult to expand data use beyond basic reporting.

DATA INFRASTRUCTURE: Outdated or inadequate data infrastructure can be a significant hurdle. It's essential to ensure that data software is up-to-date and that staff can navigate and use it effectively. However, software upgrades are often costly, especially for smaller institutions. Additionally, data systems require ongoing maintenance, so the expense extends beyond the initial purchase. Consistent upkeep is critical to keep infrastructure reliable and functional over time.

Creating a data-driven culture is key!

Consider engaging with resources and trainings from organizations such as [Achieving the Dream](#) and the [Association for Institutional Research](#) to promote a data-driven culture at your school.



COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY: A comprehensive data utilization strategy requires understanding and buy-in from faculty, staff, and administration, which can be difficult to achieve. Institutions may need to invest in data capacity training for their faculty and staff and ensure that data collection, analysis, and housing responsibilities do not fall on one or two people.

“*Limited Resources and resistance to change and presenting the idea to administration and getting their buy-in on the front-end can be a challenge. Also, faculty and staff can be glued in on the traditional ways of embracing data. Educating them on the new data strategies and the benefits of embracing such for the institution.*”

—College Representative

Ensuring buy-in can take time. Plan for multiple opportunities for faculty and staff to absorb information on the importance and utility of a comprehensive data strategy. Encourage faculty and staff to ask questions and work to address concerns around how any changes may impact their work. Dialogue among all involved parties can increase buy-in and may also reveal ideas to improve data utilization strategies at your college or university.

INTENTIONALITY: Colleges may face challenges identifying which forms of data collection are most critical. Being intentional about not only referring to data, but also updating and engaging with emerging trends can help to better understand what new processes are making a difference and where additional changes are needed. Focusing on collecting data that are required can be the first step in building data capacity before investing in larger data systems or trying to collect more complicated data.

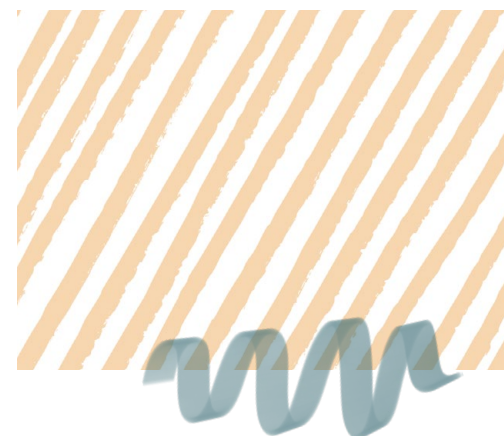
“*The challenge(s) remains in the details and accentuating which data is relevant and/or irrelevant.*”

—College Representative

STUDENT VOICE: Collecting input directly from students is critically important, but can also be challenging. Students may not be responsive to requests for data for many reasons—they may not understand the importance of the requests or be overwhelmed with too many. Many community colleges are commuter campuses and/or have large numbers of online students, so students may not be actively engaged on campus and may therefore be difficult



Focusing on collecting data that are required can be the first step in building data capacity before investing in larger data systems or trying to collect more complicated data.



to reach for data collection purposes. Even when schools are successful at collecting data, they may lack the capacity to analyze and incorporate it into systems. Working to diversify how you collect data from students and incorporating data collection into existing points of contact with students can be one way of improving student voice in data.

“*Students do not always take surveys seriously. Accurate data is needed in order to form an effective plan. My advice would be to stagger the surveys and the assessments to stop students from feeling overwhelmed.*”

—College Representative

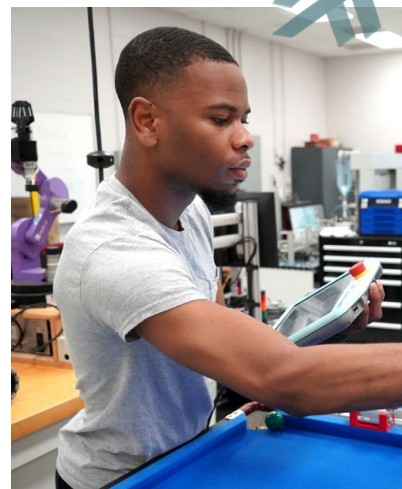
Implementation Questions

Data Utilization

Colleges preparing to implement or strengthen their data utilization should consider the following questions:

ASSEMBLE YOUR TEAM.

- Who needs to be involved in data collection, analysis, distribution, and utilization?
 - Who interacts directly with students? Including faculty, student advisors, and other people who directly interact with students can help reveal strategies for incorporating data collection and utilization in daily operations.
 - Who makes decisions that directly affect students? Are there particular staff members who could benefit from greater access to student outcome data?
 - How are Institutional Research and Effectiveness members engaged in the process?
- How will you ensure that data collection, analysis, and utilization are integrated into the work of individuals across the college and that the responsibilities are not dependent on a single person or unit?
- How will you ensure that campus leaders (e.g., department chairs) understand the importance of collecting and analyzing data and support them in becoming champions of data-informed decision making?





ANALYZE THE DATA.

- How well are you currently utilizing data?
 - What data do you currently collect?
 - How do you analyze data? Who is involved in the process?
 - How are the data findings communicated and utilized for decision-making?
 - How do faculty and staff across the college feel about the use of data? Is it transparent, accessible, and useful to them?
- What other types of data may be useful to inform new policy and program decision-making?



FORGE PARTNERSHIPS.

- What can you learn from other institutions about how data systems are working for them?
- Are there current or potential partnerships (e.g., existing contracts, grants) that might support the cost of updating data infrastructure?



CENTER STUDENT VOICES.

- How are you collecting data directly from students?
- What other methods might you consider to increase the prominence of student voice in informing college decision-making?
- How are you working to ensure that data collection from students is manageable for them? For example, you might intentionally schedule staggered student polls and assessments to avoid survey fatigue.





