

IMAGINE CONNECT PRACTICE

If you ask people who work in community colleges why they chose this career path, they often give reasons like wanting to help students attain a better life, supporting the resiliency of their communities, and paying it forward—particularly those who benefited from attending community college themselves. But sometimes, when colleges strive to implement reform efforts, these motivations fade to the background. This passion for community, learning, and dreams can serve as a north star when the work of change gets difficult, whether for students or for practitioners. Therefore, this guide provides a framework that can help link reform efforts back to the work that community college articulation officers aspire to do.



IMAGINE



CONNECT



PRACTICE

Three Words for Wednesday

For the people who work most closely with students, particularly articulation officers, one of the challenges of implementing education reform efforts is that these frameworks may not spell out what practice looks like in the counseling office. While you may agree with the goals set by your college, it may not be clear what you would do differently next Wednesday when you are focused on helping students navigate the many different transfer requirements of four-year institutions in your region. And yet, articulation officers play a key role in creating a more seamless transition and ensuring that college resources are aligned with partner requirements.

We have identified three words that can help focus your improvement efforts—image, connect, and practice—which are described in this section. These concepts are based on the experience of practitioners who are leading student-centered redesign efforts in places like California, Ohio, Rhode Island, and Texas. This guide

will outline why these three ideas are critical for culture change and equitably improving student outcomes. The guide will also provide you with a framework to identify where your college is already supporting students in these ways and what else you could be doing — as soon as Wednesday.

The Underlying Challenge: The Gap Between Dreams and Economic Pressures

Many students go to community college to attain a dream, like being the first in their family to earn a degree, but the most common reason they give for attending is to get a job. However, for many people, the path to a career is not a straight line. The choices they make are driven by family members and friends, images they see in the media, inspirational teachers, and economic pressures.

Young people often dream of growing up and getting a specific type of job, but they may not know what it is like to do that type of work or what skills are required. Once

they learn more about that career pathway, they may discover that it is not a good match. But often people do not make this connection until after they have started college or completed their studies. Setting an academic and career direction is made more complicated by the rapidly changing job market. Students may not know about the jobs that are available, where to study for those jobs, or how their skills could qualify them for careers that may seem out of reach.

This is particularly important for first-generation and low-income students, who face stark decisions about staying in school or deferring their dreams to take low-skill jobs in order to pay for food and housing. It is also critical for students who have already been tracked into education pathways that are unlikely to lead to living wage jobs.

Career discussions do not just belong in technical programs. Arts, humanities, and social science majors also teach critical skills that prepare students for leadership positions and innovation-focused jobs. However, students are not always able to articulate how their education experience relates to the jobs they want. In the next section, we will provide practical examples to help make these ideas more concrete, including ideas for how to implement these changes in the context of the pandemic.



Articulation officers help students imagine their future by clarifying the transfer opportunities that align with their interests, strengths, and aspirations. You can help students to:

- Explore their interests and articulate their passions
- Learn about academic and career paths where they can pursue those interests
- Develop a plan for their future

Exploration activities are even more impactful when you help students think past their transfer destination to the career they will pursue. However, planning activities are not intended to focus narrowly on specific jobs. Instead, they can support students in identifying what motivates them and understanding the changes they want to make in their own lives, their communities, and the world at large.

Right now...

How do you currently help students imagine their future, provide opportunities to explore, and identify clear transfer pathways to reach goals?

On Wednesday...

What is one action you could take on Wednesday to help more students imagine their futures and identify transfer pathways to their goals?

Ideas for Wednesday from the Field

- Identify the various routes to transfer in a specific discipline (such as business) from within an academic and career community, and determine key turning or restrictive points (such as common and differential requirements)
- Work with academic deans and chairs to create transfer guides for each program, to all major four-year partners
- Ensure that articulation agreements and advising materials allow students to navigate institutional requirements to attain career goals
- *COVID-19 response:* Coordinate with four-year partners on documenting the labor market value of each academic program at the bachelor's degree level, to support outreach efforts



Students who see themselves as part of a community are more likely to stay enrolled at your institution, and to persist once they transfer to a four-year institution. However, students may not know how to build those connections on campus. Articulation officers can help to connect students with others who share their interests and create mechanisms to stay connected with them. You can design opportunities for students to:

- Meet others who share their interests
- Connect with mentors and peers in their field of interest
- Learn about academic and career opportunities aligned to their interests

Articulation officers do not need to personally serve as mentors for all of their students. By joining networks of

people who share a passion, you can spread this support role across many people, while building a community to support and sustain your own work.

Right now...

How do you currently help students connect with a career and/or interest-based community that includes faculty, peers, advisors, and students and practitioners at four-year partners?

On Wednesday...

What is one action you could take on Wednesday to help more students build connections that will help them complete, transfer, and find employment?

Ideas for Wednesday from the Field

- Offer social activities where students who have the same transfer destination meet each other
- Cultivate relationships with four-year partners so that potential transfer students can connect with students and faculty at the four-year institution
- Ensure students pursuing shorter term credential sequences are included in communications and outreach activities regarding transfer
- *COVID-19 response:* Work with four-year partners to prioritize outreach to and engagement with potential transfer students as a way to strengthen enrollments



There is no better way to figure out one's true interests than getting hands-on experience. By solving real-world challenges, starting in the very first classes they take, and understanding how core competencies are deepened over time within a discipline, students can:

- Build self-efficacy as problem-solvers and learners
- Understand and articulate why they are learning specific topics
- Determine whether they have picked the right pathway

Although getting to see how concepts are applied in work or service-learning contexts is an excellent way to implement active learning, students can learn these

skills within courses as well. Articulation officers can partner with four-year institutions to identify key competencies that students should be working on both before and after transfer that will position them for the career of their choice.

Right now...

How do you currently advocate for opportunities where students actively practice skills and evaluate the fit of an area of study?

On Wednesday...

What is one action you could take on Wednesday to develop transfer-preparation pathways that value real-world challenges?

Ideas for Wednesday from the Field

- Identify how non-career and technical education transfer pathways prepare students for jobs
- Coordinate with four-year partners about messaging the value of 21st Century skills
- Work with four-year partners to address how content taught in career and technical education pathways could be accepted for transfer
- *COVID-19 response:* Clarify for students how the skills they gain after transfer will lead to stronger earnings and career opportunities

Find Out More

Learn more about how communities are implementing helping students to imagine, connect, and practice at www.WestEd.org/project/e3-economic-mobility-education-equity.