



## **The Road to Transformation**

### **An Overview of Norco College's Completion Initiative 2015-2018**

#### *Report Summary*

The following provides an overview of the history of the development of the Completion Initiative (CI) at Norco College. Predating the California Guided Pathways program by two years, the CI is a homegrown effort to address low student transfer and completion rates with a new model of student-centric support. Now a national model for Guided Pathways implementation, it is hoped that this report might prove useful to other institutions as they contemplate adopting a similar student success initiative for their own communities.

## **Introduction: Joe's situation**

Joe lives in Norco, a city of roughly 27,000 residents. Because of the dairies and its many wide-open spaces, the city is often called “the country” even though the landscape is changing. Today the city is developing and growing like so many of the suburban communities on the far eastern edge of the Los Angeles basin. Joe is 23 and works for his parents, who started a dry-cleaning business when they immigrated from Mexico more than twenty years ago. Joe married his high school sweetheart Jessica, and they have a child under the age of three. Joe wants more for his family.

A few years ago, Joe realized that his high school diploma wouldn't be enough to create more financial opportunities for his family and decided to go back to school in order to find a better-paying job. He didn't feel like he had a choice. “Only people with diplomas get good-paying jobs,” everyone told him. He applied to Norco College via [www.openccapply.net](http://www.openccapply.net) and began the process. When it was time to go on campus to take an assessment, he was grateful for his parents —another employer would have given him a hard time about that.

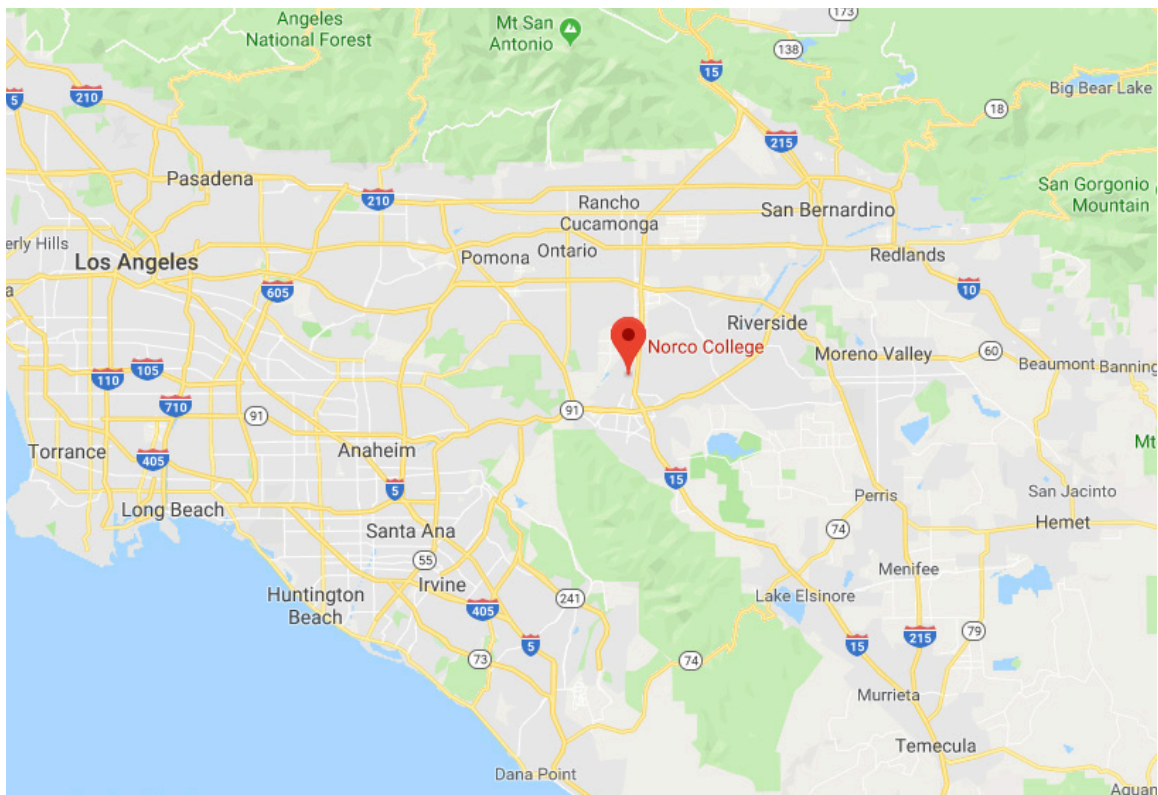
Everything went well with the assessment, and Joe even submits an education plan—he's interested in software design and figures that this is where the good-paying jobs are—but he starts having problems. As he registers online for his classes, error messages keep flashing on the screen. He tries several times, but no matter what combination of classes he attempts, nothing works. He can't understand why the system is giving him such a hard time. Joe doesn't realize that there are prerequisites that need to be figured out—and he doesn't have time to talk to a counselor. His father has suddenly gotten sick, and Joe is carrying a full load at their business. He'd like to go back to campus to ask questions, but he can't take any time away from work. He doesn't want to risk losing any of the customers that his parents have established over the past two decades.

Tired and frustrated, Joe decides to wait and try registering again in the spring—even though statistics show that the longer he waits the more his enthusiasm will cool off ... not to mention the fact that he'll be even more burdened with responsibilities if his father doesn't recover. What nags at Joe is something else he doesn't want to admit to Jessica: maybe the problems he faced in the registration process are just a sign that college isn't for him. He turns the experience into a judgment against himself for the smallest of reasons: the error messages don't provide any kind of explanation or suggest any follow-up steps. His parents have done fine without college, he decides. Their lives seem fine without it, even if it is hard work. He'll stay there because one day he'll take over the business, and maybe everything will be fine.

