

Student Voices on the Higher Education Pathway

Preliminary Insights & Stakeholder
Engagement Considerations



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By Public Agenda
with the support of WestEd



PUBLIC AGENDA



The design concept for this report is an abstract, yet highly focused, graphical representation of student voices. Each color signifies the involved states; all together, the colors represent the states working in concert to paint a larger picture that resembles a sound wave (graphic equalizer). The sound wave represents all of the voices and discussions heard during the student focus groups.



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Introduction

Efforts to improve student learning and success at community colleges are in the national policy spotlight. Colleges around the country are reviewing their institutional practices and gathering groups of education stakeholders to design and then implement changes in advising, developmental education, programs of study and curricula, student service delivery, transfer and articulation, and more. One of the central tenets of current efforts is to keep changes and improvements “student-centered”—that is, to keep the ultimate goal of improving the student experience in sight throughout the process

of change. To this end, keeping students’ voices and experiences at the center of reform plans can enhance the legitimacy of proposed reforms, their effectiveness, and their sustainability. The purpose of the research presented here is to support and reinforce student-centered reforms by providing another vehicle for student voices.

To support community college leaders’ ongoing deliberations about how to integrate a student perspective into the reform process, Public Agenda and WestEd conducted focus groups in March 2012, during which they asked current and former students about the relationship between their goals for, and experiences in, college. Special attention was paid to examining

RESEARCH SAMPLE AND METHODOLOGY

The research that informed this report was drawn from 15 two-hour focus groups conducted in March 2012 with 161 individuals from the four Completion by Design states who represented three types of relationship to community college: those currently enrolled (“current students”), those who had completed a degree or certificate (“completers”), and those who had dropped out (“non-completers”). Current students ranged in age from 18 to 27 years old, while completers and non-completers were between 24 and 29 years old. The greatest number of participants identified themselves as Caucasian, followed by African American and Hispanic. Employed participants held jobs ranging from administrative to management roles in various industries, with health care and technology the most common. The main areas of focus group inquiry included:

- Attitudes toward higher education attainment
- Factors influencing decisions to go to college
- College readiness
- Early experiences in college, especially with developmental education, orientation, and student success courses
- Beliefs about and the experience of determining a program of study
- Institutional supports for, or barriers to, completion
- Use of technology as it related to their community college experiences (current students)
- Recommended changes that might have helped them to persist and complete college degrees or certificates.

This report is based on preliminary analysis of the focus group research. In summer 2012, WestEd and Public Agenda will develop a second report based on deep analyses of the focus group transcripts. While qualitative research is a powerful vehicle for generating a deeper understanding of a problem, the conclusions drawn from small-scale research of this kind should be viewed as suggestive rather than definitive.

how some students succeed, why some do not, and what students think could have helped them be more successful. For example, we asked students how important they believed it was to have a concrete end goal in mind early in their college careers. We also asked at what point during their college experience did they feel they should be encouraged to narrow their focus toward a specific goal, whether academic or professional? What would they describe as the most promising changes that colleges could make to help them complete their degree or transfer to a four-year institution?

In general, the themes that emerged from the focus group discussions reflected attitudes shared by both current and former students, across institutions located in four states. The last section of the report offers a set of questions developed to encourage dialogue and collaborative problem solving among college stakeholders, including faculty, staff, students, and administrators.¹

THEMES

Theme 1. Students wanted more exposure to career possibilities so that they could make better-informed decisions about the goals they set out to achieve and the steps necessary for success.

Theme 2. While former and current community college students consistently reported that they lacked readiness for college, most believed that the student success and developmental education courses intended to bring them up to speed were not offered in a way that helped them succeed.

Theme 3. Participants believed that having clear goals, and being in programs with well-defined pathways, gave them a greater chance of persisting, completing, or transferring.

Theme 4. Advisors, counselors, and faculty members who offer support and guidance that is accurate, accessible, and tailored to students' educational and career goals are in high demand and can be hard to come by.

Theme 5. Students are aware that colleges offer a wide range of services, but they report that finding the specific information or services they need often requires going on a "wild goose chase" and navigating silos.

¹ The "Internal Stakeholder Engagement Workshop Toolkit" (2012) developed by Public Agenda for Completion by Design offers guidance on designing and conducting problem-solving dialogues aimed at enhancing student success at community colleges.

