

# Reengineering Sierra College for Student Success



Final Report  
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## **REENGINEERING FOR STUDENT SUCCESS (R4S)**

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## INTRODUCTION

As colleges across the nation have sought to improve outcomes for their students, they have increasingly found promise in the principles of “guided pathways.” Although some colleges have been developing guided pathways for as much as a decade, the movement is a recent arrival in California; it first came to general attention in 2015. As the concepts gained traction in the state, three main approaches have developed:

1. Participation in the national American Association of Community Colleges Pathways Project, starting in 2016;
2. Participation in the California Guided Pathways Project, beginning 2017; and
3. Independent approaches, where colleges explore and implement guided pathways without the support of a larger project.

As of the writing of this report in January 2018, the CCCCO has embraced guided pathways and is offering a five-year funding stream to California Community Colleges that are willing to implement its principles.

Sierra College has been an early adopter of guided pathways in California, initiating an independent approach in 2015. This report captures the first two years of our implementation and is meant to serve as a record of our work, as a vehicle for the task force to make its recommendations for the future, and as what we hope will be a helpful tool for other colleges beginning to implement guided pathways. In it, we highlight both the successes and the stumbles of the past two years. Working with guided pathways has taught us that we have to be as honest about our shortcomings as we are proud of our achievements, and this report reflects that.

A couple of general notes:

Guided pathways are unique to each college. What has worked well at Sierra might be a complete failure somewhere else. We can't emphasize enough the need to shape initial pathway implementation to the culture of the college.

Throughout this process, whenever we started to lose focus or struggle with the scope of change, we came back to a simple question: “What’s best for our students?” This often brought clarity to discussions that otherwise might have gotten lost in details.

## BACKGROUND

Prior to the fall 2015 semester, the general sense of the institution was that we were serving our students effectively. Sierra College did well compared to similar institutions in the Student Success Scorecard and other metrics, and we were meeting our benchmarks for progress each year. Our transfer numbers were high, and we enjoyed a strong reputation in our community. In all, we felt, like most California community colleges, that we were meeting the needs of our students and our region.

And then, starting in 2015, after an internal examination of our Student Success and Support Programs (SSSP) and Equity plans and a deeper look into our disaggregated data, some unpleasant realities started to emerge. Those “good” numbers were masking huge equity gaps in important markers like course success rates and completion of transfer level math. Of students who told us their goal was a degree or transfer, only 3% had completed 30 units at the end of their first year. After six years, less than 40% of those students had actually received a degree or transferred. We had literally thousands of students who had Math and English on their student education plans (SEPs) but had not even attempted those classes. Mandy Davies, Vice President of Student Services, was tasked with disaggregating our data for SSSP/Equity and was among the first in the district to realize the implications of this data: we were not serving our students nearly as well as we thought we were . . . in fact, as she repeatedly said, we not only had to improve, we had a “moral imperative” to do better. Closing the equity gap was critical, but if we eliminated it, we still wouldn’t be serving students well enough because even our top-performing demographic groups weren’t reaching their goals in large numbers.

This began a semester of difficult reflection and realization for the institution. Starting in Fall 2015, Mandy, working with Vice President of Instruction Deb Sutphen, led a campaign to educate the college about the ugly truths hiding in our data. Rob Johnstone was invited to campus in early September to address a group of about 30 campus leaders on improving student success; that was the first time that the concept of “guided pathways” was brought to the institution. After much discussion, President Willy Duncan and the Executive Team decided that the best way to make real progress on these issues was to create a task force that would be charged with recommending ways to increase student success across the district. Unlike a typical task force, however, this group would be well resourced in time, space, and funding to accomplish its mandate.

The Task Force on Reengineering Sierra College for Student Success, or R4S as it came to be called, was developed during the Fall 2015 semester and began its work in Spring 2016 with a two-year charter. The membership, determined by the Executive team, was predominately faculty:

- Two executive-level deans
- 15 faculty (7 Academic Senators)
- 1 classified staff member

The faculty were given 20% release each semester, and the deans were reassigned 100% to the task force (and backfilled with interim deans). The task force was also given a full-time administrative assistant, an office and conference room, and an operating budget with access to SSSP and Equity funds as appropriate. Just as importantly, the President and Executive Team made clear to the task force members that they had the full support and trust of Exec; they were encouraged to take the time to research and explore options before making recommendations and to “leave no stone unturned”—not to be afraid to take on the third-rail issues that often stand in the way of change. As this report will

emphasize throughout, this combination of responsibility, trust, and freedom established by the top leadership was critical to the task force's ability to facilitate the beginnings of real cultural change in the first two years.