For years, situations like Joe's have been a factor (though not the only one) behind the college's low transfer and completion rate of 9.8 percent. Even for students who have not given up like Joe and persisted, many have lost their way after a semester or two. In 2015, the college's community decided that enough was enough. There had been other attempts to improve student outcomes in the past, but now a decision was made to do something even more revolutionary: to initiate a complete restructuring of the entire student experience.

## 1. The call for a Completion Initiative: Spring, 2015

Norco College sits at the epicenter of a significant demographic change long anticipated by population forecasters in the region. According to recent demographic reports published by private and public sources, ranging from the U.S. Census Bureau and U.S. Conference of Mayors to USC's Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration, a population shift from Los Angeles to the communities of the Inland Empire is now under way. By 2030, the density of the Los Angeles basin will be considerably more concentrated in the counties of the Inland Empire that Norco College and its sister schools in the Riverside Community College District serve.



The college's low transfer/completion rate of 9.8percent—which means that less than 3 students in a classroom of 30 will ever finish and move on to the next step in their educations—has been troubling enough as administrators consider current and incoming students, but what about the future? How, they've asked, can we possibly handle any population surge over the next decade? With such a low rate, how can the institution hope to facilitate and serve even more students if it is already falling short in helping students like Joe?

To the leadership of Norco College, the prospect of business as usual doesn't bode well for future student outcomes. But more than that, they see a societal ripple effect if nothing is done about it.

"If that rate stays the same, so many other things will be affected," said Bryan Reece, Ph.D., previous Norco College President. "Economic development won't take off the way it should and poverty levels will stay where they are. If we are going to have a significant effect on the region, then we have to get more students in the door. More than that, we have to get them in the door and make sure they stay and complete their education with an ultimate career-focus in mind. Historically, we just haven't been doing that."

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"We had never dug into our data like this before, and it was appalling to us"

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Reece's comments echo a similar view expressed in the pages of *Inside Higher Ed*, which addressed transfer rates in the same year that Norco College began its transformation.

Low transfer rates, referred to as a "leaky transfer pipeline" in that publication, contribute to "higher education's equity gap. ... [R]esearch shows community college students who transfer to four-year institutions are more likely to be from low-income backgrounds than are their peers who first enroll in bachelor's degree programs..."<sup>1</sup>

The decision to launch the Completion Initiative (CI) dates back to the spring of 2015—when a small group of administrators led by Diane Dieckmeyer, Ed.D., the college's former Vice President of Academic Affairs and Accreditation Liaison Officer, attended a High Impact Practices Institute sponsored by the Association of American Colleges & Universities.

As a part of their involvement in the institute, all participants were asked to review their college's data on rates of transfer and completion at a four-year institution. Norco College's overall rate for 2010-2014 was 9.8 percent, and the rate for specific groups at the college was even lower, particularly African American and Hispanic students, at 5.1 percent and 9.5 percent respectively.

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<sup>1</sup> Fain, Paul. "The Leaky Pipeline." *Inside Higher Ed*. December 11, 2015  
[https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/12/11/groups-band-together-improve-transfer-pathways-community-college-students?utm\\_source=Inside+Higher+Ed&utm\\_campaign=aca9b71838-DNU20151211&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_1fcbc04421-aca9b71838-197419561](https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/12/11/groups-band-together-improve-transfer-pathways-community-college-students?utm_source=Inside+Higher+Ed&utm_campaign=aca9b71838-DNU20151211&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1fcbc04421-aca9b71838-197419561)

“We had never dug into our data like this before,” Dieckmeyer recalled, “and it was appalling to us.”

When the group returned from the institute, she presented the results to Norco College’s then president Paul Parnell, the academic senate and the primary strategic planning and effectiveness council. Their reaction was unsurprising: Everyone was troubled and called for something to be done on a larger scale that would transform the entire school. But it wasn’t clear what that “something” was. At that time there was no state roadmap for such a major restructuring: Norco College’s decision to develop a response to low transfer and completion rates preceded the state’s Guided Pathways Program by two years.

“We couldn’t just shake our heads and walk away from it,” Dieckmeyer said, “but we didn’t know what we were supposed to do, either.”

Nationwide, implementation guidance for such an institutional transformation has been scarce and difficult to find. Although California and other states have now initiated programs in which schools like Norco College are acting as incubators for a new model to replace the community college system’s traditional cafeteria-style approach, the college did not enjoy the benefit of any preexisting guidelines as it started its journey to create an institution-wide response to student success outcomes.

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“Waiting for students to find us and ask for help just doesn’t cut it”

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In the absence of an established roadmap; however, Norco College did have something else that would prove vital on its journey: a firm conviction shared by the members of its community that the old model of how community colleges work and how students should think about their education and future careers just doesn’t work anymore.

And what is that old model based on? It has to do with the belief that each student must figure out his/her journey on his/her own during the college years—that a sense of direction will materialize if they just stay focused on their classes and keep at it—and that a college degree will guarantee a good-paying job later.

For Biology Professor Barbara Moore, that model is especially problematic for students interested in science careers. She has found that they have trouble figuring out their career options on their own because the field is so large. They don’t understand the many kinds of career opportunities that actually exist—all they know are the usual suspects.

When students think of science careers, she told the college's former CTE dean Kevin Fleming, Ph.D., in an email early in the CI's implementation, students "do not see past doctor/nurse/dentist/physician assistant" and are missing out on so many other possibilities in the process.

For Peggy Campo, Ph.D., a professor of anatomy and physiology and previous president of the college's Academic Senate, past efforts to give students more guidance and support had been hampered by a very siloed campus situation in which "the right hand didn't know what the left was doing," she said.