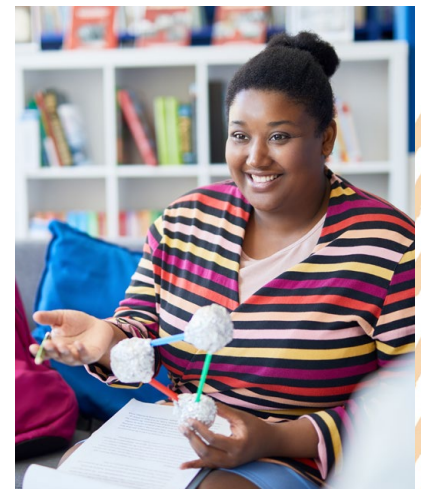
ENGAGE FACULTY AND STAFF.

- How do faculty and staff feel about current data utilization efforts?
- What processes exist for staff and faculty to engage with data?
 - How do they use student data to inform their teaching?
 - How do they interact with college-level data?
 - What opportunities do they have to discuss and collectively engage in data collection, analysis, and utilization with colleagues?
- What new processes or systems could be added to deepen faculty and staff engagement in data utilization?
- What targeted support and training might facilitate data collection and use?



BUILD ACCESSIBLE, RESPONSIVE SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES.

- What are the goals and objectives for your data collection efforts? Specificity in articulating goals for data collection will support intentional data collection methods and efficient, effective utilization of findings to inform practice. Some goals and objectives may remain constant, while others will evolve over time to reflect current realities and areas of interest at your school (e.g., to more deeply explore a trend that has been identified anecdotally).
- How well do your data collection methods reflect your goals and enable utilization of findings? Recognize that data comes in many forms and think creatively about the types of data that will best help you achieve your goals.
- How accessible is your data to the faculty, staff, and administrators who would benefit from using it to inform their work? Processes like automating reporting and analysis may promote accessibility.



EVALUATE AND ADAPT.

- What processes do you have in place to reflect on your data utilization practices? Be sure to protect time to step back and consider how well your data utilization practices are working and how they might adapt and improve.

II Pathway Creation

A pathway is a coordinated series of steps that guide students from enrollment to career readiness. Pathways often include key milestones, recommended resources and supports, advising check-ins, and additional requirements, such as internships or specific tools and materials students may need. This approach removes the guesswork from navigating college, helping students move seamlessly from enrollment to their chosen career.

Pathway creation tailors each student's journey, ensuring they take the right courses, receive the necessary support, and reach career-aligned milestones. Colleges that offer pathways go beyond providing a checklist; they shape individualized paths that consider students' specific needs and goals. Whether students are in a degree-seeking or non-credit program, community colleges embed pathway strategies into their programs, equipping students with the skills, resources, and connections needed for employment after completion. Academic maps, discussed later in this guide, often serve as interactive tools to help students stay on track within these pathways.

Pathway creation tailors each student's journey, ensuring they take the right courses, receive the necessary support, and reach career-aligned milestones.

Examples of Success

PROJECT EVOLVE at [Olive-Harvey College](#) is a career pathway program that includes 13 short-term certificate programs. The pathway illustrates how students can get scholarships and training, and be work-force ready with a trade within three semesters. The school has partnerships with companies relevant to the trades students learn and helps connect students to work opportunities once they earn their credential. Students have shared that the program is a great opportunity for them to learn a new trade or gain a credential that allows them to get to the next level in their existing field.

DENMARK TECHNICAL COLLEGE has tied many of their programs to the industry or skills needed in their local area. Denmark worked with student data to ensure that the skills students are meant to pick up in classes complement their chosen pathway and align with the jobs they plan on seeking upon completion of a degree or certificate.



BISHOP STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE partnered with local 4-year institutions to offer a pathway for students who may not yet be qualified for the 4-year institution. Students are first offered admission to Bishop State, and upon completing the necessary course work, admitted to the 4-year institution. Students are dual enrolled, have advisors and ID cards for both campuses, and can clearly map how to move through their courses. The program allows students, particularly those who may have little to no experience on a college campus, to become better acclimated to a college environment and receive any additional support they may need.

BATON ROUGE COMMUNITY COLLEGE has built stackable credentials into a couple of their pathways and has built partnerships to ensure that students become connected to the regional workforce.

PULASKI TECHNICAL COLLEGE has created guided pathways that are integrated with their admissions process. They have begun revamping their new student orientation and the process by which students are connected with academic advisors.



Challenges & Considerations

TIME: Creating and implementing pathways is a time-intensive process, particularly when crafted with care. It takes considerable time to analyze how students currently navigate a program versus the ideal path from enrollment to career entry. Managing expectations around the time commitment required from all participants is crucial to successfully developing and implementing these pathways.

BUY-IN: Successful pathways require strong buy-in from multiple stakeholders. Engaging instructors and industry leaders from the beginning ensures that course content aligns with pathway requirements. Student buy-in is equally important, particularly for

Engaging instructors and industry leaders from the beginning ensures that course content aligns with pathway requirements.

pathways that may not follow a “traditional” route. This can be challenging when the pathway’s progression and outcomes are less immediately clear, making early and continuous engagement essential for building trust and commitment.

“Complete buy-in has been a concern for us. Some paths are very obvious, like welding for example, but for a two year college others are not as obvious like English. So we have created some pathways that are creatively designed for those.”

—College Representative

COLLABORATION: Effective pathways rely on cross-campus collaboration among departments and units, which can be challenging in institutions that often operate in silos. Achieving the necessary level of coordination requires effort not only within individual departments but across the entire campus. Clearly defining next steps and key contacts within each pathway helps students understand how to progress, while also ensuring that staff and faculty are aligned and actively supporting students along the way.

“When you’re looking at the onboarding experience, a student applies and then they are contained within the admissions office for a period of time. Then there’s this handoff to advising and then they have some advising and registration activities and then there’s maybe a break before the semester begins and they matriculate into their first semester worth of classes. There are a lot of opportunities for students to become lost in the system or a lot of opportunities for students to drop from the process altogether. And so because many of these activities occur in silos, that creates the challenge to implement successful pathways to completion.”

