COLLEGE, ON PURPOSE

A guide to implementing the Purpose First strategy–
the missing link between career choice,
guided pathways, and first-year momentum

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I. INTRODUCTION

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PURPOSE MATTERS

Decisions about college and career are difficult. They require students to reflect on their values, aspirations, and the economic realities they will face on the other side of graduation. Beginning college with a clear sense of purpose is a critical step to ensuring an investment in higher education pays personal and financial dividends for a lifetime.

College-bound students are too often presented with an overwhelming number of major options with little guidance in making the best decision. While student choice is a critical value of the American higher education system, studies show that presenting anyone with too many choices "leads to paralysis, to bad decisions, to a loss of self-control, and to dissatisfaction with even good decisions" (Schwartz, 2004). When confronted with a dizzying array of choices, many students choose a course of study without fully understanding how it aligns to their personal interests or the resulting career implications.

Beginning college with a clear sense of purpose is a critical step to ensuring an investment in higher education pays personal and financial dividends for a lifetime.

Uninformed decisions about a course of study can lead students to "spin their wheels", causing them to accumulate excess credits and extend their time to degree. Data reveal that time is the enemy of completion, leading students to drop out after having achieved some college credit but no degree or credential of value. For those who do complete, the additional time results in increased costs and makes it difficult for graduates to build a solid financial foundation early on. Further, more than a third of college graduates report regrets about their choice of major (Gallup-Strada, 2017). **Underrepresented and less advantaged students are disproportionately affected by these challenges, diminishing critical efforts to close achievement gaps.**

The data makes a clear, compelling case: too many students are spending too much time and money on a degree that does not align with their career aspirations or earning potential later in life.

$46,355 in lost income & $82,074 in lost retirement savings

for students who graduate in five years instead of four.

(NerdWallet, 2016)

43%

of college grads are underemployed in their first job.

(Korn, Wall Street Journal, 2018)

African Americans & Hispanics are underrepresented

in the fastest-growing, highest-paying occupations: STEM, health, and business.

(Georgetown University, 2016 & Georgetown University, 2015)

36%

of graduates would choose a different major.

(Gallup-Strada, 2017)

PURPOSE FIRST

Early momentum in college has been proven to dramatically increase the likelihood of reaching a degree. The Momentum Pathways framework—CCA's approach to the implementation of guided pathways utilizing an intentional sequence of strategies proven to accelerate student success—ensures that students achieve critical milestones in their first year. These milestones include earning 30 credit hours, completing essential math and English gateway courses, and choosing a meta-major—broad areas of study that encompass academic majors with related courses and career opportunities.

The meta-major decision is an important one. Unfortunately, too many students are not currently well-supported in making that decision due to a lack of relevant information or cultural capital. Students, including those who have declared a major during the application process, need a college onboarding experience that supports them in making informed choices while building momentum toward a credential of value and a rewarding career. The Purpose First strategy builds on CCA's work around guided pathways and informed choice, restructuring the onboarding process to ensure students identify their interests, explore possible careers and understand important job market data that could impact their financial futures. Equipped with this information, students will be better positioned to choose a program of study and start earning credits towards their degree.

Purpose First institutions are committed to higher education's role as a launching pad toward a meaningful career and recognize that career exploration and planning must be intentional and start early in the educational experience.

Purpose First institutions are committed to higher education's role as a launching pad toward a meaningful career and recognize that career exploration and planning must be intentional and start early in the educational experience. Such institutions acknowledge that the responsibility for putting purpose first must be shared across stakeholders—registrars, admissions officers, academic advisors, student affairs professionals, career services professionals, faculty members and employers—and bring these groups together to design and execute a cohesive student experience.

Graduates are 63% more likely
to value their education if they understand the relevance of their courses and degree to their career.

(National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators, 2018)

1.9x
higher odds of a graduate agreeing education was worth the cost if they had a mentor who encouraged them to pursue their goals and dreams.

(Gallup-Purdue Index, 2015)

58%
of students say getting a good job is their primary motivation for pursuing an education.

(Gallup-Strada Education Network, 2018)

$2.3 Trillion
estimated benefit to the U.S. economy by 2050 if educational achievement gaps were closed.

(W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2018)

CONNECTING COLLEGE AND CAREER

According to research conducted by Gallup and the Strada Education Network, 58% of postsecondary education consumers cited "getting a good job" as their primary motivation for pursuing a higher education. While it may not be their sole motivation, the evidence is clear that it is indeed their top priority. The next highest factor—"a general motivation to learn more and gain knowledge"—was cited by only 23% of respondents. These data hold across multiple demographic categories as well: gender, ethnicity, personal income, and the educational level of one's parents.

Nonetheless, many students feel their college experience does not provide the career support they need. Only one-third of current students believe they will graduate prepared for success in the job market. Moreover, nearly 40% of undergraduates report having never used their school's available career services. And this isn't just an underclassmen problem; 35% of seniors haven't made use of their school's career service resources either. Career services are ancillary services simply "made available" to students instead of being highlighted as a central part of the higher education experience.

Of course, college and university leaders know the importance of a good job after graduation. They understand the expectations of their students and believe college should provide both opportunities for personal growth and a solid foundation for a future career. For many students, however, the college experience doesn't reflect the importance of their career goals—or connect how competencies learned align to these goals. It's clear students want more.

SUCCESS STARTS WITH "WHY"

The evidence indicates that a sense of purpose—understanding why college is important to a student—is critical to ensuring that a credential pays dividends. Answering the "why" question is both personal and practical. Institutions must provide opportunities and tools for students to examine their own interests, skills and passions, whether they attend college for a career or increased learning. Schools need to also embed in their application and onboarding process opportunities for students to look at the broader economic landscape and job market to understand what careers are in demand and how that may change over time.