But the call for the CI would change that.

"We really needed this idea," she said.

What the Completion Initiative would address was the urgent need to do a better job of helping students think about their future transfers and eventual careers at the very *beginning* of their college journeys not in the middle or at the end.

"Waiting for students to find us and ask for help just doesn't cut it," explains Tenisha James, Dean of Student Services, who arrived two years into the CI process and now leads the college's Guided Pathways implementation. "I think what our community realized is that we were just being too passive with our students. Putting out a flyer advertising how you can help students isn't enough. You have to go out to them. you have to engage them the minute they set foot on campus."

Such active engagement with students—"intentional" is another word used by many to describe this aspect of the CI—creates a more meaningful experience for students and a higher likelihood of transfer to a four-year institution. In other words, James explained, this effort "gives them a greater sense of belonging, and that can make all the difference."

Norco College isn't alone in recognizing that the old approach is failing. At the state level, the problems with the cafeteria-style approach are evident in the low completion and transfer results for many community colleges throughout the state. Fewer than half of the students attending California community colleges earn a degree, certificate or transfer to a four-year institution within six years.

By today's perspective, Norco College's conclusion that they needed to do something may not seem so surprising—many community colleges, according to reports published by the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), have been engaging in similar discussions of a new theoretical model for their institutions for several years.

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“When we started, I felt like we were standing on the edge of a cliff”

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But the problem, notes an AACC article about guided pathway efforts across the nation, is that too many of these discussions remain stuck in the theoretical stage because of all kinds of fear and uncertainty. College administrations face uncertainty over the proper initial action steps, uncertainty from faculty, uncertainty over the outcomes and whether or not—in business terms—the Return on Investment will be worth the pain. All of this contributes to an inability to gain the kinds of multi-level support from faculty and staff that will be needed. This leads to institutional paralysis even though administrators, staff, and educators all know that the problems won’t go away by themselves.

That paralysis doesn’t surprise Norco College interim President Monica Green, interim President of Norco CollegeEd.D.

“The guided pathways framework is pretty disruptive,” she says. “Community colleges, like other state institutions, have major systems in place that are supposed to preserve continuity and tradition. Changing to a pathways framework is not going to be just a tweak or a minor adjustment to that system. It’s naïve to think that this will be anything but disruptive, and change can be hard for many people.”

As a faculty leader, Campo says that anyone considering guided pathways must acknowledge such communal fear and take it seriously.

“The fear to change is genuine and shouldn’t be minimized,” she said. “If you ignore it, that’s dangerous. It might seem minimal to you, but not everyone is going to feel that way. That’s why I really have to hand it to Diane. She understood that. She brought the vision but she also understood what this might do to some of the people in the community.”

In California’s case, according to a 2018 report published by *EdSource*, such paralysis towards new programs has resulted in just one college in five making any progress in implementing a new student-success model, according to the Community College Chancellor’s Office.

Dieckmeyer said she can understand why.



“When we started, I felt like we were standing on the edge of a cliff,” she said. “I didn’t have a plan for what was going to change. What I had was my conviction that something was wrong and needed fixing. But you can stay stuck in that feeling instead of trying to move forward.”

In order to move past fear and paralysis, Dieckmeyer and her former Norco College colleagues (Dieckmeyer today serves as Vice President of Instruction for Mira Costa College) interviewed for this report agree that the most important step, after first agreeing that something must be done, was obvious: conduct a public dialogue to gauge the willingness of the community.

“It wasn’t going to be just me on the edge of the cliff,” she said, chuckling. “I was turning to my colleagues and saying, we don’t know what our plan is going to look like, but can we trust each other and try to figure out what it means together?”

## 2. The Slow Road to Success: Building Consensus

When Kaneesha Tarrant, Ph.D., who serves as Norco College’s Interim Vice President of Student Services, first arrived in 2018 and attended one of her first CI meetings, she looked around the room and felt awe. She said she was struck by a single thought: *Everybody is here.*

“At my other school, I thought we were pretty far along with similar initiatives,” she said, “and then I came here.”

Tarrant saw faculty, staff, students, vice presidents, and deans—a wide swath of individuals from the college’s many different stakeholder groups. What impressed Tarrant about this meeting took a great deal of effort and patience to cultivate.

Multi-level participation has been a key factor in Norco College’s progress, and what Tarrant witnessed was the result of a two-year process that was long and slow—for some, painfully so—established by Dieckmeyer to ensure that the CI had community approval.

“I know some people wanted Diane to go faster and get started with the changes, but she really wanted to make sure that everyone understood what was at stake and why we were doing this,” recalls Greg Aycock, Ph.D., dean of Institutional Effectiveness.

Aycock has been at Norco College for fifteen years and said that he has watched other efforts to address student outcomes flounder by the wayside. “I’ve seen plenty of plans

that address low rates go nowhere,” he said. “It was to Diane’s credit to move slowly and that was a big win on the front end.”

### *Two-day completion “summit” – summer, 2015*

A few months after Dieckmeyer’s presentation to the college’s governance groups, the college started its institutional transformation by inviting the entire college community to a two-day summit held during the summer. The invitation (*see illustration, next page*) didn’t hide the reason for the summit or disguise the low transfer rate. Instead, in the interests of full transparency, the invitation positioned the summit as an exciting new opportunity for the entire college community to create something new together.