—Strategy Coach

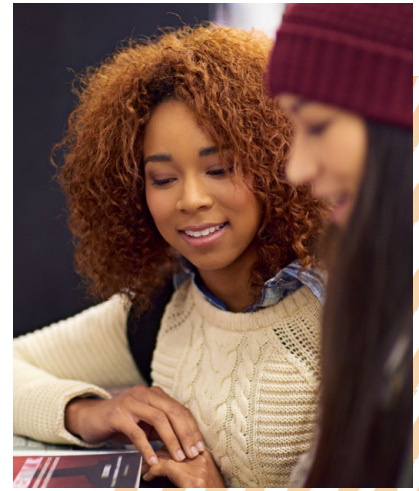
Pathways go beyond listing the courses required for a specific career. They should also outline when and where students can access additional support or materials. For instance, if a particular job requires a set number of on-the-job training hours, the pathway should specify where students can complete these hours and where to obtain necessary tools. A nursing student, for example, may

Achieving the necessary level of coordination requires effort not only within individual departments but across the entire campus.



need to connect with a local hospital program and purchase scrubs. However, they may not know whom to contact at the hospital or where to buy scrubs. This kind of detailed information should be included within their pathway to ensure a smooth, well-supported journey toward their career.

FLEXIBILITY: Pathways must be adaptable to accommodate unexpected changes. Students may encounter life circumstances that affect their attendance or face academic challenges. Incorporating remediation plans or alternative pathways is essential, allowing students to get back on track or pivot if their goals evolve. This flexibility ensures that pathways remain supportive, regardless of a student's unique journey.



Implementation Questions

Pathway Creation

Colleges preparing to implement or strengthen their pathway creation should consider the following questions:

ASSEMBLE YOUR TEAM.

- Who needs to be involved in the planning process?
 - Which faculty and teaching staff should be involved?
 - Which industry or other educational partners (e.g., high schools, four-year institutions) should be involved in order to prepare for successful on- and off-ramps from pathways?
 - Who else will be instrumental in providing support to students along various points on the pathway (e.g., scholarship programs, internship programs, student services) and should be included in the planning process?



ANALYZE THE DATA.

- What data do you have related to student needs, interests, and gaps in the current academic pathways? For example:
 - What kinds of jobs or careers do students hope to obtain after leaving your institution?
 - What is the current pathway that students follow and where might gaps exist (e.g., curriculum, support)?
- What additional data do you need to inform your planning?

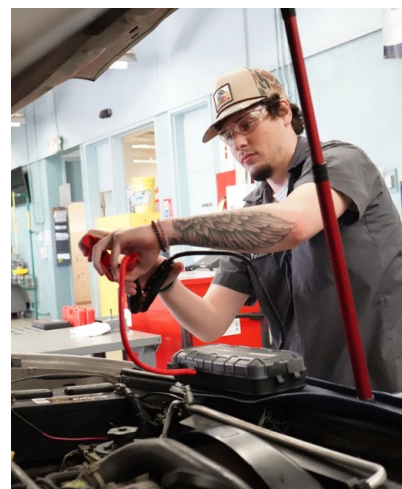


FORGE PARTNERSHIPS.

- How are you connecting with local high schools to create pathways for students to connect with your institution?
- How are you connecting with four-year colleges to create pathways to continued academic training?
- How are you connecting with industry partners to build opportunities for internships and jobs and to ensure that the curriculum covers the necessary training and skills to obtain those jobs?
- How are you connecting with local businesses and organizations to provide additional materials and resources that students may need as they continue on the pathway (e.g., specific tools, instruments, clothing)?

CENTER STUDENT VOICES.

- How are students engaged in planning pathways?
- How is information about pathways being communicated to students?
- How are you receiving and acting upon feedback from students?
 - Do students find pathways useful?
 - How do students think pathways can be more effective?





ENGAGE FACULTY AND STAFF.

- Are faculty and staff supportive of proposed pathways?
Consider asking them the following questions:
 - Do the proposed pathways successfully incorporate the knowledge students should gain from your course?
 - Does the proposed pathway lead to a job or career that your students would want to pursue?
- How are faculty and staff engaged in the planning process?
- How might the pathway impact faculty and staff, including benefits and challenges?



BUILD ACCESSIBLE AND ADAPTIVE SYSTEMS

- How do students access pathways?
 - How do students access information about pathways?
 - What barriers might they face in accessing information or embarking on pathways?
 - How can students ask questions and get more information to better understand the pathways available to them?
- How adaptable are pathways to students' unique goals and experiences?



EVALUATE AND EVOLVE.

- How will you evaluate the effectiveness of pathways? Evaluation might include the following questions:
 - In what ways are pathways successful?
 - Where do gaps exist in available pathways?
 - What barriers are students facing as they move along their pathways?
- How will you use data to evolve and improve pathways?
 - What processes and practices will you use to collectively reflect on and utilize data for continuous improvement?

“Personalized learning pathways have emerged as a game-changing approach to training that can meet the unique needs of each individual learner—making one-size-fits-all education a thing of the past. No longer do learners have to struggle with the frustration of being forced into a rigid curriculum that does not match their preferences. With personalized learning pathways, learners can chart their own course, tailor their own goals and take control of their learning.”

—Strategy Coach

III Basic Needs Supports

The challenges students face while pursuing a degree or credential extend beyond academics. Community colleges, which often serve a high percentage of low-income students, lead the way in developing services that address not only academic but also daily needs. To promote student success, many campuses establish wraparound support services that ensure students' basic needs are met. These supports may include access to food, clothing, housing, safety, healthcare, childcare, technology resources (such as computers or Wi-Fi hotspots), and transportation. Services are typically offered through a blend of on-campus resources and referrals to external organizations.

Promising Practices

HBCCs and PBCCs are implementing a range of innovative services tailored to support the unique needs of their students. Here are a few promising examples from institutions in this initiative (with many more to explore):

- **BATON ROUGE COMMUNITY COLLEGE** has become a "[Hunger Free Designated](#)" school. Students can apply for resources and to have groceries delivered to them.
- **LAWSON STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE** provides [emergency resource funds](#) that students can access if they need things like gas cards or transportation funds.
- **ROXBURY COMMUNITY COLLEGE** founded [Project Access](#), which supports students as they navigate accessing various services such as health insurance, federal and local nutrition programs, legal referrals, mental health and domestic violence resources, and housing.