Themes in Detail

Theme I.

Students wanted more exposure to career possibilities so that they could make better-informed decisions about the goals they set out to achieve and the steps necessary for success.

It is not surprising that most students enroll in community colleges to enhance their financial and professional potential by attaining a postsecondary degree or certificate. Students we spoke with were aware that although a degree is not necessary for some jobs, it is required for a career that will provide financial security and the flexibility to transition from one company or sector to another as needed.

I wanted something that I know if I decide to walk off this job today that I'm going to be able to find another job like this. It was at one point that I was looking for a job and it was like all the jobs that I was looking at, they wanted you to have a degree. I didn't want to be limited to a particular type of job because I didn't have a degree, so I just wanted more options and to be able to say—because you can lose your job at any moment. I just felt like it'd be easier to find employment with a degree. (Completer)

I was already living on my own: apartment, car payment. It was either do or die. [If] you wanted a career and a stable, nice check every two weeks, week, or month, you needed to get an education. If you wanted to work in the field, you need the degree, you need the license. It was just a motivation. (Non-Completer)

Students want to know from the start which programs and credentials prepare them for which jobs and careers. Specifically, they want it made explicit up

front what jobs are available to them based on the certificate or degree they receive so they can choose their course of study according to their job interests and prospects. Exposure to career choices, respondents said, could be obtained through pre-college work experience, internships, and guidance from adjunct professors and career counselors who have direct, up-to-date knowledge about the application and utility of different degrees in actual work settings.

I think more information like [online resources about jobs] and real-time statistical data like that... If you want to be x, y, or z or you want to major in business, these are the kinds of jobs that you can get in business. More career paths versus "I'm going to get my degree in business." (Completer)

[You need] someone who actually has a connection to real work experience. Someone that can say, "I've been in this industry here, and someone—I was in your position before not knowing what I should do or—I mean, I knew what I should do, but I didn't know how to apply it to my college path." (Completer)

When asked how colleges could help students narrow down or fine-tune their education and employment goals, a number of participants in two states gave internship and service-learning experiences high praise. The benefits of these experiences, students reported, included enhancing their job experience, exposing them to a potential career field, building their support and professional networks, and helping them to refine their goals.

[Provide data on] success rates in certain courses, what people do after, and how you can contact these people if you want to do what they did... Offer internships, so while you're [in school] you can get an internship doing something that you want to do that, you know, kind of lands you a job so that when you do get your degree, if you did—what you

did well enough without the degree, with the degree, you know, you're going to do even better. (Current Student)

It's called service-learning programs... The professor told me to do it, something related to my field. Most of the programs that they have on the list are for health, like for old people, little kids, stuff like that, not what you want to do, toward your degree. If they can increase the list of programs that they have, that would be awesome. (Completer)

[Service learning] should be required. That way they can get that real-world experience, and within a year's time, with all the classes that you'll have, if you don't like that first service learning opportunity in that area, you have another chance in another class to do something else and test that field out... Then, by the time your first year is over, you have a very solid idea of what you want to do. (Current Student)

A few completers also expressed a desire to see more connections established between local businesses and the college. Local businesses, students said, could participate more in job fairs, make presentations in classes, and generally form more of a network with the colleges so students gain not only knowledge about jobs in general, but about actual jobs in the community.

Theme 2.

While former and current community college students consistently reported that they lacked readiness for college, most believed that the student success and developmental education courses intended to bring them up to speed were not offered in a way that helped them succeed.

Students recognized the need for developmental education and student success courses, but they also

believed that they came at a high cost in terms of both time and money. Many students said the college could have done more to provide information earlier about the implications of placement tests, stating that had they known about the time and cost of these courses they would have prepared more for the tests.

I just feel like they don't prepare you [for the math placement test]. They don't tell you beforehand, "Look, if you don't do your scores you're going to have to take this test." I felt like if they would've told me this before, probably gave me a book and were like, "Okay, study this. Review," you know? Kind of "Look over these things and you can be more prepared for the test." (Completer)

With few exceptions, participants did not describe remedial courses as a huge barrier to their own persistence and completion; however, they did express a strong desire to accelerate through these courses or retake the tests mid-course if, for instance, all they required was a short refresher on the subject or if they had a negative testing experience during the placement exam. Other participants recommended offering subject refresher opportunities in formats other than the developmental education course sequence.