*“If you would like to be part of the solution to this issue,” the invitation announced, “please join us for two dialogue and planning sessions on student completion. Come prepared to think radically about how we can improve, alter, or re-think the ways in which we serve students.”*

The 2015 summer summit was a promising start. More than 40 people—faculty, staff, administrators, and students—committed to attending the two-day summit, which served as an extended brainstorming session. The three goals of the summit were:

- 1 Create an open dialogue**
- 2 Gauge the community’s willingness to support the CI**
- 3 Identify key issues that to be addressed as part of the CI**

To improve the opportunities for discussion and engagement with all of the attendees, Dieckmeyer

**NORCO COLLEGE**

**COMPLETION INITIATIVE  
... a RADICAL IDEA**

Did you know that a review of data revealed that only **9.8%** of Norco College’s first time students complete a certificate or degree over the course of four years?

If you would like to be part of the solution to this issue, please join us for two dialogue and planning sessions on student completion. Come prepared to think radically about how we can improve, alter, or re-think the ways in which we serve students.

All staff, faculty, administrators and students are welcome!

**Dates:** July 22 & 23, 2015  
**Time:** 12 noon – 4:30 pm  
**Location:** CSS 217  
*Lunch Included*

**Please RSVP** to reserve your spot.

**For more information contact**  
Dr. Diane Dieckmeyer at [diane.dieckmeyer@norcocollege.edu](mailto:diane.dieckmeyer@norcocollege.edu) or 372-7199.

used small groups led by a pair of facilitators to examine best practices and examples of success at other colleges around the nation. Even though, at that point in time, resources on guided pathways were scarce, Dieckmeyer said some materials were available and were helpful for the summit. Each small group of faculty, staff, and students used two publications—Complete College America and The Aspen Prize—as prompts in order to help foster a discussion of Norco College’s situation.

Generating an authentic, free-wheeling dialogue among members was another crucial goal of the summit. Dieckmeyer coached her facilitators—who were both administrator and faculty volunteers at the college—with a gently diplomatic email reminding them that “your role will be (most importantly) not to talk too much, but to help the group stay focused and engaged with whichever document they’re assigned to review.”

“Our facilitators were really good sports about that,” she recalled. “They understood why it was important to not really lead the groups but help them feel comfortable expressing their opinions. The last thing anyone wanted was for this to be perceived as another top-down effort to fix things. And we had students attending too. We wanted to make sure that they were encouraged to speak up.”

Facilitators also served as scribes for their groups, and this enabled Dieckmeyer to pull together everyone’s notes to create a detailed synopsis that would help lead the next day’s discussion—and keep up the first day’s good momentum. As to be expected, the synopsis of the first day was very student-centric focused:

**1. Perpetual Orientation**

- a. Reorganizing entry into the college*
- b. Reframing the initial orientation*
- c. Momentum point orientations*
- d. Life skills – financial literacy*
- e. Major/career workshops*
- f. Experiential faculty seminars*

**2. Waking the Passion**

- a. Creating meta-majors (65 programs to a dozen or less)*
- b. College to Careers concept*
- c. Connecting students with industry*
- d. Internships*
- e. Major specific work experiences*
- f. Major-/career-focused faculty seminars*

**3. Mapping the Passion**

- a. Students committing to pathways*

*b. Structured schedules*

- c. Prescribed courses*
- d. Imposing enrollment restrictions*
- e. Mandating English/Math the 1st year*
- f. Holding students accountable and engaged (yet...creating...)*

**4. A Model of Care**

- a. Redefining early alert – creating a team response approach*
- b. Case management model of support – faculty advisors, counselors, coaches*
- c. Trained student ambassadors/mentors*
- d. Personalized advisement*
- e. Cohort – learning community development – students connect with college personnel and students with like interests*
- f. One stop for emergency resources – triage*

At this early stage in Norco College’s CI effort, it is interesting to note on the above outline—among other things—the repetition of and emphasis on “passion” as well as the notion that a student’s orientation to the college should be “perpetual,” not a one-time event. A mechanism was needed, they realized, that would repeatedly touch students and maintain their engagement throughout their journey. This would eventually take the form of a case management approach and the creation of “student success teams”—which will be discussed later.

The summer summit was well-received by attendees. One unnamed participant, who posted feedback after the summit, wrote: “I wasn’t planning on attending this but got wrangled in at the last minute. Needless to say, I got very involved and came back the second day to see some closure to what my group had discussed. Hopefully some programs can be set forth and real change can be made.” That participant also suggested that everyone should “look past students’ race, age, and gender. At the end of the day each student needs a sense of belonging and *Norco College keeps allowing itself to be a steppingstone to ‘real universities’ rather than promoting involvement.*” (boldface added for emphasis)

That participant’s rejection of the “steppingstone” view of community colleges offers another perspective that has been essential to Norco College’s transformation. It underscores how the CI challenged the old conception of community colleges as just a way station to somewhere else. Interviewees for this report made it clear that changing the student experience involves more than developing a new procedural and structural model. It is about changing mindset, too. All of the people interviewed for this report expressed a shared sense of commitment to giving students a richer community college experience. The time that each student spends at Norco College forms part of a continuum of his or her entire educational journey; it is not simply a place where you satisfy your general education requirements.

Along with positive feedback, the summit also produced five interconnected components/areas identified as keys to transforming and improving the experience of Norco College’s student population. These areas, which were soon described as the Completion Initiative’s five “pillars,” were:

- 1. Meta majors/schools**
- 2. Guided pathways**
- 3. Faculty advisement**
- 4. Linking college to careers**
- 5. Developing models of student care**

Over the next four years, these pillars would evolve and also provide the much-needed roadmap for the school's transformation. With their summer summit concluded, good participation, and a clear list of priorities identified, Norco College was ready to start work on creating this new model of student success, right?


Wrong.