Community colleges, which often serve a high percentage of low-income students, lead the way in developing services that address not only academic but also daily needs.

- **TRENHOLM STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE** has partnered with their local food bank, to launch The Council Food Pantry. The partnership helps provide resources and run their newly opened on-campus food pantry for students.
- **OLIVE-HARVEY COLLEGE** provides childcare on campus for children ages 3-5 and vouchers for local childcares to help supplement the associated fees.
- **BISHOP STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE** is working with the Institute for Evidence-Based Change to implement Caring Campus, an approach to support all students in feeling connected to their campus through coaching for faculty and staff.



Challenges & Considerations

SPACE: Securing suitable spaces for services like food pantries or clothing closets can be challenging. These services need locations that are both easily accessible for students and private enough to ensure comfort and confidentiality for those utilizing them.

“*[The food pantry] is in a space where it is not open to the public in a way that if you go in the door, you know they’re going to the food pantry... it’s in a space that is much more secluded and obscure so that then students feel more comfortable. And I think the fact that we’ve been using students to run the pantry takes away some of the stigma too. It’s like peer-to-peer encouragement there.*”

—College Representative

STIGMA: Stigma around accessing basic needs support can discourage students from seeking available services or voicing their needs. Students are more likely to confide in trusted peers, staff, and faculty than in designated student services personnel, highlighting the importance of building a supportive campus culture.

“*Students may be hesitant to disclose their struggles with basic needs due to embarrassment or fear of judgment.*”

—College Representative

Some institutions implemented “open houses” or similar events to advertise that resources are available and open to all students.

Students are more likely to confide in trusted peers, staff, and faculty than in designated student services personnel, highlighting the importance of building a supportive campus culture.

COMMUNICATION: Effectively informing students about available basic needs support can be challenging. Schools may offer resources, but these only make an impact when students know how to access them. Ensuring that all faculty and staff are informed and prepared to guide students to available support is a crucial step in connecting students with the help they need. Additionally, tools like anonymous referrals or other discreet communication methods can increase student awareness and access to essential services.

Implementation Questions

Basic Needs Supports

Colleges preparing to implement or strengthen their basic needs supports should consider the following questions:



ASSEMBLE YOUR TEAM.

- Who needs to be involved in a cross-campus team dedicated to improving student life in and out of the classroom, with a focus on basic needs supports?
 - Which administrators, faculty, and staff are instrumental in providing support to students along various points on the pathway (e.g., scholarship programs, internship programs, student services) and should be represented in the planning team?
- What processes are in place to ensure that individuals across campus are engaged in planning and feedback loops, even if they are not members of the planning team? Student needs vary widely, change over time, and can be addressed through diverse strategies, so extensive and ongoing data gathering from multiple sources is important to ensure that solutions are timely and adaptive.
- How will you engage Academic Affairs to learn where they see the need for additional basic need support for students?



- How will you engage Student Affairs to learn about existing student resources and how to build on those resources? They can provide insights on questions including:
 - Are there any existing gaps that need to be addressed?
 - Where are services currently housed?
 - What information is shared with all students about existing resources?
 - How is that information shared?
- How will you integrate input from individuals and units that have especially close contact and awareness of students' experiences, such as members of the campus health system, teaching faculty and staff, and advisors?
- How will you integrate student input?

ANALYZE THE DATA.

- What student needs exist related to childcare, food, housing, physical and mental health, safety, technology, transportation, or other essentials?
 - Which needs exist and are being adequately met by campus services?
 - Which needs exist and are not being adequately addressed?
- What support services exist on campus and how are they being utilized?
 - Are certain groups of students accessing services more or less frequently than others? What might that suggest about barriers or opportunities for increasing access?
- What additional data do you need to collect to understand the need for support services on campus?
- How can you best direct resources toward students' real needs? Utilize the data to make informed decisions about where to prioritize resources.

“I recommend that colleges that want to address basic needs support for students form a community of practice around student life in and out of the classroom. This group, composed of residential life, student activities, student advising, and similar personnel could share their separate experiences of dealing with various challenges of students, and discover ways to effectively address them.”

—College Representative

“Conduct surveys or focus groups to understand the specific needs of your student population. Analyze existing data on retention, enrollment.”

—College Representative



FORGE PARTNERSHIPS.

- How can you utilize external partnerships to fill gaps in basic needs services, including connecting students to public benefits? Combining resources provides multiple avenues for students to have their needs met. Connect with local organizations that understand the experiences of your student population.



CENTER STUDENT VOICES.

- How will you engage students in planning for basic needs supports?
- How will you receive ongoing feedback from students about their needs, what is working well, and where gaps or barriers exist in current services? Institutions in the initiative have used various tools to hear from students, including surveys, focus groups, and designated student advisory groups.
 - How will you ensure that feedback is not only received, but acted on? What feedback loops will be in place to let students know that their concerns have been heard and are being addressed?
- How will you communicate opportunities to students? For example, some colleges host “open houses” or similar events to raise awareness about available resources, emphasizing that these supports are accessible to all students.



ENGAGE FACULTY AND STAFF.

- How will you ensure that faculty and staff are equipped to recognize and understand students’ needs? Consider providing training to prepare faculty and staff to support students in ways that demonstrate true care and leave students feeling supported and empowered (e.g., [Campus Care](#)).
- How will you create opportunities for faculty and staff to communicate about emerging student needs and inform planning efforts?

“Focus on the delivery of both free campus resources and services, and combining those with community resources and services.”

—College Representative





BUILD ACCESSIBLE AND ADAPTIVE SYSTEMS.

- How will you streamline processes for accessing resources? For example, avoid requiring students to prove that they need support, which can potentially create barriers and stigma.
- What barriers exist to accessing services and how can you address them? Consider barriers such as physical location, awareness, and student beliefs (e.g., stigma, fear of consequences for accessing services).
- How can support services adapt to meet students' changing needs?



EVALUATE AND EVOLVE.