In a second off-campus convening in October 2015, Rob Johnstone brought his message about the need for change to about 125 members of the Sierra community—deans, chairs, Academic Senate members, classified and management leadership, and key faculty from instruction and counseling. The task force and its members were introduced at that meeting. Evaluations gathered at the end of the convening indicated strong understanding of and support for the need for change, as well as concern about how those changes would affect individuals and the institution as a whole.

### **SPRING 2016**

The task force had a preliminary meeting in December 2015 and at that first meeting made several important decisions that would set the tone for all the work that was to come. First, we established that the group was open to making whatever recommendations would most benefit student success; although we had all read *Redesigning America's Community Colleges* and guided pathways seemed promising, at that point it was by no means certain we would take that route. We also knew that we needed a way to focus our discussions and so developed a "Problem Statement" that would guide us at the highest level:

**Students at Sierra College are not reaching their educational goals in a timely manner, or at all.**

This short but powerful statement proved invaluable over the past two years, bringing the task force back to the heart of our mission when we started to head down rabbit holes. We also used the "four pillars" of the guided pathways framework as the basis for our own guiding principles:

- Make navigating the institution user-friendly to all students.
- Help students understand, explore, and choose appropriate educational goals.
- Give students clear and efficient paths to reach those goals.
- Ensure those paths are available.
- Provide support and resources to keep students on those paths.
- Measure institutional progress toward/success at these goals and respond accordingly.

In the first few meetings in the spring semester, we began a self-assessment based on "Building Guided Pathways: Practical Lessons from Achieving the Dream Colleges"; the task force completed the assessment and held several open forums to get feedback from faculty, staff and students. Eight sub-groups with focused scopes of work were formed to explore various aspects of guided pathways and student success: Academic and Career Goal Confirmation; Academic Maps; Career and Major Interest Areas; Communication; Data, Disruptive Change; Life-long Learning; and Nursing. These groups met throughout the semester and reported back to the main group each meeting. The groups studied best practices and reached out to colleges across the nation that had significantly increased student success. By mid-semester it became clear to the task force that guided pathways was the only approach that had a proven, if young, track record of success and our first recommendation should be that the college adopt a guided pathways approach. We also recognized the need for a formal communication plan from

the task force to the college and strong project management as the course of action took shape. As the workgroups met their SOW, they made recommendations to the larger group and stopped meeting.

Although the narrative above suggests a clear arc from early discussions to recommendations, the task force went through the typical phases of group formation during those early months. The extended and sometimes recursive discussion was frustrating for some members who wanted to see action and results quickly; other members felt the need to continue the research before settling on an approach. During this conflict phase, tensions were sometimes noticeable. In looking back, however, the task force members agree that the tension was a useful catalyst. The time that we spent researching, talking, and “marinating” in what we were discovering was critical in helping us realize the scope of what we needed to achieve, but we needed a push to move us into the next stage—presenting our initial recommendation to the college, in particular to the Executive team and to the Academic Senate.

The semester timeline became critical at this point. If we were to move forward with creating program templates and interest areas (our name for meta-majors) in the 16-17 academic year, the summer would be an important work time. And that meant securing support for our recommendations by early May. The President and Executive Team were supportive of this approach. We began an intensive educational campaign for the campus: we held a variety of open informational forums, some especially for faculty, and purchased copies of *Redesigning America's Community Colleges* for key campus leaders and all academic senators. During the semester, there were over 40 R4S events, ranging from short presentations at committee meetings to full-scale open forums. Unsure if the institution was ready to commit to a full guided pathways approach, we started by seeking Senate support for the first two phases, creating academic maps and determining interest areas. The Senate was supportive, but pushed us to expand our recommendation to include the full guided pathways approach. In late April, the Senate approved the following statement:

Based upon R4s's first semester of research and discussion, Academic Senate recommends that Sierra College build comprehensive guided pathways for our students, including

- academic maps and interest areas,
- structured onboarding processes,
- proactive academic and career counseling,
- enhancement of early alert system, and
- instructional support and co-curricular activities (professional development).