Although the summit was a great success, as Dieckmeyer notes, "everyone wasn't there. You really can't create transformational change in a large organization without it." More time was needed and would be spent on growing a greater community-wide consensus first.

### 3. Socializing the Initiative: Fall-Spring, 2015-2016

Only **ONE** session left! Even if you have not been able to attend the other sessions come to this last one and be part of this important conversation.

*This event has been approved for FLEX credit for full and part-time faculty.*



**COMPLETION INITIATIVE**  
Continuing the Conversation

**What is the Completion Initiative?**  
Norco College is engaging in an on-going dialogue about student success, specifically about completion. A review of data show only 9.8% of first time Norco College students complete a degree or certificate in four years. In particular, African-Americans, African-American males, Hispanics, part-time students, and older students are the lowest performing groups across all metrics. On July 22 and 23, 2015, the College held its first Completion Initiative event, discussing radical ideas being implemented in community colleges across the country that are struggling with similarly low completion rates.

This Brown Bag series will continue the dialogue, further investigating concepts and strategies which address completion.

**BROWN BAG SERIES**  
*Light refreshments served*

**Linking College to Careers**  
Mon., March 14 • Noon – 1:30 • ST 107

**Models of Student Care/Student Ambassadors**  
Thurs., April 7 • Noon – 1:30 • ST 107

**WATCH THE VIDEO** • [Completion Initiative: Just the beginning...](#)

For more information contact Dr. Diane Dieckmeyer at [diane.dieckmeyer@norcollege.edu](mailto:diane.dieckmeyer@norcollege.edu)

A successful summit is one thing, but does it mean that you have a mandate? Not for Dieckmeyer.

“If we had just jumped from those summer meetings to a decision to go for it,” she said, “we would have crashed and burned.”

Many agreed that another key difference between the rollout of the CI and previous student success efforts at Norco College was *the conspicuous absence of a top-down approach*. For former Academic Senate President Campo, that doesn’t mean that there aren’t people in charge of managing the effort, like Dieckmeyer.

“You still need leadership and vision, and patience too. Diane had all of those,” Campo said. “She knew that you have to have faculty on board to make something like this work,

and you need time to get that critical mass going behind the idea. She gave everyone that time.”

### ***Opportunities for dissent and protest: Brown bag sessions***

Like many for-profit and non-profit organizations across the country, Norco College realized that the CI’s success hinged on gaining the college community’s broad, multi-level acceptance—and, even more important, its *understanding*—of the vision behind it. According to finance and marketing site Hub Spot, in an article about the disadvantages of top-down management, “if people don’t know why they’re supporting the company’s vision, morale will plummet, leading to low-quality work and a high turnover rate.”<sup>2</sup>

“We were very intentional about not making this another initiative forced down people’s throats by the administration,” recalls Koji Uesugi, former dean of Special Funded Programs (and now Mt. SAC’s dean of Students Services). “Instead, we needed to let the data do the talking. The reason for the initiative was something that we should all be concerned about, so we tried to let the data drive the reason for why we wanted to do this. The challenging part was figuring out an answer to the question, how do we make that happen?”

That’s where the “brown bag” discussion sessions come in.

For the entire academic year, from September 2015 to May 2016, the CI was socialized at Norco College with these sessions. Email invitations like the one presented at the beginning of this section were sent out to all students, staff, faculty, and administrators.

To tease an interest in attending the sessions, the emails invited recipients to also view a brief, well-produced video that celebrates the two-day summer summit. Set to upbeat music, the video rolls through a series of still photographs from the summit that show energy, enthusiasm, and a diversity of participants as well as subtly implying another point: *If you don’t get involved, you’ll be missing out on something big.*

The brown bag series had a twofold purpose: to educate community members on the five pillars identified during the summer summit and provide opportunities to express concern and even downright dissent.

For Melissa Bader, chair of the English Department and a key participant in developing the CI from its inception, the sessions also helped to address the kinds of

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<sup>2</sup> Chi, Clifford. “4 Management Styles to Strive For, and 4 to Avoid.” *HubSpot*. July 30, 2018. <https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/management-styles>

misunderstandings and misinformation that typically develop around a project in its early stages.

“The metaphor that everyone understands best is the leaky pipe, and we’ve had that here,” she said. “Our success rates have been hovering around 70 percent, and that’s pretty good when you look across the state, but why aren’t more of these students actually finishing? Nobody was stopping to think about that, and that’s what the sessions partly helped us to address. We just needed everyone to put the pieces together and realize that we’ve got to stop how we’re doing things and find another way.”

In the months that followed, session attendance was very robust. Many attendees noted in post-session surveys that the presentations gave them a chance to gain an understanding of unfamiliar terms (like “meta majors”) as well as learn how student experience in the classroom, with counselors, and in career planning would be mapped out under the CI.

Another important message communicated to attendees by these sessions was: *The fate of the CI is in your hands; this is not an administrative fait accompli.*

“Our session facilitators made it clear to everyone, ‘this is your chance,’ ” Dieckmeyer recalled. “At the end of the school year, once the brown bags were done, we would all make a decision if we really wanted to commit to this or not. We’d either take the plunge together or we wouldn’t do it.”

### ***Campus-wide approval; creation of working group – spring, 2016***

As the end of the 2015-2016 academic year approached, the socialization process came to an end, too. The brown bag sessions were concluded, and a vote was taken for the Completion Initiative. The CI was taken through all of the college’s shared governance structures and endorsed by all stakeholders.

With a unanimous vote behind them, the college now moved to its next step: the creation of a working group to begin the complicated challenge of translating the five pillars into tangible, practical applications within the Norco College system.