- How will you evaluate the effectiveness of basic needs supports? It will be important to collect information including:
 - To what extent are students utilizing the available services?
 - What needs exist on campus and are being adequately served through existing support services?
 - What services may exist that are no longer needed?
 - What needs exist that are not being adequately met through existing support services?
- What processes and practices will you use to collectively reflect on and utilize data for continuous improvement?
- How will you update services based on feedback and new information?

“Financial aid programs and interventions to reduce basic needs insecurity among college students should avoid onerous paperwork or application requirements and eligibility restrictions that could exacerbate equity gaps among students already experiencing disproportionate levels of basic needs insecurity.”

—College Representative



IV Academic Maps

An [academic map](#) is a tool that guides students along the path to earning a credential, helping them track their individual progress. Academic maps usually include information such as:

- the sequence of courses that a student should take, including when they are being offered and when the student should plan to enroll;
- the grade a student needs in each course for the credit to count toward their major;
- milestones the student must reach to stay on track;
- opportunities for employment or internships; and
- information about the types of opportunities that become available when students earn a particular degree.

Unlike pathways, academic maps primarily focus on what a student needs to complete in order to earn a degree or credential, rather than the additional steps required to begin a career or transfer to a four-year institution. Some academic maps may also include information on where to seek guidance or support, along with resources needed for specific courses or to fulfill degree requirements. Below is a sample map from [Marshall University](#).

Examples of Success

[ARKANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY MID-SOUTH](#) implemented [academic maps](#) across programs on their campus and have become a mentor for other institutions working to design academic maps.

Unlike pathways, academic maps primarily focus on what a student needs to complete in order to earn a degree or credential, rather than the additional steps required to begin a career or transfer to a four-year institution.

DRAKE STATE COMMUNITY & TECHNICAL COLLEGE

incorporated [stackable credentials](#) into their academic maps as a way to provide students with additional certificates and skills should they need to pause their education for any reason. [The U.S. Department of Labor](#) defines a stackable credential as “...part of a sequence of credentials that can be accumulated over time to build up an individual’s qualifications and help them to move along a career pathway or up a career ladder to different and potentially higher-paying jobs.” The stackable credentials offer students the opportunity to show marketable skills and degrees sooner than other more traditional programs.

DELGADO COMMUNITY COLLEGE has been working on creating academic maps that are focused on reconnecting with and supporting students who have some college experience but no degree.



Challenges & Considerations

THE PROCESS AS A TOOL: Developing academic maps for each degree and credential offered has allowed participating colleges to identify and address potential barriers that students may encounter on their path to completion. By requiring institutional teams to envision the student journey in detail, this process reveals obstacles and highlights areas for improvement. Creating a comprehensive academic map involves gathering diverse perspectives from across campus and analyzing data from multiple sources, making it a valuable exercise in uncovering challenges to student success and devising strategies to overcome them. Additionally, the collaborative nature of the process fosters stronger relationships among college leadership, faculty, staff, and academic advisors, enhancing cross-campus cohesion.

LEADERSHIP SUPPORT: Strong leadership buy-in, support, and involvement are essential for successfully developing and implementing academic maps. Leaders must champion the initiative, actively advocating for the use of academic maps and engaging all relevant partners in their creation and maintenance. Leadership commitment also helps secure the necessary funding and resources, such as purchasing or updating software and obtaining external capacity-building support for the institutional team.


Creating a comprehensive academic map involves gathering diverse perspectives from across campus and analyzing data from multiple sources, making it a valuable exercise in uncovering challenges to student success and devising strategies to overcome them.

INCORPORATE KEY MILESTONES AND SUPPORT POINTS:


Academic maps serve as valuable tools for boosting student retention by guiding students through degree-specific milestones and support resources. By including targeted timelines for achieving milestones, suggestions for meeting with advisors, and information on available resources, academic maps help students set realistic expectations for degree completion. They also provide students with strategies for accelerating their path to graduation in a more affordable and efficient way.

INTEGRATION WITH ADVISING: The effectiveness of academic maps relies on the commitment and engagement of academic advisors. When advisors fully embrace the value of these maps, they are more likely to use them consistently and effectively, making them much more beneficial to students. Advisors need to be invested in the process and make it a regular practice to review a student's academic map together, ensuring that maps are used successfully to guide students along their academic journey.

STUDENT AWARENESS: Students may underutilize academic maps if they don't fully understand their value or are unaware of updates made to their maps. Ensuring that academic maps are prominently visible and accessible on students' online portals, combined with guidance from advisors, can greatly enhance their use.

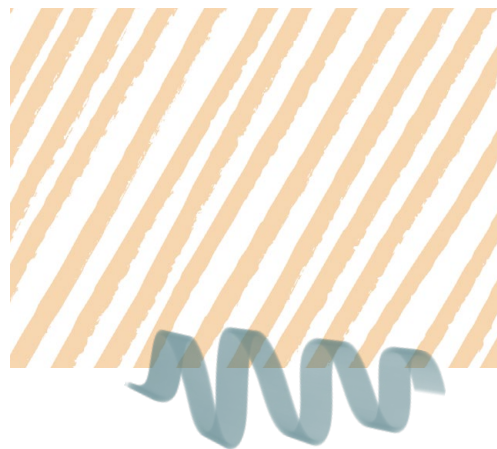
 ***It is imperative to make sure that students are aware of and fully understand how to use the maps effectively.***
—College Representative

SOFTWARE: Selecting the right software is essential for ensuring academic maps are adaptable and can reflect students' progress. Integrating maps into existing student information systems can help make them easily accessible and automatically updated as students complete courses. While initial paper copies may be helpful for orientation, having academic maps that update in real time is far more valuable for both students and advisors.

