

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 advisors aspire to do.



IMAGINE



CONNECT



PRACTICE

Three Words for Wednesday

For the people who work most closely with students, particularly advisors, 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 get enrolled in classes and accessing resources related to financial aid and other needs, all with too few resources.

And yet, advisors play a key role in helping students to understand their options and identify the best avenue to reach their goals.

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.

Establishing educational and career goals early on 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.



Advisors have a key role to play in helping students to imagine their future. For example, 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

These activities are not intended to focus narrowly on specific jobs. Instead, they 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 pathways to reach goals?

On Wednesday...

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

Ideas for Wednesday from the Field

- Ensure outreach activities with feeder high schools and adult education programs allow students to explore their strengths and interests
- Clarify how each academic pathway that the student is considering would support economic mobility
- Help students to create multi-year academic plans so they can see the steps that will lead them to their goals
- *COVID-19 response:* Advise students with dual enrollment and other early college experiences on how to get credit for their prior work and continue on a pathway



Students who see themselves as part of a community are more likely to stay enrolled, but students may not know how to build those connections on campus. Advisors 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

Advisors 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 potential employers?

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

- Design onboarding activities for each of your college pathways that build intentional communities
- Support student organizations organized around pathways
- Cultivate relationships with employers to develop connections for students
- *COVID-19 response:* Provide information to faculty that will help them direct students to community-building resources, to combat the isolation many experienced during the pandemic



There is no better way to figure out one's true interests than getting hands-on experience. When your college anchors its curriculum in real-world challenges and links content across courses, starting in the very first classes they take, 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, there are other ways for students to practice these competences. You can help students find classes that apply both foundational and advanced skills to the problems that fuel students' passions.

Right now...

How do you currently help students identify opportunities to practice their skills, gain experience and timely feedback, and evaluate the fit of an area of study?

On Wednesday...

What is one action you could take on Wednesday to help more students understand the core skills and practical applications of their potential majors?

Ideas for Wednesday from the Field

- Counsel students on the employment value of 21st Century skills and clarify how the student is building those skills in their academic pathway
- Develop modules for foundational courses in a pathway that include information on transfer and career options
- Support faculty to develop relationships with employers to support experiential learning or gain professional development
- *COVID-19 response:* for students who lost their jobs during the pandemic and are seeking a new career, help them identify how skills they learned at work relate to academic disciplines that lead to bachelor's degrees and living wage jobs

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.