Before describing the Purpose First strategy in more detail, it's important to understand how students are currently making choices about what to study. According to one report, 55% of adults cite informal social networks as the primary source of information about their choice of major (Gallup-Strada Education Network, 2017). This isn't surprising; parents, siblings, friends, and community leaders are best positioned to offer trusted advice. However, there are a number of challenges with this approach. First, though well-meaning, these influences may not have the most accurate information and can unknowingly offer bad advice. Secondly, their own experience will no doubt influence their advice, unintentionally overshadowing the student's interests. Finally, it's important to acknowledge the equity implications of the status quo. Students with better educated, more affluent social networks will no doubt benefit disproportionately. The data show that first generation students are far less likely to seek input from their social network, leaving a critical gap that institutions are well positioned to fill.

Purpose First is a strategy that improves institutions' capacity to help students navigate these complex choices by putting purpose at the center of the college experience. This strategy asks institutions to create a culture that encourages and facilitates student exploration of two important questions early: "What are my personal interests?" and "What careers offer the best opportunity for me to reach my goals?" To answer the first question, a number of interventions can help students understand what they care about and what field of work interests them most. Through career counseling, personal interest inventories, mentorship, and peer discussions, students can take the time they need to deeply explore their interests. The second question extends beyond a student's personal interests and looks at data about in-demand careers, salaries, and the lifestyle of those who work in a given field of interest. Effective tools for understanding career opportunities include career research, job fairs, engagement with local industry leaders, and more.

This strategy asks institutions to create a culture that encourages and facilitates student exploration of two important questions early: "What are my personal interests?" and "What careers offer the best opportunity for me to reach my goals?"

By looking at these two questions simultaneously, we can better prepare students to make informed choices about their academic plan, ensuring that every decision they make better prepares them for the degree—and career—they're aiming at.

II. THE PURPOSE FIRST STUDENT EXPERIENCE

II. THE PURPOSE FIRST STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Purpose First integrates best practices to create a seamless onboarding experience designed to support students in identifying an academic path that aligns with their career interests. Combined with Complete College America's Momentum Pathway strategies, Purpose First ensures students gain critical early momentum toward a credential of meaning and value.
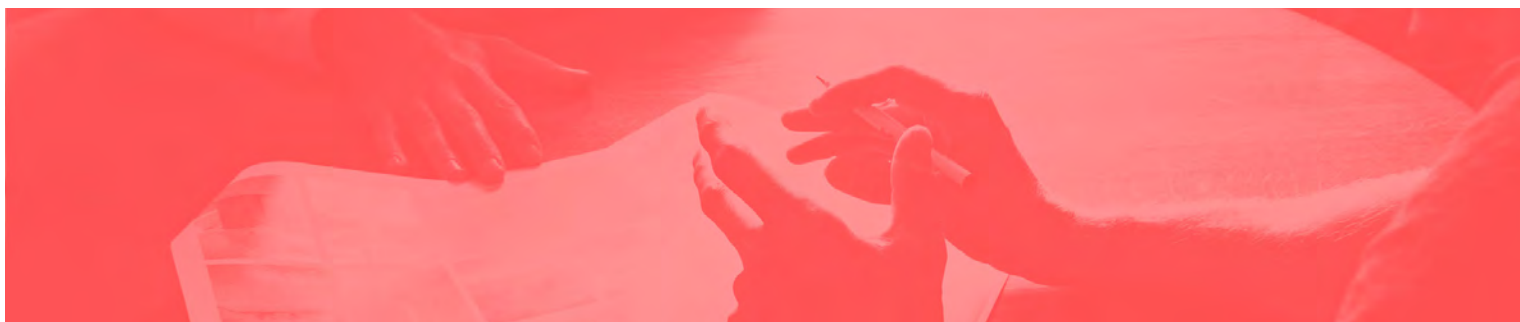
RECRUITMENT & ADMISSIONS

Students are presented with opportunities to explore their individual interests, skill sets and financial goals, preparing them to engage with campus staff and faculty during the onboarding process in identifying an academic path.

ONBOARDING

Students receive additional major and career guidance, ultimately selecting a major or meta-major that supports continued exploration while gaining momentum toward graduation. It is critical that the design of meta-majors as well as the registration guidance students receive not only incorporates the student's career ambitions, but also CCA's Momentum Pathway strategies—15 to Finish, Momentum Year, Academic Maps with Proactive Advising, Corequisite Support, and Math Pathways.

FIRST YEAR & ADVISING

From connections with career-aligned organizations on campus to career exploration assignments through First-Year Experience courses, students are provided with the exposure and guidance needed to select a major with confidence and continue on a structured path toward a credential of value.

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Application to college | College decision | First day of class | End of first year