 ***We wrestled with the fact that published academic maps would be static—they cannot be easily adjusted without writing arrows and scribbles all over the document. This was an essential acknowledgement because the institution cannot control the student's life in terms of***

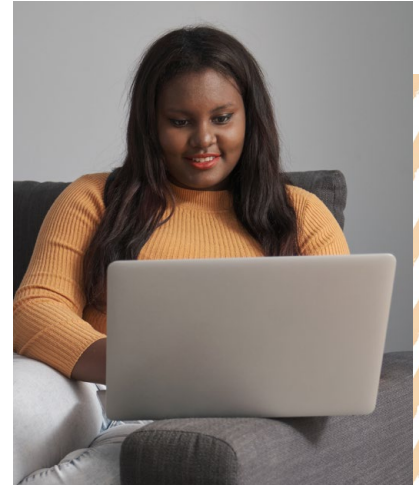


Advisors need to be invested in the process and make it a regular practice to review a student's academic map together, ensuring that maps are used successfully to guide students along their academic journey.



changes to work, living situation, family situation, etc. We aimed to find software that could take the map and make it more dynamic, so that students could plan their semester-by-semester schedule based on their availability to take course offerings, adjust on the fly as they moved their courses around to accommodate life changes, and help keep the student on path to completion by alerting the student if they were attempting to register for a course that would not count toward their declared major.”

—Strategy Coach



Implementation Questions

Academic Maps

Colleges preparing to implement or strengthen their use of academic maps should consider the following questions:

ASSEMBLE YOUR TEAM.

- Who needs to be involved in the development and implementation of academic maps?
 - Who should be engaged in reviewing existing courses and potentially adding or redesigning courses?
 - Which faculty and teaching staff should be involved?
 - Which administrators and campus leaders should be involved?
 - Which industry or other educational partners (e.g., high schools, four-year institutions) should be involved in order to ensure that academic maps reflect successful on- and off-ramps from pathways?
 - Who else will be instrumental in providing support to students along various points on the pathway (e.g., scholarship programs, internship programs, student services) and should be included in the mapping process?

“Get the right people in the room. Recruitment, faculty, advising, registrar, etc. Everyone needs to know what you are trying to accomplish.”

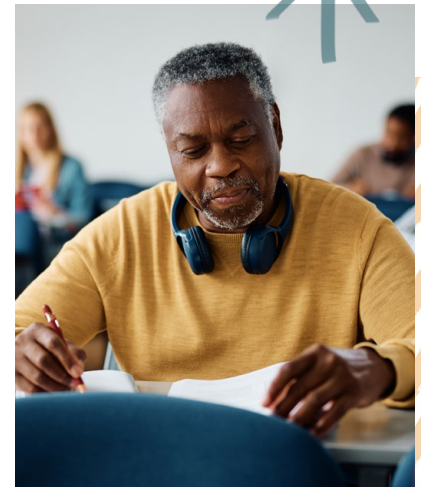
—College Representative

- How will administrators, faculty, and staff across campus collaborate to design and implement academic maps?
 - What processes or structures (e.g., committees, meetings) are in place to promote collaboration?
 - How will academic advisors be involved? Advisors will play a key role in communication with students about utilization of academic maps, so their input throughout the process will be especially important.



ANALYZE THE DATA.

- How can college data inform development of academic maps? Data can provide information about trends and pain points along students' progression and inform development of academic maps. Questions to consider might include the following:
 - What trends exist related to when students leave the institution without obtaining a degree or credential?
 - How might those trends vary across different career pathways?
 - Where might opportunities exist to build in advising or other support for students?
- How well does your student information software support implementation of academic maps?
 - Does it need to be updated to incorporate academic maps?
 - Does your institution need a different software to ensure students are able to access up-to-date academic maps?



FORGE PARTNERSHIPS.

- How might partnerships support the work? Creating these maps can be time consuming and resource intensive. Consider how you may be able to mitigate strain on your staff and faculty's time and resources. Some institutions benefited from engaging with external capacity building support to help walk through the process of building academic maps.



CENTER STUDENT VOICES.

- How are you receiving input from students to inform the design, implementation, and ongoing improvement to academic maps? Build in processes for gathering information from students about how they currently use academic maps, what is useful, and what could be improved.



ENGAGE FACULTY AND STAFF.

- How are faculty and staff engaged in the process of developing and implementing academic maps? Advisors and select faculty and staff should be involved in the development of maps, and all faculty and staff must be aware of their existence and supportive of their use to support students' academic journeys.



BUILD ACCESSIBLE AND ADAPTIVE SYSTEMS

- How can academic maps be used and tailored to the unique characteristics of different types of students (e.g., full- vs part-time, traditional vs returning student)?
- What is the process for updating academic maps? For maps to be useful, they need to be regularly maintained and current. Utilizing software that allows for automatic or easy updates will be beneficial.

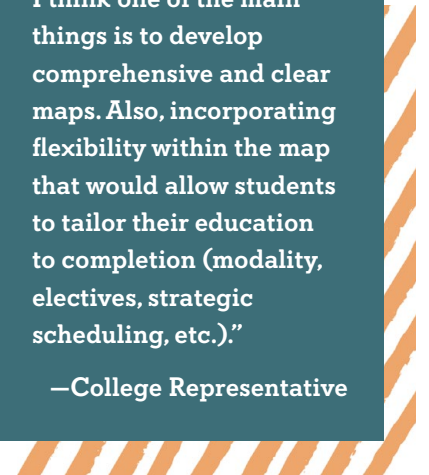


EVALUATE AND EVOLVE.

- How will you evaluate the effectiveness of academic maps? Creating and maintaining academic maps is an iterative process and it is essential to gather feedback on how academic maps are being used by advisors and students, in order to make adjustments and evolve.
- What processes and practices will you use to collectively reflect on and utilize data for continuous improvement?

“I think one of the main things is to develop comprehensive and clear maps. Also, incorporating flexibility within the map that would allow students to tailor their education to completion (modality, electives, strategic scheduling, etc.)”

—College Representative




V Advising

Although providing quality advising services might seem like an obvious way to improve student outcomes, building effective advising models with the right supports can be challenging. Similar to data utilization, advising plays a central role in ensuring the success of other student support strategies. Comprehensive advising offers students personalized guidance, helping them navigate both academic and personal challenges. While there are various models for structuring student advising, key components should include academic and career guidance, assistance with accessing and navigating financial aid, and support in securing basic needs resources.

