The following scenarios have been developed to promote robust discussion about approaches taken to develop “meta-majors”. Each intends to surface common issues that have arisen or could arise at colleges around the state as they have taken on this component of guided pathways. While meta-major structures are simply a tool to help students make decisions and focus on their educational planning, the process of developing these groupings can be encumbered by historical structure or other factors.

Examine the scenario you are assigned and be prepared to report out your groups’ observations, identification of issues, potential solutions and lessons that may be shared.

Acronym Guidance

CIO – Chief Instructional Officer/Vice President of Instruction (Academic Affairs)

C-PIE - Committee for Participatory Interactive Engagement

CSSO – Chief Student Services Officer/Vice President of Student Services

CTE – Career Technical Education

IEPI – Institutional Effectiveness Partnership Initiative (iepi.cccco.edu)

FLEX - The Flexible (Flex) program consists of staff development activities “in-lieu-of” regular instruction

GE – General Education

GP – Guided Pathways

GPTF – Guided Pathways Task Force

Aspen College

Aspen College has completed its CCC Guided Pathways Self-Assessment and turned in its workplan. The college has been allocated Guided Pathways funding as shown below.



Year 1 has gone by and the college has done little beyond sending its academic senate president, CIO, CSSO, and three academic deans to an IEPI workshop and inviting a national expert on guided pathways to present to the college community on opening day. The IEPI workshop attendees have been identified as the college’s “GP Leadership Team” and tasked with the initial kick-off of the college’s guided pathways efforts. The college intends to create a larger guided pathways implementation team, assign a faculty guided pathways coordinator, and identify a guided pathways dean. Although no formal announcements have been made, the president is considering a few individuals for these positions. On opening day two people from the GP Leadership Team will reveal a draft meta-major organization to the college. Feedback will be requested from each of the disciplines involved and input from counselors will be sought. Before opening day, the college president, CIO, and CSSO reviewed and indicated their approval of the proposed meta-majors. The fact that each meta-major was constructed so that it had approximately the same number of total full-time faculty was viewed as a positive, as was the overall comparability between the meta-major structure and current academic dean assignments.

On opening day, the response from the college community was less than enthusiastic. Many people expressed significant concerns, even though the proposal was a draft. Departments/programs began to find problems with the structure and picked apart details. Some disciplines wanted to be in multiple meta-majors and others did not think they should be included in the meta-major they were assigned to.

At the academic senate’s first meeting of the year, the faculty entertained a resolution rejecting guided pathways, which failed, but indicated another direction needs to be taken.

1. What are the issues in this scenario?
2. What could the college have done better?
3. What should it do now?
4. What lessons can be learned from this scenario?

Birch College

The Birch College has had a little trouble getting started with guided pathways. The college is small and has always emphasized CTE courses and certificates. The college feels they have not received enough CCC Guided Pathways Award program dollars as the president wanted to establish a guided pathways dean position and the funding will barely cover the anticipated costs for the next two years.

The president feels that using Strong Workforce funding will help to get the job done and is following the suggestion that the funding and work be integrated across the college. As a result, several CTE faculty were assigned to create a draft of the meta-majors structure for the college. The CTE faculty felt especially prepared to do this because they have “always” used pathways and they have always created programs with the end in mind – employment for students. The initial work on meta-majors created a configuration that placed transfer and non-transfer programs into separate meta-majors, even when clear connections were evident. The rationale for the separation was based on the time to complete an award and the different GE requirements. In addition, the CTE areas had already experimented with embedded vocational advisers within specific programs and were sure this structure should be scaled up across the institution.

When the meta-major proposal was publicized, the first reaction came from counselors, who had years of concerns about the use of classified professionals for advising rather than counseling. Even though the CTE faculty led the meta-major development, issues were noted in a number of CTE areas. Stackable credentials within a single discipline, for example, were distributed across meta-majors. In addition, some CTE areas were small and not folded into other areas because they were presumed to have nothing in common. Early Childhood Education and Agriculture, for example, each became their own meta-majors as they were determined to share no commonalities with other CTE-focused areas. In contrast, most of the transfer degrees were combined in two large and general meta-majors.

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Cherry College

The faculty at Cherry College quickly embraced guided pathways, establishing a Guided Pathways Task Force (GPTF) that was a subcommittee of the academic senate and that provided regular reports to the college’s primary governance council, the Committee for Participatory Interactive Engagement (“C-PIE”). C-PIE opted to fully support the recommendations of the GPTF and allocated the majority of its CCC Guided Pathways Award program funding to the GPTF to be used as reassigned (“release”) time for faculty. The faculty used its FLEX week to map its programs, develop meta-majors, and identify institutional barriers to student success. The college has been allocated Guided Pathways funding as shown below.

A screenshot of a social media post

Description generated with very high confidence

The program-mapping work and meta-major development was accomplished quickly as the proposed structures mirrored the existing organization of the academic units with some internal divisions. Behavioral and Social Sciences, for example, was divided into “Behavioral Sciences” and “Social Sciences” as the faculty believed such distinctions were well-understood by not only faculty, but by students, the community, and employers.

After quickly completing its curricular tasks, the faculty did a walk-through of the college – exploring the tasks that students engaged in as they went through the process of developing an education plan, selecting classes, and, ultimately, earning a degree. Upon concluding its analysis, a comprehensive plan was developed that proposed a major overhaul of the college’s “on-boarding” process and the purchase of new technology to track student progress and regularly detect – and trigger the award of – certificates and degrees.

After a year’s work on guided pathways, the meta-majors and other planned changes were presented to the student senate. The student senate president, a double major in Political Science and Administration of Justice, was quick to criticize the proposed meta-majors and initiated a student protest to many of the planned changes.

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Dogwood College

Dogwood prides itself on having a collaborative culture, minimal “silo-ing”, and a generally student-focused emphasis. Its all-college hour is a time of interaction and socialization among the entire college community – and the community at-large. Employers in the area have a semi-regular presence on campus and many will host ice cream socials and other events to secure their connection to the college. The college has a robust vision for its guided pathways implementation, but does not think they have received adequate funding to make it all happen.

A screenshot of a cell phone

Description generated with high confidence

In the interest of making Guided Pathways an inclusive endeavor, a month of Tuesday and Thursday “all-college hours” were dedicated to meta-major development. An interactive exercise for the creation of meta-majors was developed and all campus constituencies actively participated. The college’s research team then conducted an analysis to determine what the college’s meta-majors should look like. After a few final modifications, seven meta-majors were finalized and the college began a process of naming what they called “interest areas”.

Upon the academic senate’s final acceptance of the largely student-determined names for the “interest areas”, the college then began the task of program mapping. During the mapping process, it was determined that half of the identified interest areas consisted of programs with few commonalities. In addition, neither students nor faculty were comfortable with identifying general education options for even the programs that existed cohesively within a given interest area. The lack of any identified general education options threatened the college’s well-planned strategic enrollment management vision. The college had planned to begin preparing schedules two years in advance, but can only effectively do so if student course-taking can be predicted with some measure of certainty. Absent any further course specifications, the administration was left to begin a course prioritization process that would likely lead to a significant loss of certain courses from the schedule – as opposed to the preservation of options that inaction was intended to inspire.

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