It was kind of a waste of time, but they have other one-hour or two-hour workshops that they host through the student center on campus. Those are really helpful. They emphasize time management and just really, really basic study skill-type things. (Current Student)

I wish they would have had, like, a briefing, just because they have so many things at colleges, such as math centers, tutoring, and all that. You would think that they would have some form of quick—an hour class, or just kind of bring us all up to date with what you already learned. I think a lot of people would attend that, actually. (Completer)

While many students who said they needed only a refresher course found the remedial courses useful for this purpose, the students who said they had always struggled in the subject tended to find these classes more cumbersome. One participant suggested that the lack of connection between the remedial coursework and her major made the course less engaging and even frustrating.

In my opinion [developmental education] was a waste of money and time, because when you start taking these classes that they force you to take because you have to take them because they said so, not because it's relevant to your major...[your] mentality is different [from when you're taking courses for your major]. You're focused. You're taking notes. You're doing what you got to do, but you also have a drive. You have a reason why you're there. You're there for—you have a purpose. You know what I mean? You have a major. (Current Student)

Like the developmental education courses, the student success courses were largely not helpful for current and former community college students. Many felt that courses that taught life and study skills were better suited to high school students. Despite the overall negative feedback on these courses, a couple of students felt they had benefited from them, including one who remarked:

It helped me know more about myself. I'm learning how to learn. It taught me more about myself, of how I'm more of a visual-learning and hands-on than, like, auditory. It helped me learn that, because before I didn't know what type of learner I was, so it helped me determine what type of learner I was, and it's helping me now to [decide] what classes to take. (Current Student)

Theme 3.

Current and former students believed that having clear goals, and being in programs with well-defined pathways, improved their own and their peers' chances of persisting, completing, or transferring.

Both current and former students believed that articulating an end goal—be it a completed program of study, a transfer to a four-year degree, or a job or career placement—early on in the community college experience helped them or their peers build momentum and stay on track toward completion.

I think sometimes a lack of direction is a problem for a lot of people... Someone just tells you to take whatever you want, and you don't really have a goal in mind. You don't have someone telling you what to do, more or less... I think it's really hard for people when there's no end in sight and there's no goal in mind to even continue to go, because you're just probably going to get really frustrated and want to drop out. (Completer)

If you don't have that clear path to succeed—where you're going to go, what you want to do when you enter it—then you're just going to end up frustrated much quicker, I think. So the people that are most at risk to drop out are the ones that don't have a set path or don't know what they're going to do after college. That's the main thing that needs to be addressed before they even enter their first class. (Completer)

Back in high school, whenever people would come talk to us about college, they'd usually say if you don't know what you want to do, that's okay. I think up to a certain point that's not good advice. (Current Student)

I would start with letting [people] know first and foremost, do not go to college until you're ready to go to college, because if your head is not right and you go in the game not ready to play the game, then you're not going to be doing the right thing when it comes to studying. You have to be—you have to have a goal. (Current Student)

The dominant thinking among students was that without focus and without a clearly defined end goal, higher education is too difficult and expensive. However, a number of students expressed hesitation about being forced to choose a focus too quickly; they believed that premature decisions would lead to their regretting their choices and changing course later. To avoid misdirection and taking needless credits, participants recommended that students allow time early on at the college to take advantage of core courses to explore opportunities and find direction.

I feel like a community college is mainly right for your core [classes]. That's the time when you figure out what you want to do. Unless what you're going to do only requires a two-year degree, then okay... But other than that, just do your core and get a general studies degree. That way you can still do anything, because if you concentrate in one area for those two years and then you decide, "Oh, that's not what I want to do," you've wasted your time. You have to kind of start all over. (Completer)

I'd say just go in there and do your basic courses first. Do your math, do your English, and along the way go preparing yourself, looking around, seeing what internships they have... How many of us said we were in college and we were changing our degrees? You could just start very general, and then afterward be like, "Okay, this is what I want to do." (Completer)

Honestly, sometimes it's really important for a person to focus in on getting the basics done

and then moving into their degree program, and sometimes you just need options. You need to be able to kind of pick and choose to be able to figure out what you're wanting. (Non-Completer)

Additionally, while some participants see community college as a cost-effective way to take different courses and explore various career options, they emphasized the importance of capping this experimentation with a time or credit limit before students have to select a program of study.