RECRUITMENT & ADMISSIONS | **ONBOARDING** | **FIRST YEAR & ADVISING**

Recruitment

Resources on career & major

Career interest assessment

Advising on career, major, & academic map

Registration in meta-major

Career-aligned math & English courses

New student orientation

Declaration of major
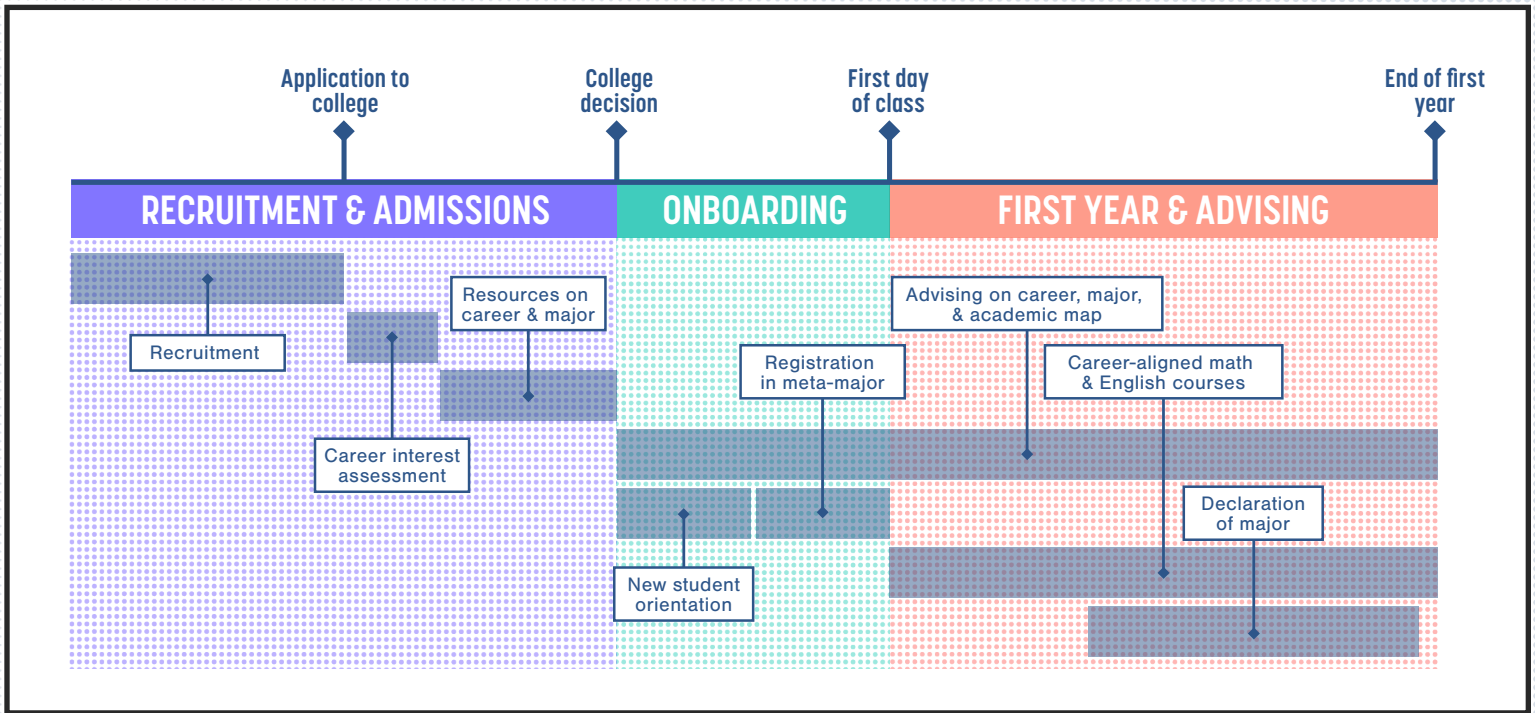
III. RESPONDING TO COMMON QUESTIONS

III. RESPONDING TO COMMON QUESTIONS

Are you saying all students should be encouraged to go into high-paying careers regardless of whether or not those careers are aligned with their skills and interests?

No, but let's make sure we are providing them with the information and guidance they need to make an **informed choice** of career based on their **interests, skill set and financial goals.**

If the data suggests that certain student populations are less likely to pursue high-paying careers, are you suggesting we intentionally work to funnel these underrepresented students into majors associated with high-paying careers?

Yes and no. Too often underrepresented students **are not exposed to major and career information** that would lead to high-paying occupations. It is only by ensuring that all students receive the necessary information and support to make an **informed decision** that we can close and **eliminate opportunity and achievement gaps.** It is crucial that institutions examine the disaggregation of majors/meta-majors by race/ethnicity, age, gender, and Pell status so as to best understand how to resolve equity gaps.

Aren't you worried that students won't have the time and opportunities they need to explore?

No, Purpose First provides **additional, more structured opportunities** for students to explore **while still maintaining momentum** toward an on-time graduation. In fact, by providing early information and assessments and encouraging students to select a meta-major, students have **more time** to consider and explore their options.

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What about the role of higher education in creating well-rounded individuals?

Purpose First **does not limit** our ability to create well-rounded individuals; it simply ensures that students are **also** provided the tools and experiences needed to **graduate on time** and successfully pursue a **meaningful career.**

How do employers fit into this?

Employers play an important role in helping institutions **identify the skill sets prioritized** for new hires, and in **supporting career exploration** through internships, mentorship, and presentations.

Shouldn't only undeclared students go through this new onboarding structure?

No. All students (undeclared, declared, and returning adults) should be provided with a Purpose First experience. For students that have declared a major, additional information and support can help them either **confirm their choice or explore new opportunities** they hadn't yet considered.

IV. IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

IV. IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

Successful implementation of the Purpose First student experience requires coordinated and intentional efforts at institutions across five key areas: Institutional Culture; Recruiting, Admissions & Onboarding; Career Exploration; Academic Structures; and The First Year & Beyond. This section provides guidance and best practices to support this process.

01. INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE

OVERVIEW
Any significant change effort starts with culture. Institutions succeed when there is broad support for new approaches and when all aspects of the school community are working together towards a common goal. This is especially true for Purpose First. From recruitment to the first year of attendance, there are countless opportunities for campus leaders, faculty and staff to connect with students about their purpose for being in school and their future career goals. By building a culture that values academic success and career outcomes, institutions can create a student experience that ensures students can identify their dreams and find a pathway that leads to future success.

STATUS QUO
While institutional leaders understand the reality that students primarily pursue higher education as a means for a career, data and anecdotal evidence suggest that career exploration and advising are more often ancillary to—and not a central part of—the core academic experience. Far too many students complete college without a clear understanding of how their academics connect to their career goals, and are left unemployed or unprepared for the workplace after graduation.

PURPOSE FIRST EXPERIENCE
Purpose First envisions a campus culture where conversations about how a student's academic endeavors are setting them up for a lifetime of success are frequent occurrences. The process of helping students identify career-aligned academic pathways starts early and is sustained by numerous opportunities for students to explore their interests, meet with career mentors, get a feel for future work, and acquire the skills they need to succeed no matter what their chosen professional pathway.

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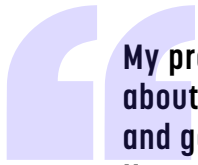
> **My professor taught me that coming to school isn't just about obtaining a degree; it's learning about networking and learning about yourself and challenging yourself, so when you graduate and get your degree and are out in the world, you've experienced a lot while at college. He taught me a lot about my finances, career, and believing in myself and being able to get it done.**
>
> **// TRAMAUNI BROCK** *Texas Southern University*

Students at historically black colleges and universities, where preparing students for both lifelong learning and future employment remains a high priority, were over 50% more likely to use resources from career services to learn about careers than their peers at predominantly white institutions.