Promising Practices

POLANSKI TECHNICAL COLLEGE utilizes data and feedback from students to reorganize their advising model. They provided professional development to advisors and created an intentional warm hand-off and communication process into their advising cycle.

DELGADO COMMUNITY COLLEGE changed the location where advising services are housed to make it easier for students to find academic and career support. All academic and administrative advisors are housed in the same location and communication is open between advisors to ensure that the right services and tools are given to each student.



Comprehensive advising offers students personalized guidance, helping them navigate both academic and personal challenges.

Advising Models: Finding the Right Fit

Institutions should implement the advising model that best suits their structure and student population. Participating HBCCs and PBCCs described several successful advising models, including:

- **INDIVIDUALIZED ADVISING:** In this model, students are assigned an advisor, or “academic champion,” in their first year who remains with them throughout their time at the institution. Some schools may bring in specialized advisors after the first year, but students maintain a connection with their initial advisor.
- **GENERAL ADVISING:** All advising staff are trained to assist students across a wide range of topics and are not assigned to specific students. Advisors, professors, and staff have access to a comprehensive course guide, both electronic and physical, enabling them to support any student regardless of their area of study. Although students may also have a designated advisor, this model emphasizes that all faculty and staff share responsibility for student success.
- **PARTNERSHIP MODEL:** Institutions partner with external organizations (e.g., [One Million Degrees](#)) to provide advising. This model helps colleges address capacity limitations and advisor turnover—issues often encountered at community colleges.
- **MIXED ADVISING MODEL:** Combining elements from multiple advising models, this approach offers students flexibility to receive advising virtually or in-person. A key focus is on ensuring that an advisor is always available to address students’ needs.

Each model provides distinct advantages, allowing institutions to tailor their advising approaches to best support their students. For more information on advising models, colleges recommend exploring resources available through the [National Academic Advising Association](#).



Challenges & Considerations

STAFFING: Staffing advising programs is often challenging. Many colleges report staff shortages that result in high caseloads per advisor, reducing the accessibility and quality of advising services. Additionally, high turnover rates can disrupt continuity in student-advisor relationships and lead to inconsistency in services.

RESOURCES: Securing adequate resources to support advising programs can be difficult. Effective advising requires not only personnel time but also essential resources like dedicated office space and software for career planning and internships.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT: Low student engagement with advising programs is a common issue. Engagement may suffer due to limited availability (e.g., restricted hours or specific advisors students must meet) or a lack of trust and connection with advising staff.

CAMPUS CULTURE: A campus culture that encourages multiple touchpoints and fosters open faculty-staff-student interactions is essential for building trust in advising. When students feel comfortable approaching faculty and staff in any setting—classrooms, offices, or hallways—they are more likely to seek and receive support, benefiting from both formal and informal guidance across campus.



When students feel comfortable approaching faculty and staff in any setting—classrooms, offices, or hallways—they are more likely to seek and receive support, benefiting from both formal and informal guidance across campus.

Implementation Questions

Advising

Colleges preparing to implement or strengthen their advising should consider the following questions:



ASSEMBLE YOUR TEAM.

- Who needs to be involved in the team that supports ongoing advising efforts? Understanding advising needs means establishing a team with not only academic advisors, but representatives of all staff and faculty that interact with students. This broad collaboration is necessary to understand all points where students may face challenges or barriers to success.



- Which administrators, faculty, and staff should be involved in the team?
- Who else will be instrumental in providing support to students along various points on the pathway (e.g., scholarship programs, internship programs, student services) and should be actively engaged in the advising process?

ANALYZE THE DATA.

- How do advisors access and utilize data? Ensure that advisors understand how to access and analyze data at the individual and college level, in order to understand and accommodate students' needs. They might consider questions such as the following:
 - Are there specific points at which students seem to struggle more than others? Consider how advising might help students find resources at those key points.
 - Is retention a concern during specific times of the year? Consider targeted student outreach during those times to encourage them to connect with advisors.
 - What other patterns do they see emerging from student data?
 - How might those findings inform advising and other support strategies?
- How do advisors communicate with each other and with instructional faculty and staff about student data?



FORGE PARTNERSHIPS.

- How are advisors working in partnership with faculty and staff within the college? Ensure that advisors have strong partnerships within the college, so that they have access to correct and updated information about courses and other student resources.
- Are there ways in which external partners might support your school's advising work? For example, if recruiting or providing training or oversight for advisors is presenting a challenge, consider partnering with an organization that can provide those services.





CENTER STUDENT VOICES.

- How are you receiving input from students about the advising process and how it can best serve them?



ENGAGE FACULTY AND STAFF.

- How are faculty and staff engaged in the advising process? Everyone on campus should be prepared to help guide students. Ensuring that faculty and staff understand what an advisor can offer to students can help them make informed decisions on where to direct students who are seeking support.



BUILD ACCESSIBLE AND ADAPTIVE SYSTEMS.

- Is your current advising model working well for your school or is it time to explore other options?
 - What advising model are you currently using and how is it working?
 - Are there other models that might better serve your students? Explore different advising models and features to build a program that works well for your campus and students. For schools with limited resources, investing in partnerships may be a promising option.
- How is your advising model adaptive to students' diverse and changing needs? Advising processes should include structure (e.g., standard timelines for when students should check in with their advisors) and flexibility (e.g., drop-in services).
- How accessible are advising services to students? Try to provide multiple avenues for students to connect with advisors, potentially including in-person or virtual meetings, as well as asynchronous, electronically-available resources.



EVALUATE AND EVOLVE.

- How will you evaluate the effectiveness of your advising program?
- What processes and practices will you use to collectively reflect on and utilize data for continuous improvement?



“Make online orientations and other resources available outside of the advising office and easy to access.”

—College Representative

Final Thoughts

Across the country, HBCCs and PBCCs are reimagining campus systems to empower the dreams and ambitions of their diverse student bodies. This guide, *Opportunity by Design*, captures the dedication and innovation driving these institutions as they create structured pathways to success. Each insight reflects the unwavering commitment of HBCCs and PBCCs to uplift students not only academically but holistically—bridging academic, personal, and professional supports to meet students where they are and respond to the complexities of their lives.