It's good to have dabbled for the first little bit, because you might discover something you really like that you didn't have any idea of what it was before. But I think as you start to rack up credits, you start to run into problems with financial aid and stuff like that, because I think you can have one and a half times the amount of credits you need for your degree before they start cutting you off. Don't dabble. (Current Student)

You can get by two semesters without declaring, but after that you're just wasting time kind of wandering around with credits that won't transfer. (Current Student)

Theme 4.

Advisors, counselors, and faculty members who offer support and guidance that is accurate, accessible, and tailored to students' educational and career goals are in high demand and can be hard to come by.

Students described a variety of experiences with college advisors. In some cases, advisors did not live up to students' expectations, failing to provide them with meaningful assistance. In other cases, advisors went above and beyond the call of duty to provide struggling students with information and help. Across

the board, participants agreed that having knowledgeable, clear, and willing advisors would have greatly eased the burden of navigating their community college experience.

In order for students to succeed, they need somebody to go to, whether it is professors... or—like in my case—somebody to talk to about my financial aid. I just think that they need more people to be hands-on with students. (Non-Completer)

Just somebody that you got one-on-one time with—someone where you can say, “Look, I’m having an issue here. Can we set an appointment or a time where we can get together and talk about it?” instead of having to fight with an advisor’s schedule. That was my biggest problem. (Non-Completer)

My advisor was there with me from the beginning. He helped me every step of the way. He even pushed me to challenge myself with going into competitions and stuff like that. So I think it all depends on if you have that one person, that one advisor who actually cares about their job and seeing somebody improve... He made sure that I was on the right track. Even though I started with a general idea of what I wanted to do, he actually helped me to refine that idea and make sure that I was on the right path and taking the right courses to transfer to the school that I wanted to transfer to. (Completer)

A number of students described positive one-on-one experiences with professors who played an important role in helping them stay motivated, connected to opportunities, and connected to their education goals.

They know I want to get a Ph.D. eventually, and it’s just like this thing where they talk to me. They help me. They give me advice. They stick with me. It’s just great. It’s really great, how much investment they put when they see that you’re passionate about it. They get behind you. At least,

that’s my experience—they get behind what you want to do. (Current)

I personally haven’t had any bad experience learning from professors. They’ve always given me, if not their personal phone number, they’ve given me, like, the phone of their office, for example, or they give me, like, their hours in their office and their e-mails. I’ve never had any problems, and they’re actually at the labs to tutor. (Current)

I had a situation a couple semesters back where I was in an accident, and I was out of school for, like, a month. I was talking to my teachers every week. They were getting my work to me in the hospital. They were bringing my stuff to me because I actually communicate. If you e-mail, communicate with them, that’s all you got to do. Keep communication with your instructor. I passed my class, and I was out of school for a month. People were like, “If I was in the hospital for a month, I couldn’t...do that.” Just communicate with your teachers. They’re there to help you. (Current)

Other students, however, were frustrated by a lack of accessible information and support from professors.

I think teachers should be required to post their numbers and their student hours in some kind of online directory, because I don’t know—I never find one that’s up to date because they’re always changing offices or whatever, or they’re changing their office hours. They should post that in addition to the numbers. (Current Student)

I’ve had professors tell me, “I need to sign you guys in because it’s a requirement from the school for me, but I really don’t care if you guys don’t show up. The syllabus has the test dates. You show up for the tests. There’s no makeups. You like it, fine. You don’t, drop the class by this date”... If anything, I want to hear, “What-

ever you guys need, I'm here. My office hours are these..." The student is just as responsible for seeking help, but [a professor] also has to be available and be approachable. (Current Student)

Not only is information and guidance sometimes inaccessible, current and former students report that it is common to get different and contradictory information. Inconsistency in information or guidance, not surprisingly, causes distrust of the institution. Distrust in information leads students—many of whom are making family and financial sacrifices to obtain a degree—to feel as if they are risking time and investment by pursuing higher education.