(National Survey of Student Engagement, 2018)

PRINCIPLES

1

Student success—while enrolled and after graduation—is the responsibility of everyone on campus.

2

The value of a postsecondary education is closely tied to a student's future career goals.

3

Supporting students in identifying their academic purpose and career goals is a central part of the postsecondary experience.

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PRACTICES

1 Collect data on undeclared majors and on the frequency and number of major changes. Analyze the data to understand the current state and identify opportunities for improvement.

2 Evaluate underrepresentation across colleges, meta-majors and majors by race/ethnicity, age, gender and Pell status.

3 Audit the current activities across the institution related to helping students identify their academic purpose and future career goals.

4 Meet with groups of students—either one-on-one or in focus groups—to understand how you can better help them reach their future career goals.

5 Create transparency by ensuring information about the current state is shared broadly across the campus community. As you collect more information for each student about their personal goals, share that information with admissions counselors, academic and career advisors, faculty, and departmental staff who interact with students on a regular basis.

6 Establish an institution-wide working group focused on Purpose First with representation from faculty, administration, student support professionals, and students. When appropriate, include external workforce leaders to offer perspective on various career opportunities.

7 Commit to collaborating across the institution when developing and implementing new approaches. Given the number of people working to ensure student success, it's critical to include many voices.

8 Encourage students to participate in campus activities and organizations that build skills and connect to future careers as a part of a well-rounded postsecondary experience.

Access the digital report at completecollege.org/collegeonpurpose
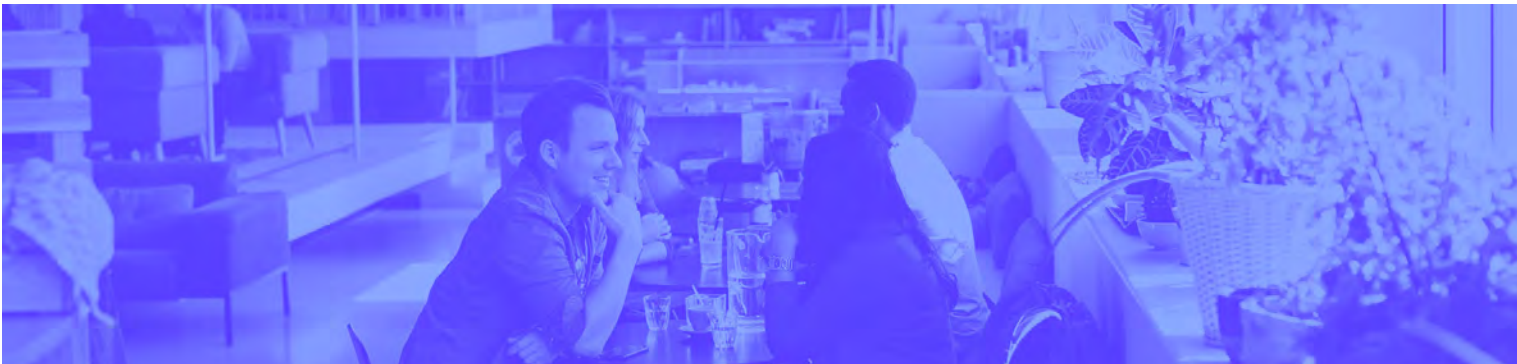
CASE STUDY

CHALLENGE

The student onboarding process included few opportunities for early career and program of study exploration. Plus, many of the processes were manual, which resulted in students coming to campus to turn in SAT scores, transcripts, shot records, and proof of residency.

SOLUTION

In January 2018, Houston Community College officially launched a new onboarding system, Choose Your Path, that allows students to do all of their onboarding online, with the exception of testing for placement purposes. Choose Your Path also offers prospective and incoming students with valuable information on areas of study, possible career options and labor market data, while prompting them to complete a career assessment through Career Coach, an online technology tool.

HIGHLIGHT

The implementation team was comprised of people from every area of the college that would impact the students' onboarding experience—registration, advising, data, information technology, faculty, as well as executives. Together, they reviewed the data and asked themselves two key questions: Are we happy about this data? If not, what should we do about it?

OUTCOMES

6,720 students completed career assessments and advising during the Spring 2018 semester, a significant increase from the 1,046 students who received career assessments and advising over the entire 2016-17 academic year.

87.5% decrease in the number of students without a declared academic plan by the end of their first term.

93.6% of students that registered for MyMajors completed the full 15-minute assessment and were better informed about their major and career choices.

OVERVIEW

When determining academic purpose and career goals, sooner is always better. Purpose First should begin from the moment an institution starts to build a relationship with a prospective student and be a central part of the admissions and onboarding process. Increasingly, students are looking to institutions to demonstrate the return on investment of their education. By indicating your institution's focus on helping students identify their interests and connect those to future career goals, you can leave no doubt about your commitment to lifelong success.

STATUS QUO

Many students don't begin thinking seriously about life after college until their junior or senior year, when the proximity of decisions creates a sense of urgency. At the same time, institutions don't begin to strongly encourage students to participate in available career services until later in their college career, rather than when students are making early decisions about a course of study that will affect their career trajectory.

PURPOSE FIRST EXPERIENCE

Institutions should begin to prepare students for their future career as soon as possible. By working with students to understand their interests and ambitions early on, students can make critical early decisions that impact their workforce readiness. When students have a strong sense of purpose early on, they are better able to take advantage of available resources and experiences intended to prepare them for future careers.

> **Less prepared students are more likely to decide not to attend college, choose less selective colleges, pick less rigorous and remunerative majors, and pursue less coherent pathways through higher education.**
>
> (Center for Global Higher Education, 2018)

PRINCIPLES

1
Earlier is better. Students should be provided opportunities to explore their personal interests and future career goals during the recruitment, admissions and onboarding process.

2
A general sense of purpose is not enough. It's important to help students engage in deep, purposeful consideration of what their personal and professional goals are.

3
Institutions should provide numerous well-aligned interventions that ensure no student "falls through the cracks" early in their college career.

PRACTICES

1 Emphasize your institution's commitment to helping students explore their interests and find a meaningful career after graduation. By communicating this focus, you can differentiate yourself from competing institutions that take a more traditional approach.