To an outside reader, the creation of a working group may seem to be a merely functional next step, but supporters of the CI stress that this decision was nearly as important, in many ways, as the unanimous community-wide vote itself. The question of who will implement the changes of a pathways initiative goes to the very heart of the challenge



facing many community colleges (which may be another reason for their fear and hesitation).

The working group grappled with several key questions that every college must face: If we implement this, what will our institution look like? How will the current academic structure have to change? Can these changes be institutionalized?

The general working group—and smaller sub-groups focusing on each of the pillars—was tasked with answering these questions. With the creation of the working group, as in any other project on a college campus, faculty support was critical. Dieckmeyer said it was important to have the participation of individuals with direct control as well as “influencers,” those figures on campus who may not hold actual power but whose opinions are important to the rest of the community.

Another group whose involvement was critical was the faculty. Dieckmeyer said that faculty department chairs as well as then Senate President Campo agreed to join the working group early on.

“I thought it was really important for me to be there,” Campo said. “When you’re facing such a large academic issue, it’s critical to make sure the faculty have a voice.”

#### 4. Mid-2016, the work begins: Problems and challenges

The newly-formed CI working group members accepted an additional workload and time commitment without additional compensation. Though many advise other schools not to create extra work for their staffs by sustaining two systems (the existing processes and the new ones) on parallel tracks, that situation seems unavoidable for any institution, at least in the short term.

As the college continued with its regular operations and procedures, the working group—and subgroups focusing on specific pillars of the CI—plunged into a discovery phase and quickly encountered problems. Even after a lengthy period of socialization, they found that the creation of a new guided pathways structure would not be conflict-free. A period of socialization, even one marked by high community participation over many months, is not a guarantee of smooth sailing.

##### *Concerns & territoriality*

Instead, as the college moved towards a plan for implementation in the CI's second year, potential conflicts and challenges soon arose. Some of these challenges involved the school's counseling department, which was concerned that pillar three of the CI—faculty advisement—would infringe on their established, traditional role in overseeing the student guidance process.

Other conflicts and issues ranged from seemingly minor ones—how best to set up digital communications, for example, so that students get automatic notifications about the schools and majors which they've chosen—to more significant ones involving programs and courses. When, for example, a major doesn't fit neatly into a single school but can be placed in two or more—like STEM majors—what do you do? Another difficulty that arose—and that is still being resolved today, in 2019—involves the CI's fourth pillar (models of student care). If we are implementing a new kind of model of student care, what management approach should our support teams use? And what kind of compensation should that work receive?

Counselors weren't the only group troubled by structural changes. Faculty were worried that the CI's first pillar—on the creation of meta majors and schools—would eliminate traditional departments and force them to move offices and change physical locations on campus. As the subgroups explored implementation, and as more information about each pillar became available, Campo said that she found herself spending a great deal of time listening to her faculty colleagues and trying to allay their concerns.

With many such discussions swirling around campus, Dieckmeyer decided that—like the brown bag sessions—another community-wide discussion was needed. To address concerns and nip any gossip and miscommunication in the bud, a community town hall meeting was held. This effort at transparency and demonstration of responsiveness to public concerns was critical to the initiative’s progress. The town hall succeeded in addressing concerns and correcting some of the misinformation about the CI as the working group continued.

### ***Funding needs, state-level changes***

What the working group also discovered—along with various staff and faculty concerns and operational challenges—was that such an institutional transformation involves expenses beyond what a college’s regular annual operating budget allows.

Over this same time period, in order to help with the development of the initiative, the working group also sought outside funding and partnerships to support new costs—extra marketing, compensation for summer work on the creation of the structure of each school, travel to additional conferences and related needs. Members of the group were enlisted in drafting applications for various potential partners and education-related grants, including The Aspen Prize and the College Futures Foundation (CFF). The college’s application with the CFF resulted in the awarding of its first \$100,000 grant from the Foundation. Many said that the college has enjoyed a positive interaction with the CFF, and the grant provided a necessary shot in the arm at a crucial moment in the initiative’s early development.



Another impactful development took place in 2017, as Norco College continued work on the CI. The state announced the creation of the California Guided Pathways Project (CGPP). Following its acceptance as one of only 20 colleges in the new state program, Norco College was seen as a pioneer in the new statewide effort to improve student outcomes thanks to the CI effort. This is discussed in more detail later in this report.

### *Staff changes, continuity concerns*

Norco College's acceptance into the CGPP took place as one of its early guides and architects, Diane Dieckmeyer, said goodbye and departed for Mira Costa College. Dieckmeyer said that staff turnover is another important factor that any college must take into account as they launch into their own initiative. The only solution to this—and the related loss of institutional memory and crucial working relationships that happens when personnel changes—is to keep pushing hard to institutionalize the effort as much as is possible.

“I'm not sure what the answer really is, but I keep going back to structure, where will your initiative live in the college,” she said. “It has to be independent of any individual or specific personality to succeed. There's got to be a policy and procedure in place that supports this effort and that won't go away when a particular person does.”

Fortunately, in the absence of a policy and procedure in the early phase of the CI, Norco College did have some continuity in Dr. Monica Green, who then served as Norco College's Vice President of Student Services, and had collaborated with Dieckmeyer from the very beginning. Her ability to move into Dieckmeyer's former role resulted in a non-disruptive, smooth transition with Green overseeing the next steps in the CI as well as the college's participation in the CGPP. Green would also play a key role in addressing the concerns of counselors (whom her office oversaw) as the working group and subgroups continued with their work.