[At the advising center] they'll sometimes have students that are working part-time, and so you listen. "Don't listen to that advisor. She told me to take these classes, and I ended up taking, like, five classes that I didn't need, I had to pay for, and guess what? I don't need them for anything." So then you're sitting there saying, "Who do I trust?" (Current Student)

That's kind of scary to me, because it's like you're paying out of pocket for these classes... I paid for four classes that are not going to go toward my degree. That was kind of like, "Oh, my god. What are these people doing?" You've got to trust these people, but at the same time, it's kind of hard to do that. (Current Student)

In the absence of reliable campus-based support structures, some focus group participants noted that they appreciated having the option of getting advice and information about curricula and college policies by using technology. Accessing information on the Internet about teachers, staff, and policies eased the stress of the college environment. Several students suggested that colleges could do a lot more to streamline guidance by improving their websites and other forms of electronic communication.

Modernize... A lot of people have smart phones. To build a mobile site, to be able to access everything. We've all said it. Life is too busy now. We need to be able to streamline. (Current Student)

When neither online nor institutional supports have helped, students have had to "take their education into their own hands" and rely on their own devices or on guidance from their peers:

They did have student mentors—and I thought that was really helpful. They were explaining how their experience was [in school] and what they've had to do and where they went when they needed help. Coming from the student perspective, rather than just a grown-up that isn't actually in schooling, helps. (Current Student)

I would just ask the same question to [advisors] three times and see if they gave me the same answer all three times. A lot of times, that's when I would identify if there was, "Oh, I'll just do it this way," since whatever. Or to ask three different people the same question and see what the answers were. (Completer)

They would sign you up for some classes, but then some had nothing to do with your major—they would say you need this, you need this class. It ended up counting as electives later on because you really didn't need it for your actual degree. It wasn't only me; a bunch of my friends, the same exact thing happened to them. They started signing up themselves. (Completer)

It got to a point where I took out my papers and I ended up one day testing [my advisor] to see if she knew what she doing. I ended up knowing more than her about the classes. I was like, "I'm going to stop coming to you, lady." (Completer)

I had a really good friend that threatened me if I didn't have my nursing degree before the age of 30.

I have her to thank, as well. She definitely pushed me to at least start and never let me stop, even if it was for financial reasons. (Current Student)

Theme 5.

Students are aware that colleges offer a wide range of services, beyond advising, but they report that finding the specific information and services they need often requires going on a “wild goose chase” and navigating silos.

A common source of frustration among students is the lack of coordination and communication among the various college offices that provide information and services. Combined with the out-of-date, unclear, or incorrect information often provided by these offices, this situation results in the waste of students' valuable time. Having to deal with the many offices responsible for different aspects of college operations and services is intimidating and confusing for most students. Providing students with up-to-date, high-quality information about what students are required to obtain and do—and when, where, and how to meet these responsibilities—would enable students to treat education as their first priority, rather than spending time on confusing administrative hurdles.

For me to start school was already a hurdle I had to cross, basically. But not only did I have to go through getting myself to actually go to school, now I'm fighting the school that I want to go to for information that shouldn't be that difficult to get... I just sat here for four hours for me to walk up to a window and say, "I need to speak to an advisor." Then they're going to say, "Okay. Here's a paper. Go wait over there for another two hours." (Current Student)

If the information were easier to get to, and I knew sooner who to talk to, I might not have had to drop out and I might have been further along at this point. It would have been nice to know

the go-to, who to talk to besides an advisor, because they really lead you to counseling. Again, it took me getting near failing for them to say, "Come talk to somebody." Then those people were extremely helpful and very supportive. In fact, that's what started me down, "Here's where you can find out what resources we do have available so you don't get academic probation." At that point I was so overwhelmed, it was kind of like I didn't have the mental or emotional stores to look at all of that at that point. I was just completely overwhelmed. (Current Student)

You have to go through a lot of steps to get something done that may not be really needed. You know what I mean? It causes a delay. Then you get frustrated and you're like, "I've wasted all this time. I work full-time. [Expletive]." Then you don't go. (Current Student)

There's some paperwork that you have to do with some processes that you have to go through in order to do this and do that that. [My friends] just were fed up with waiting and doing this and submitting that and waiting for that...and they just dropped out. They were just, "I'm not going to deal with this mess and this paperwork and all this stuff." (Current Student)

One of [the advisors] sent me—they're like, "I can't really help you with this"... She's like, "You can go to this office and they can advise you better"... I went and they were closed. They were on a different campus. I went back and I had to wait in line to talk to somebody else just because they told me to go to some room that didn't even exist anymore. (Completer)