2 Integrate comprehensive interest assessments into the admissions and application process and ensure admissions counselors, academic advisors, and/or career counselors follow up with students committed to attend about their results.

3 Incorporate meta-majors in the application process to better introduce and develop each student's initial interests and goals.

4 Require all new students to go through a student orientation that incorporates the connection between major selection and career options.

5 Provide opportunities for career exploration discussions during student orientation.

CASE STUDY

Baker College

CHALLENGE

In Fall 2016, Baker College was seeing nearly 6,000 students changing their major and academic plans after enrolling, making them less likely to persist and graduate on time.

SOLUTION

Baker College partnered with technology vendor MyMajors to develop a solution that utilized artificial intelligence to guide students through an interest assessment and provide admissions and advising with a comprehensive advisement report about potential majors on campus.

HIGHLIGHT

Each student received a top ten list of recommended programs to explore on campus with a description of each along with median salary, estimated employment increase by 2022, companies employing graduates from the program, specific job titles of graduates, companies that were accepting Baker undergrad interns, program employment rate, and related employment rates.

OUTCOMES

50% decrease in the number of students changing their major after just two years of implementation.

93.6% of students that registered for MyMajors completed the full 15-minute assessment and were better informed about their major and career choices.

OVERVIEW

The world of work is large and complex. There are endless possibilities for finding a lasting and fulfilling career. And as innovation continues, we can expect to see future jobs that we haven't yet conceived of. As a result, traditional approaches to career exploration need to be reconsidered—especially given that students are likely to hold multiple jobs throughout their career. By providing students with as much opportunity as possible to explore their interests, we can ensure they are well-prepared for their important first step into the workforce.

STATUS QUO

Students are largely dependent on their social networks for guidance about possible careers. They look to family and friends to help them evaluate their options and rarely supplement their search with concrete data. At worst, students are left to their own devices to explore majors and careers while accumulating credit hours that may not lead to a degree.

PURPOSE FIRST EXPERIENCE

Given the dizzying array of options, students should begin exploring careers through numerous avenues even before they've declared a major. Indeed, career exploration should inform a student's choice of major, not be constrained by it. Students should have multiple options for how they explore careers—including assessments, mentorships, hands-on experiences, and connections with local and industry leaders.

Whereas almost 73% of community college students discussed their career interests with academic advisors, only 39% discussed regional employment opportunities.

(Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2018)

> **I didn't really know what I wanted to do. My brothers told me they thought I should go into law. I thought that's great, but I wanted to find out what I liked to do. I work part-time as waitress, so there isn't much time to explore career options outside of school.**
>
> **// HANNAH CROCE** *Graduate, Nashua Community College*

Only a third of students believe they will graduate with the skills and knowledge to be successful in the job market (34 percent) and in the workplace (36 percent).

Just half (53 percent) believe their major will lead to a good job.

(Gallup-Strada Education Network, 2017)

PRINCIPLES

1
It is the responsibility of the institution to help students realize that higher education is not simply a box to be checked, but an opportunity to engage in intentional self-discovery, align interests with real-world opportunities, and make informed choices based on future aspirations.

2
Given the number and diversity of possible careers, there should be numerous built-in opportunities for students to explore professional pathways as early as their freshman year.

3
Data is good. Insights from leaders and peers are better. Giving students access to both is best.

PRACTICES

Building Student Ownership

1 Provide tools for students to compile a Comprehensive Learner Record (CLR) or e-Portfolio; allow students to connect learning with skills associated with career.

2 Ask students to identify two parallel paths (majors) to best explore their options.

Informing Student Choice

3 Provide labor market data and relevant information (job demand, starting salary, benefits, associated skills, and education requirement) for each major and associated careers.

4 Showcase the success of graduates by highlighting their careers and approximate salaries.

5 Host workshops and opportunities for students to meet faculty members and student organizations connected to careers and professional organizations.

Exploring Career Opportunities

6 Host major and career fairs designed to facilitate exploration of career opportunities and greater understanding of how coursework aligns to potential careers.

7 Create Peer Mentoring programs under meta-majors and/or career areas.

8 Connect with regional employers to identify future high-demand jobs and skills.

9 Host networking events with regional employers and alumni.

10 Connect students with career-aligned organizations on campus.
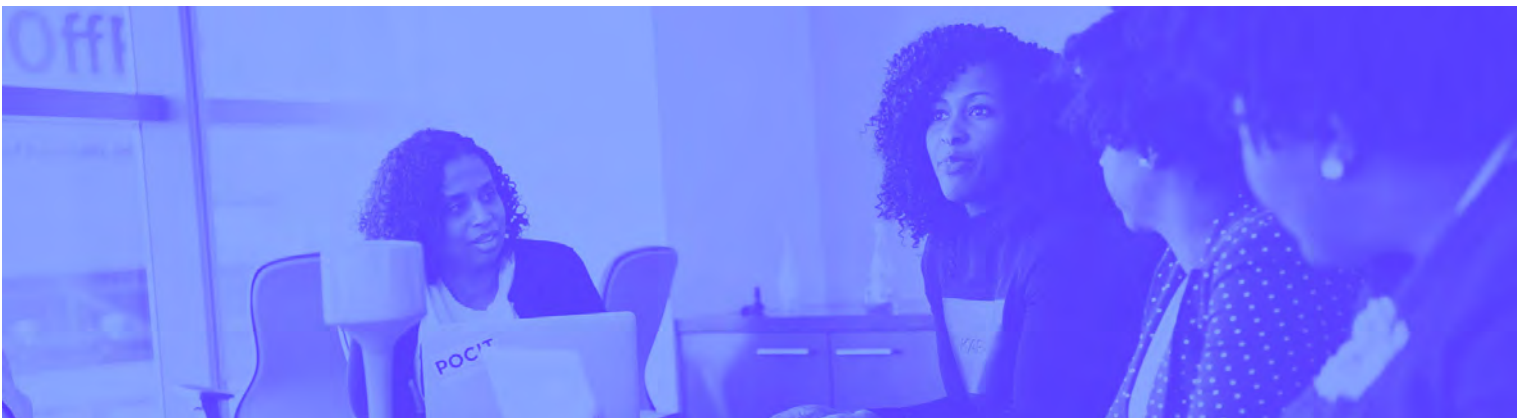
CASE STUDY

CHALLENGE

New Hampshire has the third lowest unemployment rate and the second highest rate of college-bound high school seniors going out of state. Keeping more students in New Hampshire and on the path to employment is essential to the state's economic future.