Phase one of guided pathways implementation, to begin in Fall 16, will include developing Academic Maps and Interest Areas, the “backbone” of a guided pathways approach. These will be integrated with the continuing planning processes that use data and stakeholder participation to provide a clear direction for future phases.

This was followed in May by the Board of Trustees making the guided pathways approach its number one priority for the 17-18 year. This clear mission—to begin implementing pathways with program maps and interest areas—gave the task force renewed focus and direction. The mission and purpose were clear, and it was time to move from research and discussion into action.

## SUMMER/FALL 16

Following the college's commitment to a guided pathways framework, Summer 16 was a busy time for the task force. Small workgroups planned the timeline and logistics needed to complete semester-by-semester program templates, including major courses and recommended general education/elective courses. Rob Johnstone met with the task force in June to confer on progress to that point and offer recommendations for the following year. A messaging/communication plan for the fall was developed, and research continued on options for Allied Health and redesigning our scheduling process to ensure our classes better meet student need. Faculty on ten-month contracts were given stipends to work over the summer.

Early in the fall semester, we did a "dry run" of the mapping activity with several willing departments (Chemistry, Art History, and History). Each department was guided by a mapping team consisting of one instructional faculty and one counselor from R4S. This exercise was very valuable in helping us see what parts of our plan worked well, what needed revision, and what additional resources would be helpful; one significant takeaway was that the teams of instructional/counseling faculty worked well to provide the facilitation and information the departments needed.

We planned two "mapping days" on Fridays in October, with two sessions each day. With all departments split among the four sessions, we needed to support approximately ten departments at a time. Counselors were recruited to join mapping teams, and all team members were provided training in late September, a few weeks prior to the mapping days.

To help prepare the faculty—particularly the chairs—to create maps, we had a series of informational meetings and trainings, starting with a meeting during flex week that laid out the schedule for the semester and a included worksheet they were asked to complete at department meetings. Rob Johnstone and Gretchen Schmidt came to campus for two days in early September, giving a presentation on guided pathways to a group of about 40 campus leaders from all areas the first day and then working with the task force and mapping counselors the next.

The following week, a "Get Ready to Map" workshop was held for the faculty who would actually participate in the mapping (anywhere from one to four members of the department). At this meeting the process was explained. This meeting turned out to be critical as it surfaced several concerns from the faculty. The first was the question of what would happen to general education classes that didn't end up on many templates—would those classes and departments lose enrollment? Related to this, some faculty felt that they simply didn't know enough about general education options in other departments to make educated decisions. While it was impossible to predict the long-term impact of templates, we were able to address these concerns in a couple of ways. First, the participation of counselors on the mapping teams meant that the faculty had access to the needed expertise on general education. Second, we invited departments to write a short description of their GE courses that would be most appropriate for students in certain types of majors to take. Rather than copy the catalog information, the departments explained how these courses could fit into a broader pattern of general education. These were compiled and distributed to all faculty and proved very useful during the mapping days. In retrospect, this would have been even more effective if we had started the process sooner.

Another concern expressed was that CTE departments have fewer courses that count toward general education, particularly in the CSU/IGETC patterns, and so would be left out of the templates. This has rekindled a previous discussion about adding a CTE requirement to the local degree pattern; this conversation may be taken up in Curriculum Committee in the coming semesters.

In mid-September, Isaac Rowlett, a consultant with expertise in change management, came to the Rocklin campus for two days. On the first day, he trained the task force and mapping counselors to lead difficult conversations; the day included extensive role playing preparation. The following day, we held a major convening with approximately 150 attendees from all areas of the institution. Isaac started the day with a presentation on guided pathways and change management, and then the task force members and mapping counselors facilitated tables through a loss/momentum framework discussion and a “pre-mortem” of the guided pathways efforts (“In five years, if we have succeeded, why? If we have failed, why did we fail?”). The convening was well-received as the facilitators found the previous day’s training to be very useful in the table discussions and later during the mapping days. In the following weeks, we held three loss/momentum and pre-mortem discussions that were aimed specifically at classified staff to ensure they were given equal opportunity for input. The results of all of these discussions were captured and distributed widely.