They don't even know. That's the whole thing. Nobody communicates with anybody, so you go and ask one person like she did, and they don't know, so they direct you to somebody else. Finally, you get to where you do need to go, and they're clueless. (Current Student)



Student-Centered Stakeholder Engagement

Regardless of where a college is in its reform efforts, the stories, concerns, and recommendations raised by current and former students serve as useful points of departure for discussion of how to help more students complete degrees. The prompts below have been developed to trigger critical thinking and collaborative problem solving toward the end of increasing student success. Though not every question will be useful for every audience, community college leaders may find these questions useful for engaging faculty, staff, administrators, and students, as well as for guiding internal discussions about student-centered reforms.

Questions About Students

- ◇ How can students play an active role in the institution's efforts to plan and implement success and completion efforts? For instance, do we have student representation on committees? How can the college create opportunities for students to discuss and problem-solve institutional barriers to success and completion?
- ◇ How can students or alumni of community colleges support peers in their efforts to persist and complete? What types of peer information and support networks could students and alumni develop or expand to help more students? How can the institution engage alumni around student success and completion?
- ◇ What mechanisms do we currently use to incorporate student voices in our decision-making? How can we improve the ways in which we involve students in our efforts to boost student success and completion? How can the institution engage alumni around student success and completion?

- ◇ How does the college share data (e.g., institutional-level data, labor and employment trend data, demographic data) with its students, and how can students be part of using data to make informed decisions for themselves and on behalf of the college?
 - » Are there opportunities for students to access and analyze data on persistence, completion, and job placement for their own purposes? (For example, could reviewing post-graduation industries of employment provide students with a better understanding of career opportunities?)
 - » Are there opportunities for students to help interpret institutional-level data in order to help the college determine improvements or changes to academic and support services for students? (For example, if the data shows low enrollment in student success courses, might students be able to help interpret why enrollment is low and how it could be improved?)
- ◇ How can we better integrate advising into the everyday experience of our students? For example, how can we ensure that students will have the context of their academic and career pathway in mind when making decisions about which courses to take, where to look for internships, and how to describe their educational and career goals to others?

Questions About Faculty

- ◇ What kinds of professional development or orientation can be offered to our full-time and adjunct faculty in order to create institutionwide understanding about resources and supports for students?
- ◇ How can the institution make the most of faculty—adjunct and tenure-track—connections to the labor market as a source of potential career guidance for students exploring different pathways?

- ◇ How can we better engage adjunct faculty in the process of implementing our college's reforms to increase student completion?

Questions About Advisors

- ◇ How can we ensure that advisors are equipped to assist students with core issues such as education and career planning, course selection, and degree and transfer requirements? What processes can be developed within and between advising services at the college that will provide more efficient, accurate, and consistent information for students?
- ◇ What are the most effective ways we can alert students to potential problems (insufficient units, failing grades, too many dropped classes) before they become a crisis and it's too late to make changes? How much of a personal touch are we able to provide? What is the appropriate role of technology?
- ◇ How can we empower and support faculty members to enhance their roles as student mentors and advisors? What are the barriers to increasing advising responsibilities for faculty (barriers for faculty and for student services)? How can we create the political will to overcome those barriers? Who needs to be at the table?

Questions About Facilitating Transfer and Connection to Careers

- ◇ What kinds of opportunities can we develop, expand, or explore to increase student exposure to career and educational fields of study before or during entry into community college? (For example, how can the community college work with high schools to raise awareness of career and job paths that can begin with an education at a community college?)
- ◇ How can our student application and enrollment process prepare students to enter our college with a clear understanding of the different paths that

they can follow in order to graduate? How can we help students navigate between exploring options and choosing a directed path? How can we help students switch paths if they realize they did not choose the one best suited to their interests?

- ◇ How does our college interact with the local businesses and industries? How can the college connect with local employers to create stronger pathways or expose students to more opportunities in the local area?
- ◇ To what extent do local employers consider our college a resource for future employees? How can we improve the pipeline?
- ◇ How does our college interact with the four-year institutions that our students are most likely to transfer to? How can the college ensure that faculty and advisors have accurate, up-to-date information about transfer requirements?
- ◇ What are the main barriers to re-entry at our institution? At what points do individuals who have stopped-out reconnect with the institution, and how can we make sure that reconnection points are strengthened and supported?

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