SOLUTION

CCSNH is working to better prepare students for meaningful careers by implementing Career Coach, a mobile-friendly, web-based tool from Emsi, alongside academic changes that substantially and proactively help students engage with these online resources.

HIGHLIGHT

New Hampshire Community Colleges have adopted an innovative first-year course called "Ethnography of Work," originally developed by Guttman Community College in New York City. In the course, students visit local employers and use Career Coach while applying the principles of ethnography in their exploration of workplaces and future careers.

OUTCOMES

33% higher retention rate for first- and second-semester students enrolled in Ethnography of Work courses at New Hampshire's community colleges, increasing retention from below 66% to above 75%.

Students are **more than 50% more likely** to move from an undeclared status or meta-major to a specific program of study after taking an Ethnography of Work course.

OVERVIEW

Purpose First institutions recognize the importance of the academic experience to future work outcomes. As a result, they are designing meta-majors that help students build critical early momentum. And because content knowledge is only half of the equation, supplementing the traditional academic experience with innovative coursework and learning experiences create more opportunities for students to gain valuable in-demand soft skills and on-the-job competencies.

STATUS QUO

The vast majority of institutions still ask students to make very specific choices of major and fail to create meta-majors that act as a funnel into critical coursework sequences. Additionally, the competencies learned in coursework are often not clearly aligned with the skills students require for success in their future careers.

PURPOSE FIRST EXPERIENCE

Institutions use meta-majors to help get students on an academic pathway early on. This ensures they take coursework that builds momentum towards their eventual major while allowing time for exploration. Moreover, academic maps are being expanded to include critical learning focused on career skills and competencies as well as experiential learning opportunities. that would apply to all careers and contribute to overall growth.

Students often struggle to articulate what they learned and the greater value of their experiences to potential employers, graduate and professional schools.

(NASPA & American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, 2015)

> **Since implementing meta-majors, Georgia State University has experienced a 30% reduction in students changing their majors. And students who do end up changing majors are more likely to have enough courses under their belt that will cross over.**
>
> (EAB, 2016)

PRINCIPLES

1

Helping students choose a broad area of study ensures momentum towards a credential is not lost.

2

Programs of study should identify learning outcomes and critical work-ready competencies and skills.

3

Experiential learning is essential to a well-rounded education.

PRACTICES

Implementing Meta-Majors

1   Categorize the existing list of majors into meta-majors and, in doing so, work to eliminate choice paralysis and help students gain momentum in an area of study aligned with related career opportunities. For better tracking and reporting purposes, build meta-majors into student information system.

2   Cross-train academic advisors, career counselors, and recruitment counselors on meta-majors and associated careers.

3   Create academic maps that include potential career options and information.

Exploring Career Opportunities

4   Have faculty liaison identify career competencies and resources in departments.

5   Have faculty members design competencies that are connected with career outcomes.

6   Have students reflect on competencies learned in coursework with career goals.

7   Create career-interest milestones for each year of study.

8   Integrate internships and/or experiential learning in academic maps, highlighting paid internships.

9   Integrate co-curricular experiences and programs into the academic map for each year of study.

META-MAJOR EXEMPLAR
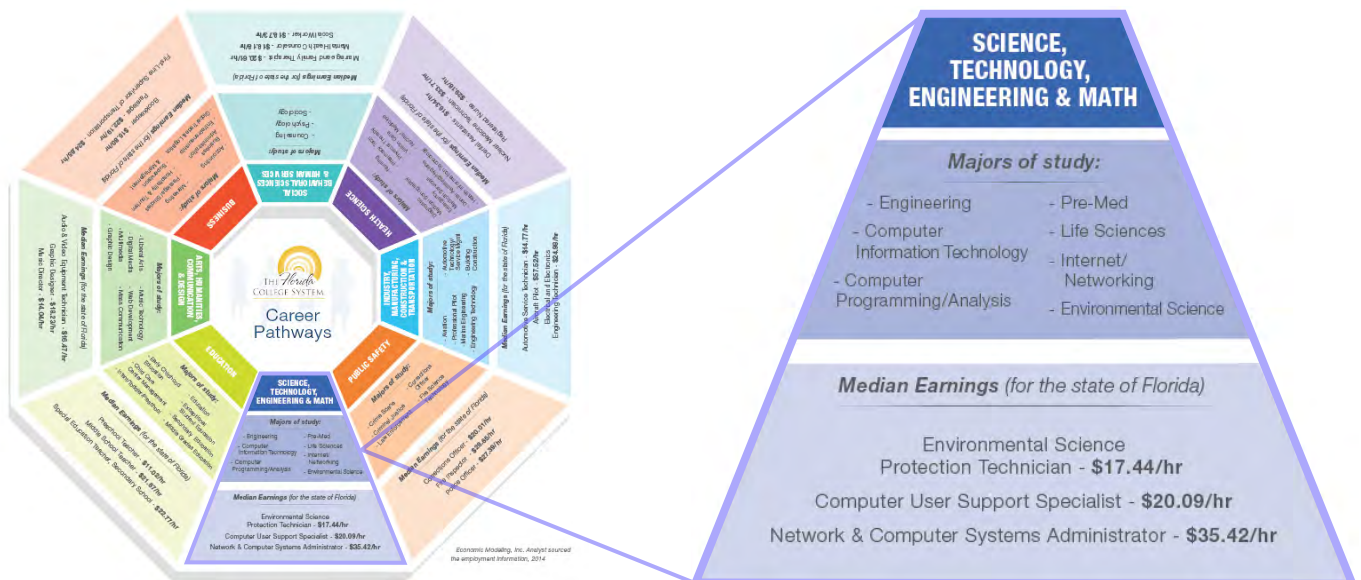
(Florida College System, 2014)

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CASE STUDY

CHALLENGE

While increased enrollment in the SOJC was creating a demand for more academic advising, a full-time career counselor was being under-utilized by students. The center's director, with support from the school's leadership, saw an opportunity to cross-train and combine the roles, gaining another academic advisor to address volume issues who could also assist with early career advising efforts.