The mapping days themselves were held in October, two weeks apart. The task force put a great deal of thought into preparing for these events, with every detail from what materials would be available to office supplies to beverage service deliberately planned. The rooms were carefully prepared before the sessions with the materials specific to each department in an effort to create a professional and welcoming atmosphere that would be conducive to the work required. Several things proved particularly successful:

- Either the VPI or VPSS gave a brief welcome at each session—this set the tone for the next few hours.
- One of the major successes was simply bringing teaching faculty and counselors together to talk about programs. For many departments, this was the first time they had met with the counselors who see their students every day. Many asked for more opportunity to have these discussions.
- The task force established some guidelines for the maps: they would assume students were coming full-time and were college-ready in English and math; English and math would be put into the first semester, and transfer degrees would be designed with IGETC options. Obviously, not all of our students fit this profile. We considered this to be a starting point with an understanding that part-time and developmental sequence maps would have to follow.
- Large copies of blank map templates (approximately 3’x3’) were put on the wall by each table; facilitators used post-it notes to place classes. This helped keep the attention at each table centrally focused.
- Several counselors served as “floaters,” checking in at the various tables and stepping in to relieve the mapping team members for a few minutes if needed (if progress had stalled, for example, and the group needed a fresh voice).



- Having multiple tables in the same room created a positive energy and excitement—it felt like everyone there was part of a real event. Additionally, if one table had a question about another department’s offerings, it was often possible to just walk over and ask.

Following the mapping days, the mapping counselors spent the rest of the semester checking the templates against degree and GE requirements and confirming changes with the departments as needed. This part of the process turned out to be the most challenging as there were a variety of issues and “lessons learned”:

- The task force established some guidelines for the maps: they would assume students were coming full-time and were college-ready in English and math, English and math would be put into the first semester, and transfer degrees would be designed with IGETC options. Obviously, not all of our students fit this profile. We considered this to be a starting point with an understanding that part-time and developmental sequence maps would have to follow.
- The need for more counselors to help with the checking process. The counselors on the task force were challenged by the need to check ~150 different awards in a short time.
- Despite guidelines, there was wide variation among the templates—for example, transfer programs were inconsistently mapped to local, CSU, or IGETC GE requirements.
- We mapped what currently existed, but that meant that by the following summer, the templates were already out of date when the new catalog came out. And some departments continued to make changes to their awards after the templates were completed. We need a clear and systematic way for both departments and counselors to review the templates and keep them current.
- Technical issues with Degree Works slowed the process down considerably. We intended that the degrees would be ready for use by late spring 2017, but because of technical issues with our degree audit system they were not available until October 2017. As of the writing of this report, counselors have all templates in paper form but are just beginning to use them in Degree Works to create education plans.
- Two versions of the templates are needed—one with detailed notes for counselors to use and a more streamlined version for the public-facing website. Determining how to have both versions feed from a single source has been another technical challenge.
- Because of this delay, the template process lost public momentum. Although the counselors, evaluators, and technical support staff were working very hard behind the scenes, none of this work was visible to the college community.
- Related to this, we needed an explicit feedback loop to departments and clearer plan to release the templates as they were completed. Faculty were working on the Spring 18 schedule in Spring 17 and were concerned that the template would affect what they needed to offer—but the templates weren’t available to them or students at that point. We were able to answer individual questions but lacked a more comprehensive roll-out plan.
- The mapping process demonstrated how out of sync our whole curriculum and scheduling process currently is—new students are getting SEPs in April, but the catalog they have rights to doesn’t come out until after classes start the following fall.

## FALL 16 REFERRALS

As the task force continued its research through the summer of 2016, it became evident that there were areas that would be impacted by guided pathways but were beyond the scope of the task force itself. These broad recommendations were made in early Fall 16 as referrals to the Executive Team which responded in turn by supporting workgroups to look into each issue.