By the fall of 2017, the CI working group had established a school structure for meta majors around four schools:

- *Arts and Humanities*
- *Business and Management*
- *Social and Behavioral Sciences*
- *Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics\**

*(\*indicates that this school is comprised of two separate pathways –this has prompted some on campus to say that the school has five schools, not four)*

In just two short years, with the opening of the 2017-18 academic year, Norco College was ready to begin presenting incoming students with a choice of four schools and some related, mapped curriculum (although it was not fully fleshed out by then). Though much work was—and still is—ahead of them, the college had moved well ahead of many

colleges across the state and nation still struggling with the fear and uncertainty of committing to the process.

The next section of this report gives more details about the each of the pillars of the CI.

## 5. The Completion Initiative’s Evolution: A Closer Look, 2016-2018

As implementation of the CI moved well into its second year—according to the *EducationDive* news site, laying the groundwork alone for such an initiative will take any college at least “two or more years”<sup>3</sup>—progress by the subgroups on each of the five pillars moved at different speeds.

As of the writing of this report, the implementation of the CI has followed a very fluid structure. Each of the five pillars has evolved as a result of trial and error and the impact of collective decision-making. The number of pillars and their labels also have been changed and re-named to align with the college’s participation in the California Guided Pathways Program.

The following section looks at some of the developments and difficulties noted by interview subjects between late 2016 and the beginning of the 2018-2019 academic year.

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### **1. Meta Majors/Schools**

The expected effect of using meta majors is that they give Norco College students a deeper sense of belonging to a specific field or profession. It changes their perception of the college as a mere stepping-stone to somewhere else (see page 10) and establishes the school as an authentic part of their academic journey.

An immediate problem, however, was the term itself. “Meta major” is an abstract, uncommon expression—not something that most people grasp easily. The term refers to a group of academic majors with related coursework that are brought together under a collective name or identifier. Some members of the CI working group joked that using “bucket” would have worked just as well ... and would have been more comprehensible to lay people. Ultimately, the working group and sub-group for this pillar of the initiative replaced “meta majors” with the more understandable “schools.”

When a student chooses a major or degree based on his or her interest, their choice will place him or her within one of the following four schools at the college:

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<sup>3</sup> Schwartz, Natalie. “Community colleges embracing ‘guided pathways’ see payoff.” *EducationDive*, April 15, 2019. <https://www.educationdive.com/news/community-colleges-embracing-guided-pathways-see-payoff/552684/>

*School of Arts & Humanities*

*School of Business & Management*

*School of Social & Behavioral Sciences*

*School of Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics (STEM)*

“Aligning our courses in this manner is similar to the way that universities are structured,” Bader pointed out.

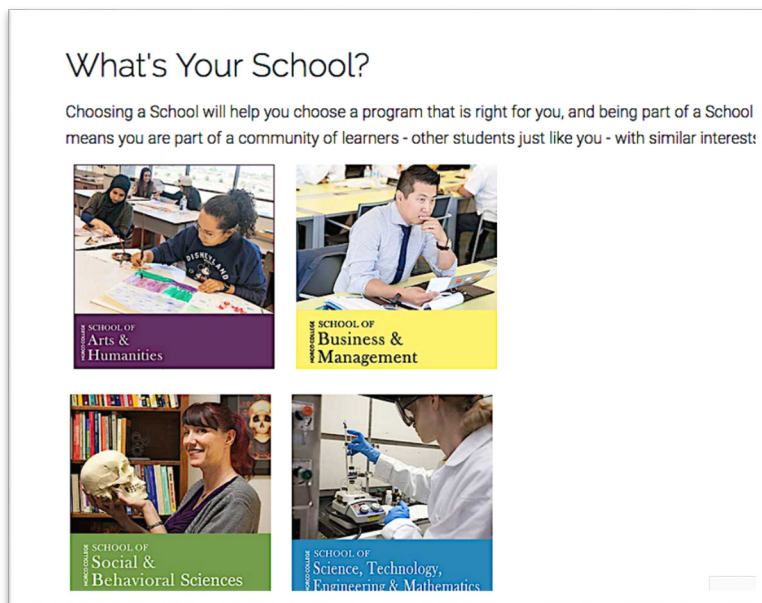
Such groupings make perfect sense, but creating these groups proved easier said than done. The subgroup spent (at least) an entire academic year in categorizing and assigning more than 100 degree and related certificate programs to each of the four schools. Some organizers likened the effort of working with Associate Degrees for Transfer (ADTs) and Area of Emphasis degrees (AOEs) and overlapping certificates to a three-dimensional game of chess on TV’s “Star Trek.”

Adding to the complexity were other essential differences among programs—some certificates, for instance, are based on a specific end goal (training in a particular skill that will be applicable to a job) while ADTs provide the first two years of an anticipated four-year undergraduate career. Which certificates should touch which schools? A student interested in studying design should be assigned to the School of Arts & Humanities, but what if that design interest happens to include computer graphics? Then, the appropriate school would be STEM, not Arts & Humanities, wouldn’t it?

Many hours were spent in discussion and developing program maps (discussed in the next section) in response to such questions.

*Results:*

Thus far, the student experience has changed substantially. The creation of schools (as well as more interactions with counselors) has enabled more incoming and current students to make better-informed decisions about their academic plan. “It’s good to tell these students right away that they belong here and here is where they belong,” one professor said. By the start of the 2017-2018 academic year, the college launched its “What’s Your School?” campaign and focused on a website redesign in order to educate students on the changes.



The Completion Initiative was not envisioned as a mere tweak or slight adjustment to an existing system; it presented Norco College with a complete disruption of that system. While the student experience has already improved with the creation of schools, this change hasn't penetrated the school's institutional side. An eventual shift from traditional academic departments to a focus on each of the four schools hasn't happened, and that is probably a comfort to concerned faculty—as Campo explained (see page 16). To move closer to that governance structure, many say will involve the faculty union and discussion about the department chair role/scope.