SOLUTION

The SOJC Student Services Center has developed a hybrid model that is based on a premise that student development and academic goal-setting are interlinked with career development and career goals. Professional advisors begin the career advising process with early career development conversations, and continue with job/internship search strategies and resume/cover letter assistance. Faculty advisors compliment with industry-specific knowledge, nuances, connections and workshops.

HIGHLIGHT

SOJC faculty advise student chapters of professional organizations that provide an avenue for students to meet with professionals in their fields. In addition, the SOJC brings professionals into the classroom, coordinates internally-run internship programs and maintains a job and internship database.

OUTCOMES

77% of students reported they "received excellent advising and mentoring" during their time in the SOJC.

95% of students reported that generally, all advising and career questions and concerns were addressed.

96.8% of students advised by SOJC Student Services advisors were retained, in comparison to:
> SOJC students who didn't seek advising: 89.1%
> All UO students: 91.3%
> Any UO student advised by another UO advisor: 80.8%.

OVERVIEW

The research is clear: college success is closely tied to critical milestones reached early in a college career. Institutions that prioritize student success are building high-touch first-year experiences that help students orient themselves to postsecondary education, plan ahead, and make important early decisions about their academic purpose and future career goals.

STATUS QUO

Many institutions view the first year as a settling in period and fail to provide students with important guidance and structure intended to help them build momentum and reach critical milestones proven to drive student success.

PURPOSE FIRST EXPERIENCE

Purpose First institutions understand the critical importance of building and maintaining momentum. They know if they can support students in achieving early goals aligned with their future success, students are more likely to continue on that trajectory. By structuring robust first-year experiences, institutions work closely with students to identify priorities and make valuable decisions that will influence the rest of their postsecondary experience.

"

In UH's College Success course, we looked at data for all of the different degrees offered and their associated careers. It's nice to see what's most in demand now and what will be in demand in ten years. I realized accounting is what I want to do, and seeing the numbers helped me to know it's something I can do and that I'll be able to find a job.

// MONICA HERNANDEZ *University of Houston ('19, Accounting and Finance)*

PRINCIPLES

1

Purpose does not simply make a degree more valuable, it makes attainment of a degree more likely.

2

The first year is critical to student success. Institutions should ensure that year one is a robust, well-supported experience that provides all students with tools and networks that will help them maintain momentum.

3

Academic and career advising requires regular connections with students from the first year onward.

PRACTICES

First-Year Milestones

1 Require all students go through a First-Year Experience/Student Success course.

2 Include a career exploration assignment in First-Year Experience/Student Success course.

3 Require students to select a major (with guidance) by the end of their first academic year.

Academic Advising

4 Require all students to connect, virtually or in person, with an academic advisor prior to selecting meta-major.

5 Require students to connect with career counselors and/or faculty members to discuss careers.

6 Ensure academic advising and career counseling happen regularly to confirm students are on track to meet their graduation and career goals.

7 Reach out to all students about their major or meta-major selection to confirm their choice and provide them with relevant career information.

CASE STUDY

CHALLENGE

Counselors at the Maida Kamber Center for Career Exploration, Transfer, and Graduation Services, the Arts and Sciences counseling unit at Kapiʻolani Community College, had been using a career and educational planning system online since 2004, but found that oftentimes, first-year students were unsure of how to fully utilize these support services.

SOLUTION

During a Fall 2017 pilot, English faculty integrated career and major exploration into ENG98/ENG100 course writing assignments and partnered with counselors and First-Year Experience Coordinators to deliver career interventions in the classroom. In doing so, students would be able to build rapport with a counselor, experience a small group advising session, and learn more about registration, programs, and transfer options. In turn, faculty could ensure these areas were addressed in the first or second semester of a first-year student's college experience.

HIGHLIGHT

Writing assignments facilitated student reflection and ownership over their career and major exploration, while classroom interventions framed career exploration as a lifelong process and provided students with actionable tools and information on careers.

OUTCOMES

79% and 73.3% retention in ENG98 and ENG100, respectively.

87.5% of students who completed the career assignment reported feeling more confident about their major choices

90.2% of students who completed the career assignment reported a better understanding about the connection between their careers and majors

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PURPOSE FIRST BEST PRACTICES OVERVIEW

INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE

1   For better tracking and reporting purposes, build meta-majors into student information system.

2   Evaluate underrepresentation across colleges, meta-majors and majors.

3   Audit the current activities across the institution related to helping students identify their academic purpose and future career goals.

4   Meet with students to understand how you can better help them reach their future career goals.

5   Create transparency by ensuring information about the current state is shared broadly across the campus community.

6   Establish an institution-wide working group focused on Purpose First with representation from faculty, administration, student support professionals, and students.

7   Commit to collaborating across the institution when developing and implementing new approaches.

8   Encourage students to participate in campus activities and organizations that build skills and connect to future careers as a part of a well-rounded postsecondary experience.

RECRUITING, ADMISSIONS & ONBOARDING

1   Emphasize your institution's commitment to helping students explore their interests and find a meaningful career after graduation.

RECRUITING, ADMISSIONS & ONBOARDING (continued)

2   Integrate comprehensive interest assessments into the admissions and application process and follow up with students committed to attend about their results.

3   Incorporate meta-majors in the application process to better introduce and develop each student's initial interests and goals.

4   Require all new students to go through a student orientation that incorporates the connection between major selection and career options.

5   Provide opportunities for career exploration discussions during student orientation.

CAREER EXPLORATION

Building Student Ownership

1   Provide tools for students to compile a Comprehensive Learner Record (CLR) or e-Portfolio; allow students to connect learning with skills associated with career.

2   Ask students to identify two parallel paths (majors) to best explore their options.

Informing Student Choice

3   Provide labor market data and relevant information (job demand, starting salary, benefits, associated skills, and education requirement) for each major and associated careers.