### *Professional Development*

Professional Development is key to a successful guided pathways implementation. The task force recommended a deep look at our current staff development structure and support; the Executive Team created a separate workgroup with appointments from all senates to make recommendations. It began meeting in the Spring 17 semester, researching best practices and possible models throughout the state. In May 17 the group recommended that a management position be created to lead a renewed professional development program; this recommendation was accepted and a new Educational Director, Professional and Organizational Development position began in January 2018. In the fall the workgroup put together a package of general recommendations for the new hire and completed its work at the end of the Fall 2017 semester.

### *Curriculum and Scheduling*

Even before the R4S task force began its work, it was clear that our current scheduling process was serving neither our students nor our staff very well. Key classes are bottlenecks for students trying to progress through their programs—certain science lab classes, for example, are full with full wait lists before priority registration is over. Uncertainty about enrollment numbers has led to a huge increase in last-minute class cancellations in recent years, which is very difficult on students and part-time faculty. And the scheduling building process itself is reiterative, depends on shadow systems, and consumes thousands of person hours each year. Additionally, our Promise grant requires that we give students access to full-year registration by Fall 2020. After looking at what other institutions have done to ensure their schedule of classes is matched to student need, the task force opted to refer out a full redesign of our scheduling process.

Under the direction of the Instruction Office, a schedule business process analysis (BPA) was held in March 2017 with 35 people in attendance; the session, which spanned three days, was facilitated by Kari Blinn from Strata Information Group. The recommendations that emerged from the BPA led to the formation of a scheduling software procurement group, which spent the late spring, summer, and early fall engaging in an RFI and RFP process. After a thorough and detailed vetting process, we contracted with Ad Astra Information Systems to purchase their Platinum Analytics and Astra Scheduler products. Implementation will begin in Spring 2018.

As mentioned earlier, another result of the template mapping process was a clear understanding that our current curriculum cycle does not serve students well. We also need to integrate a yearly template review and update into our timeline. At the request of the Curriculum Chair, a BPA on our curriculum cycle was held in late November 2017. The results of this BPA will be incorporated into the implementation process for our new scheduling software, resulting in what we hope will be a completely reimaged, comprehensively integrated curriculum and scheduling process that uses staff time efficiently, reduces redundancy and error, and effectively meets department and student need.

### *Allied Health*

The pipeline to Sierra's nursing program is severely impacted, with as many as 3,000 students at any given time trying to complete the prerequisites for our program, which accepts 40 students per year. Many of these students don't complete the challenging prerequisite sequences, and even those who do face long odds in being admitted. We realized early on that we needed to provide alternative paths for these students. The Allied Health workgroup was granted Strong Workforce Initiative funds to develop an Allied Health pilot that could serve as a model for future interest areas at Sierra. Faculty on the workgroup, which was expanded beyond the original group with appointments from Academic Senate, will be given reassigned time or stipends to create an "Introduction to Allied Health" course that will be a gateway to all Allied Health programs and to look at local workforce needs; a dedicated counselor will work with area faculty on pathways that support our programs and to develop interventions to help Allied Health students select the program that is right for them. The goal is to have the pilot running by 2018-2019.

### **SPRING 2017**

The Spring 2017 semester was focused primarily on developing our interest areas (often called meta-majors). The Interest Area Formation Group (which sought all semester to select a better name for itself and failed) included faculty from across the divisions, classified staff, and managers. The R4S task force developed the basic process and timeline that guided the group. The task force, using best practices from its research, laid out a few guidelines:

- Departments without awards (degrees or certificates) were not included in an interest area.
- Departments would be in only one interest area. There was some discussion around this, but it was ultimately decided that putting departments in more than one area would make it very difficult to offer support services through interest areas in the future.
- The broad "transfer" majors—Natural Sciences, Arts and Culture, and Social Science—were not included.<sup>1</sup>
- The task force members had differing views on including exploratory areas, but decided not to include them at this point.