The learnings in this guide are offered as a resource to the wider postsecondary education community, a toolkit for institutions of all types and sizes to promote student achievement in ways that are responsive, inclusive, and impactful. By embracing these strategies, colleges and universities can foster environments where students are not merely participants but fully engaged, supported, and seen. Opportunity by Design isn't just a concept; it's an approach that transforms potential into progress, crafting inclusive and resilient systems that honor each student's unique path.

The success of this work relies on the collective commitment of leaders, advisors, faculty, staff, and community partners. Together, these individuals and groups can create pathways that serve as more than academic roadmaps—they are blueprints for lifelong achievement. Let this guide inspire ongoing collaboration, innovation, and the pursuit of an unbounded future, where all students—today and tomorrow—can turn their aspirations into lasting success.



Opportunity by Design isn't just a concept; it's an approach that transforms potential into progress, crafting inclusive and resilient systems that honor each student's unique path.

Cross-Cutting Themes

Three recommendations emerged across all five strategies:

- 1. FOSTER CROSS-CAMPUS COLLABORATION.** Effective system-wide change relies on collaboration across campus. Implementation teams should involve multiple departments, including academic and student affairs, to create a unified approach. Providing targeted training ensures that faculty, staff, and administrators are well-prepared to support new systems. Engaging all levels and departments promotes awareness, alignment, and buy-in for optimal results.
- 2. LEVERAGE EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIPS TO EXPAND RESOURCES.** External partnerships can fill resource gaps and open new opportunities. When colleges face limited internal capacity, community partners can provide essential support, such as access to basic needs services, career and internship pathways, advising infrastructure, or data analysis capabilities.
- 3. PRIORITIZE CLEAR, TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION.** Communication with students is essential to keep them informed about available opportunities, while feedback from students guides decision-making and continuous improvement. Additionally, effective internal communication among administrators, faculty, and staff strengthens cross-campus collaboration, creating a cohesive support system for all initiatives.



Dive Deeper

Opportunity by Design is a call to create learning environments that truly meet students where they are, acknowledging the complexities of their lives and removing barriers to success. Efforts to support students at HBCCs and PBCCs are not just about programmatic decisions—they are intentional, strategic efforts to engage and support diverse student populations, particularly those balancing education with work, family, and other responsibilities.

To learn more about HBCC/PBCCs and promising practices they are implementing to support their students, explore the Deep Dives.



Mapping Opportunity

The Importance of HBCCs and PBCCs

Information about HBCCs and PBCCs, including an interactive map.

[EXPLORE THE DEEP DIVE](#)



Redesigning Opportunity

Condensed Academic Terms to Promote Student Success

Insight into one community college's journey to better serve their students by transitioning to 8-week terms.

[EXPLORE THE DEEP DIVE](#)

Appendix: Methodology

Equivolve has served as the learning partner for the HBCC/PBCC Adult Learners of Color Initiative initiative since its inception in 2021. This implementation guide is derived from many interactions with CCA, Lumina Foundation, and the participating colleges over the course of the initiative. Data collection methods included:

- **SITE VISITS:** Equivolve conducted site visits at three colleges in 2023. These visits involved observations, interviews, and focus groups with college personnel, students, and local partners.
- **INTERVIEWS:** Equivolve conducted over 25 interviews with CCA, cohort coaches, and representatives from participating colleges. Equivolve also conducted three student focus groups with a total of 12 participants.
- **SURVEYS:** Equivolve distributed electronic surveys to participating colleges in 2024 and received 29 responses.

Appendix: Sources

- 1 National Center for Education Statistics. (2023). Characteristics of Postsecondary Students. *Condition of Education*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/csb>
- 2 Bureau of Labor Statistics (2024). College Enrollment and Work Activity of High School Graduates News Release. <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/hsgcec.htm>
- 3 National Center for Education Statistics. (2023). Characteristics of Postsecondary Students. *Condition of Education*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/csb>
- 4 Bureau of Labor Statistics (2024). College Enrollment and Work Activity of High School Graduates News Release. <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/hsgcec.htm>
- 5 <https://iwpr.org/parents-in-college-by-the-numbers>
- 6 <https://www.educationdynamics.com/community-college-students-enrollment-data>
- 7 National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, *Some College, No Credential Student Outcomes, Annual Progress Report – A 2024 Snapshot for the Nation and the States* (2024). <https://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/SCNCRReport2024.pdf>
- 8 Equivolve Consulting, *Lumina Foundation HBCC/PBCC Adult Student of Color Completion Initiative Evaluation Interim Report* (2024).
- 9 <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=667>
- 10 <https://www.congress.gov/bill/110th-congress/house-bill/4137>

Credit to Orangeburg-Calhoun Technical College for photos on pages 11, 15, and 18.

This Guide was developed by Equivolve Consulting, with the support of Lumina Foundation.

About Equivolve

Equivolve envisions a world unbound—a vibrant society in dynamic harmony, untethered by the chains of structural inequality. We dream of a society that pulsates with life, where every person’s potential is not just acknowledged but celebrated. We challenge norms, break barriers, and confront inequities head-on. We believe in shaking the foundations, rewriting narratives, and igniting a cultural renaissance that redefines what it means to live in an equitable society.

By focusing on areas where disparities are most evident—wealth and income, education, healthcare, housing, employment, criminal justice, environment, and transportation—we leverage our resources and expertise to influence change. In this endeavor, we work closely with leaders in government, philanthropy, and the nonprofit sector, forming collaborative partnerships that amplify our impact. Visit equivolveconsulting.com to learn more.

Authors

- Wendell Hall
- Stephanie Moore
- Teja Vemuganti

About Lumina Foundation

Lumina Foundation is an independent, private foundation in Indianapolis that is committed to making opportunities for learning beyond high school available to all. We envision a system that is easy to navigate, delivers fair results, and meets the nation’s need for talent through a broad range of credentials. Our mission is to prepare people for informed citizenship and success in a global economy. Visit luminafoundation.org to learn more.