4   Showcase the success of graduates by highlighting their careers and approximate salaries.

5   Host workshops and opportunities for students to meet faculty members and student organizations connected to careers and professional organizations.

CAREER EXPLORATION (continued)

Exploring Career Opportunities

6   Host major and career fairs designed to facilitate exploration of career opportunities and greater understanding of how coursework aligns to potential careers.

7   Create Peer Mentoring programs under meta-majors and/or career areas.

8   Connect with regional employers to identify future high-demand jobs and skills.

9   Host networking events with regional employers and alumni

10 Connect students with career-aligned organizations on campus.

ACADEMIC STRUCTURES

Implementing Meta-Majors

1   Categorize the existing list of majors into meta-majors and, in doing so, work to eliminate choice paralysis and help students gain momentum in an are a of study aligned with related career opportunities. For better tracking and reporting purposes, build meta-majors into student information system.

2   Cross-train academic advisors, career counselors, and recruitment counselors on meta-majors and associated careers.

3   Create academic maps that include potential career options and information.

Exploring Career Opportunities

4   Have faculty liaison identify career competencies and resources in departments.

5   Have faculty members design competencies that are connected with career outcomes.

6   Have students reflect on competencies learned in coursework with career goals.

ACADEMIC STRUCTURES (continued)

7   Create career-interest milestones for each year of study.

8   Integrate internships and/or experiential learning in academic maps, highlighting paid internships.

9   Integrate co-curricular experiences and programs into the academic map for each year of study.

THE FIRST YEAR & BEYOND

First-Year Milestones

1   Require all students go through a First-Year Experience/Student Success course.

2   Include a career exploration assignment in First-Year Experience/Student Success course.

3   Require students to select a major (with guidance) by the end of their first academic year.

Academic Advising

4   Require all students to connect, virtually or in person, with an academic advisor prior to selecting meta-major.

5   Require students to connect with career counselors and/or faculty members to discuss careers.

6   Ensure academic advising and career counseling happen regularly to confirm students are on track to meet their graduation and career goals.

7   Reach out to all students about their major or meta-major selection to confirm their choice and provide them with relevant career information.

V. MEASUREMENT & EVALUATION

V. MEASUREMENT & EVALUATION

Frequent measurement is critical to evaluating the effectiveness of Purpose First initiatives and planning for ongoing improvements. CCA and its partners have identified the following outcomes to facilitate consistent measurement and the sharing of actionable learnings across institutions.

QUANTITATIVE OUTCOMES

For each meta-major category, the following outcomes should be measured with disaggregation by race/ethnicity, age, gender, Pell status and remedial status.

> Number of students enrolled in a major or meta-major within 1 year
> Number of students who complete 30+ credits within 1 year
> Number of students with at least 9 credits associated with program of study after 1 year
> Number of students who change their major at the end of the 1st year
> GPA or Level of Academic Standing by meta-major in the first year

It is worth noting that schools should continually assess the appropriate configuration of each major within the meta-majors. Frequent changes between specific majors across different meta-majors might indicate that there are misalignments in the composition of the meta-majors.

QUALITATIVE OUTCOMES

Students should receive a survey that analyzes the percentage of students that see the following statements as true.

> Have an increased understanding of careers connected to majors
> Have meaningful exposure to career and labor market data
> Feel career and labor market data helps inform their major choice
> Feel their advisors incorporated career and labor market data into discussion regarding major choice
> Feel like first year courses are applicable to career

VI. TECHNOLOGY TOOLS

VI. TECHNOLOGY TOOLS

CCA, its Alliance, and partners have identified several technology tools that effectively support a Purpose First student experience by providing students with opportunities to explore careers and majors, streamlining registration into meta-major courses, and supporting proactive advising.

It's important to note that the use of technology is not essential to a successful Purpose First experience and that the tools themselves are not a full solution.

HOW TECHNOLOGY TOOLS CAN ADD VALUE

> Empower students with the information and resources they need to explore careers and majors on their own
> Increase capacity for campus faculty and staff to more meaningfully engage with students
> Reduce barriers to ensuring all students receive support in identifying an academic path that aligns with their career interests

KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE TOOLS

> Facilitate interest assessments and recommends possible meta-majors and majors given results
> Provide employment information by meta-major and major
> Easily integrate with the registration process and software
> Default students onto their chosen academic map
> Provide mechanisms for ongoing monitoring and reporting for when students get off track

SAMPLES OF EFFECTIVE
TECHNOLOGY TOOLS:

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HOBSONS >
Education Advances

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VII. PARTNERS & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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In 2016, Complete College America and Strada Education Network announced an initiative with the Community College System of New Hampshire, members of the University System of New Hampshire, the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, Tennessee Board of Regents, University of Hawai'i System, University of Houston and Houston Community Colleges to design new models for supporting students in making an informed choice of program aligned with their interests while building momentum toward a credential of value.

In an effort to better design these models, Complete College America has partnered with professional organizations that provide expertise and experience on the different practices already in place at institutions.

Access the digital report at completecollege.org/collegeonpurpose

Earlier this year, CCA released Shared Beliefs and Practices for Putting Purpose First in American Higher Education, a collaborative report with these partners outlining a shared vision for incorporating early career exploration and academic planning into the student onboarding experience. To read the full report, go to completecollege.org/purposefirst.

It is thanks to the work of these dedicated partners that we have been able to identify the best practices and implementation guidelines presented in this report. Complete College America is committed to supporting and learning from our partners as we, together, continue to refine and scale efforts to put purpose first in higher education.

Have learnings to share?

Let us know by using the #PurposeFirst hashtag or by emailing us at info@completecollege.org

Ready to get started?

Reach out to us at info@completecollege.org to learn how we can support your implementation efforts.

Need more information?

Follow the #PurposeFirst hashtag and check out completecollege.org/purposefirst for more resources.

Citing this Report: Complete College America. (2019). College, On Purpose. completecollege.org/collegeonpurpose

Access the digital report at

COMPLETECOLLEGE.ORG/COLLEGEONPURPOSE