After an initial meeting to finalize details, we held a series of hands-on "sorting activities" in which a table of 6-8 people, with minimal direction, were asked to sort our current majors (grouped by department) into whatever groupings they thought made sense; they then named each group. They were provided with some examples from other colleges and asked to aim for 7-9 interest areas (presented as a guideline rather than a rule). Around 200 people participated: Sierra faculty, classified staff, managers, and students; adult school students; and high school students. The results of these activities were put into a spreadsheet and then our Research Office used the groupings to create a dendrogram that showed how often participants clustered given departments together. This offered a

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<sup>1</sup> These majors are structured to allow students to pick 18 units from over a hundred class choices, so they are impossible to map like a degree focusing on a specific area of study.

structure to start the conversation; after considering the dendrogram and all the names given to the groups across the activities, a draft with nine interest areas was shared with the college. We held several forums at which anyone could offer feedback; some changes were made based on those robust discussions. The interest areas were finalized by the end of the semester.

In the Fall 17 semester, the Marketing department created several options for icons for each area. The options were put out for input via an online survey to which over 500 staff and students responded. Based on that feedback, the icons were finalized by the end of the semester and will be used to represent our interest areas starting Spring 18. Based on feedback, an improvement would have been to consult directly with equity-focused campus groups.

Overall, the task force felt that this was a very successful process. It was structured but allowed for broad input, both during the sorting activities and then in response to the draft interest areas. The sorting activities themselves were lively and engaging and participants enjoyed them. A few departments did not agree with their final placement and there were questions about the name of at least one interest area (Applied Technology—does that have meaning for students?). The formation group will meet again in Spring 18 to consider if any changes should be made to the original groupings.

Our long-term goal is to have an initial “safe semester” in each interest area so that students can be confident that the first classes they take will apply no matter which major they select within each area. Because we mapped degrees and certificates before we created the interest areas, we haven’t yet accomplished this. As departments start to work together and with counselors in interest areas, important discussions will be centered on developing safe semesters, personal development classes focused by interest area, and survey classes that introduce students to the range of career and discipline options in an interest area. The creation of a task force in Spring 18 is needed to develop the structure of interest areas.

### **FALL 2017**

The R4S Task Force completed its initial charter at the end of the Fall 2017 semester, so the focus was on finishing or transitioning the workgroups (which has been discussed in context earlier), on developing this final report, which includes recommendations for the future of guided pathways work at Sierra, and on the student success conference held during Flex Week in January 2018.

### **Spring 18 Conference**

The conference, “Looking Through a Different Lens: Driving Change through Focused Actions,” was held over two days during the Spring 18 flex week. It was designed with two main goals for attendees:

- Gain a richer understanding of how each person’s specific job responsibilities contribute to the overall success of our students
- Learn to use evidence to increase student learning and success

Additionally, the conference was a significant change from the usual pattern of flex week activities. Over the years, flex week had become increasingly filled with regular department and committee meetings rather than specific professional development opportunities; in keeping with the recommendation about professional development supported by the Academic Senate in Spring 16, the conference was a deliberate attempt to reverse that trend. The task force, working with Staff Development, asked that as

many of the standard meetings as possible be moved to other days and completely cleared for the conference activities. The District worked with the faculty union to provide compensation beyond flex for part-time instructors who were able to attend part or all of the conference.

While conference activities were open to all staff, the sessions on the first day focused on how faculty can use student success data to improve instruction. The first day was kicked off by Tom Broxson from Pierce College, as our keynote speaker, who gave a presentation on “Using Data to Improve Student Success: Examples in Action,” followed by a break-out of faculty-led introductions to the college’s data Dashboards titled, “Using Data to Improve Student Success: Collaborative Inquiry.” The second day started with a keynote speaker Kathy Booth, who gave a presentation on “Understanding Guided Pathways: Reform with the Equitable End in Mind,” followed by two breakout sessions, each offering 6-7 different workshops. Each workshop was evidence-based and designed so that attendees left with a specific action they could take to improve student success. Post-conference evaluation forms showed that on a scale of 1 (not useful) to 5 (extremely useful), over 80% of attendees rated the conference a 4 or 5. A similar percentage would like to repeat the conference format in the future.

The conference kick-started some important conversations about how the institution, and specifically faculty, can use data and assessment to improve student success. To help advance these discussions, there are a variety of follow up activities planned for the Spring 18 semester for both departments and individual instructors, including a three-hour Post-Conference scheduled two weeks later, giving individual departments time to examine their program and course data and create improvement plans. The intent is that the use of this data becomes part of the fabric of instructional discussion across the institution and is used as a starting place for constructive engagement and change—not as something that casts any program or instructor in a negative light.

### **Statewide context for Sierra’s Guided Pathways work**

By Fall 17, guided pathways became a focus for community colleges across the state—and this was accelerated by funding made available through the Chancellor’s office starting in Spring 18. Because Sierra has been focused on this work for over two years, we have emerged as one of the “rogue” colleges (as Laura Hope phrased it) who have made significant progress without being part of a cohort (the AACC or California Guided Pathways projects). Our work has been increasingly recognized throughout the state. What follows is a partial list of trainings, presentations, and summits in which Sierra representatives have participated:

- CCCCO/Department of Finance/Governor’s staff/Career Ladders Project visit
- Leadership Matters Summit, Bakersfield
- Skyline College/CLP summit
- Classified Leadership Institute panel
- Two presentations at California Pathways Project; Mandy Davies is serving as a coach for the project
- IEPI Guided Pathways Workshops (Sierra presented at 8 of 9 sessions)
- ASCCC Plenary
- Los Rios visit to campus
- Assemblymember McCarty and staff/CCCCO visit to campus

- Community College League of California panel
- ACCCA panel presentation
- CSSSO panel presentation
- IEPI Guided Pathways Workshops, Spring 18
- CCLC Presentation

Additionally, task force members continue to respond to multiple requests for information from colleges across the state.

## LESSONS LEARNED

As with any undertaking of this scope, there were rousing successes and things the task force would do differently if we could go back. The list below tries to capture some of the most important lessons to keep in mind as we move forward.

- The backing of the Executive team, and in particular the President, was critical to the success of the task force. The task force members felt the freedom to “leave no stone unturned,” as President Duncan put it, and also knew that their recommendations would be supported by upper administration.
- The way the faculty membership of the task force was formed, without specific input from the Academic Senate, created some friction and concern that might have been avoided through a more collaborative process. This was something that the co-facilitators of the task force took to heart and worked hard to avoid repeating.
- Because guided pathways work has such strong connections to the Academic Senate 10+1 areas, the task force membership was very heavily weighted toward faculty. More classified voices would have been a very positive addition. There were three counselors on the task force, but because their expertise was so critical, additional counselors would also have been valuable.
- The task force was well-resourced. Between reassignment and release time and the provision of an Office of Student Success and conference room, the members of the task force had the time and space to focus on the work.
- Bringing in experts from the outside was critical, both in building the case for change and in keeping us focused at critical points. Outside experts can sometimes say the difficult things that might not be well-received from an internal voice.
- Guided pathways work is an iterative process: our first attempt at change will be better than what we had before but will need to be revisited and refined as we move forward. We often had to make decisions that we knew weren’t perfect, with the understanding that we could improve upon them in the next round. A key example of this is our decision to create the initial templates for full-time, college-ready students. Clearly, that leaves out many of our students—but we will come back and create variations as we move forward.
- Wide engagement across the institution is critical, including
  - Making sure our NCC and Truckee outreach campuses were included in all activities.
  - Frequent communication with everyone (R4S updates.)
  - Planning several sessions of a given activity to allow maximum access for all staff.
  - Frequent engagement with/updates for the Academic Senate.
  - Making activities engaging and interactive whenever possible.

- Keeping momentum is critical. During the 2016-17 year, with mapping and interest area development, there were many high-visibility activities that encouraged energy and engagement across the district. During Fall 17, however, when most of the activity was behind the scenes (like planning for the conference), the institutional momentum flagged. The task force understands the importance of developing an “R4S 2.0” structure that will keep the guided pathways work focused, visible, and accessible, in moving forward. In retrospect, starting this process by engaging Academic Senate and the campus community as a whole during Fall 17 would have helped build and maintain this needed momentum.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The R4S Task Force has several recommendations it believes are critical for the long-term success of guided pathways at Sierra College:

### R4S 2.0 Structure

As the task force completes its work—recommending a guided pathways approach, preparing the college community for major change, and developing maps and interest areas—as an institution, we turn to the next steps. Now the work of the college is to keep these changes moving forward and to institutionalize the culture change that has just begun. It is critical that we develop a clear structure that will maintain the momentum of the past two years. Whatever this structure is, there are several key goals:

- Continued integration of Student Services/Instruction to better serve our students.
- Determining appropriate technology support for the range of guided pathways needs (maintaining templates, developing “Career Action Plans,” onboarding processes, maintaining interest area/academic web pages, integrated outcomes assessment, the R4S web pages, etc.)
- Development of a framework and clear goals for guided pathways work to keep us focused and progressing.
- Development of a process to evaluate our progress toward our goals.

**Recommendation:** During Spring 2018, create a planning committee that will recommend a sustainable “R4S 2.0” structure for continuing and institutionalizing guided pathways at Sierra College.

### Participatory Governance and Planning Processes

Truly institutionalizing the guided pathways principles—putting students at the center of everything we do to create a coherent experience that supports them in reaching their academic goals—requires that as an institution we examine everything we do, including participatory governance and planning, with those principles in mind. As an institution, our participatory governance processes need to do a better job of coordinating new and existing planning and improvement efforts and using data to evaluate the effectiveness of our guided pathways initiatives.

**Recommendation:** Beginning Spring 2018, engage in an institutional process to determine how participatory governance and planning processes should be changed to support guided pathways principles.

## Academic Maps and Interest Areas

In keeping with central principles of guided pathways implementation, we still have work to do helping students on a path with Interest Areas and keeping them there with clear Academic Maps that guide them to completion of their academic goal.

This remains the heart of our concerns over student success and equity at the college. It requires that student services and instructional faculty work together to develop a new way to support student success.

### Recommendations:

- Develop a plan to expand the Academic Maps to include options for part-time and developmental students.
- Work to align the templates so that they are consistently mapped to local, CSU, and IGETC GE requirements.
- Make the work counselors do associated with Academic Maps now available in DegreeWorks more visible to the college community. Use these maps to create education plans.
- Develop a clear and systematic way for both departments and counselors to review the templates and keep them current.
- Create and support a design team for interest areas. Resource the team to research, engage the campus, and recommend structure/next steps to implement interest areas.

## Professional Development

As detailed earlier in this report, the task force referred professional development to the Vice President of Instruction, who created a task force to consider the issue. That task force has completed its work and a new Educational Director, Professional and Organizational Development has been hired. As the Director works with the college to develop a new professional development framework, the task force made the following recommendations.

### Recommendations from the Professional Development Task Force:

- Professional development all across the institution should be informed by data and respond to evidence of student learning
- Improved engagement of part-time faculty in professional development opportunities
- Increased focus on professional development focused on equity in the classroom
- Clear professional development plans for groups (faculty, classified, management) with appropriate incentives



## **Internal/External Marketing**

Communication and marketing, both internal and external, about the changes to the college remains critical. In addition to continuing the current R4S updates and occasional forums, the task force recommends that at the appropriate time Sierra considers holding a “grand reopening/open house” that would invite the external community to learn how guided pathways will help our students and our region.

## **CONCLUSION**

This report marks the formal end of the R4S Task Force, but there is more work ahead to develop and implement robust guided pathways at Sierra College. In the next few years, we will continue to have difficult conversations, dig into the data, and determine where our governance structure R4S 2.0 resides. Although the full realization of guided pathways will likely take 7-10 years, we anticipate that our efforts will start to positively impact success and completion rates within a 2-3 year time frame and we will be able to show that more students are reaching their educational goals in significantly less time.

The members of the R4S task force often discussed the implications of a full adoption of “guided pathways.” The steps that the college has taken to create the paths and support students in reaching their goals are critical first steps, but a true institutional commitment goes even deeper to finding ways to ensure students have their fundamental needs met so they can enter the classroom primed for success. We hope that the focus on guided pathways ignites a flame within the culture of our college to develop signature projects that will advance those goals. As we continue to work toward a full embrace of guided pathways principles, our critical task is to build and maintain institutional momentum toward deep, meaningful and lasting institutional change that will truly “move the needle” on student success.