## 2. Clear and directed pathways

As of the writing of this overview, the college continues the process of developing structured pathways/program maps to guide each student through the set of courses needed to reach their specific degree or transfer goal. Borrowing terminology from the hiking world, these course “trailheads” minimize the guesswork—and the amount of wasted time—that was typical of the student experience in the past.

Starting in late 2016, the subgroup considered charting out the prescribed coursework that every student needs—semester by semester—in each field of study for their entire academic career at Norco College. A year later, by the end of 2017, 18 ADTs had been mapped to pathways.



As a result of the pathways subgroup's efforts, new and incoming students are placed within a school based on their career and academic interests, and each school provides them with a course trailhead consisting of about 15 units that will guide them through their *first semester only*. Through the creation of a student support system (that includes significant changes to the onboarding process, discussed in more detail below), new and incoming students are instructed to meet with counselors to discuss further details of their academic direction beyond the first semester. This reduces the amount of incoming student confusion by providing a helpful guideline for their first few months while also reinforcing the importance of counseling services in subsequent semesters.

Even though the trailhead is short, it is sufficient to help students “get their feet wet,” as one professor said for this report. Each student's next step is to then work with a counselor as well as the other members of the new student support system (also discussed below) to develop a comprehensive Student Education Plan (SEP)—with assistance from a new online platform, EduNav—that will chart their entire journey at Norco College and give them a clearer sense of direction than was provided in the past.

#### *Results:*

Thus far, data regarding the results of program maps and trailheads has been limited to anecdotes. And yet, these anecdotes are promising: Some indicate that the maps and trailheads, though in use for only a short time, were immediately successful with students as well as faculty. Several administrators and faculty noted a considerable amount of energy and enthusiasm for the maps and trailheads among incoming students in the fall of 2018. The same was true of some faculty members, who found themselves interacting more with colleagues outside of their traditional departmental structures. Though there is still much work to be done, this has marked a positive early step towards increasing a more meaningful communal experience for everyone—not just students—on the campus.

Because of the use of trailheads and program maps, the nature of conversations taking place between counselors and students also has changed. Counselors are spending less time on establishing each student's academic and career interests because much of this is already being addressed by the trailheads and program maps before each student arranges for a counseling appointment.

As will also be seen in the next section on faculty advisement, the college's counseling department has faced a variety of challenges and pressures as a result of the restructuring introduced by the CI.

The impact that the trailheads and program maps have had on student-counselor conversations points to an evolving role for the school’s counselors that is part of an even larger vision of how the CI could transform the campus. What was envisioned—and that hasn’t been attained yet—is a model in which counselors move away from traditional roles as overall generalists into a new role in which they also have specialized knowledge and are nested in one of the college’s four schools. The challenges—and potential impact—of that change are discussed in the next two sections.

### **3 Faculty advisement**

Making structural changes can be upsetting to any staff or faculty member. Change is not only disruptive: it can also be interpreted as assigning blame or fault to someone

Dr. Green is credited by many for addressing this situation with the members of the counseling department and the rest of the staff of Student Services, which had been affected significantly—perhaps even the most—by the changes wrought by the CI plans. Whenever a proposal identifies new ways to improve or change a process that a specific group has been using for many years, it is understandable that they’ll feel that their current practices and effectiveness are being criticized. Maintaining good dialogue and shifting the conversation away from blame to an awareness of what’s needed is essential—and it was what Green did to reduce the resistance of the members of her office.

“She was really the only person who could do that, and we were so fortunate to have her here,” said Bader, who also served with Green as one of working group’s co-chairs. “Any school that is making an overhaul is going to need to have conversations like that, even if they don’t have someone like Monica Green on their campus.”<sup>4</sup>

The source of contention for the counseling department was the pillar of the CI seeking to create instructional faculty advisors to provide another source of motivation and encouragement for students. The advantages of having faculty participate in advising students are clear: It provides another level of mentorship and constant communication with faculty members who—because of their academic and professional experience and networks—understand the realities in the job market facing their students after they leave Norco College.

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<sup>4</sup> And if you don’t have a Dr. Green, Bader recommends studying The RP Group’s “Student Support (Re)defined”: <https://rpgroup.org/StudentSupportRedefined/StudentSupport-Re-definedinCCCs>

Unfortunately, the discussion of faculty advisement at Norco College coincided with a similar (but far more contentious) discussion taking place at another college in the district that was fraught with tension and misinformation, recalled Koji Uesugi.

“We heard a lot of talk going on there that faculty advisement was going to step on everybody’s toes,” he said. “There was a lot of turmoil and basically the counselors were complaining that ‘faculty are supposed to teach and leave the guidance to us.’ We realized that wasn’t going to work for us.”

Uesugi also said that another factor behind the counselors’ initial concerns about faculty advisement at Norco College was their absence from the early working group discussions. That didn’t help the situation. It gave many of them the impression that changes to the school’s approach to guidance would be forced through, regardless of their concerns. In the end, however, the college was able to minimize conflict by having frank discussions with the counselors and the rest of Student Services—in part led by Green—as well as encouraging them to take a place at the working group table and become involved in the CI subgroups (some of the counselors credited with taking lead roles include Jethro Midgett and John Moore).

“I think once the counselors started getting involved and saw that the environment was collegial, that their expertise would be respected, they recognized that they would play a substantial role in this,” Uesugi said. “Once we all started using a common language I think people came on board.”

#### *Results:*

Training in faculty advisement was implemented for those educators interested in serving as advisors. Thus far the program has continued with a loose structure in which the advisory role is voluntary. The college has found that many are interested in participating as long as they can adapt this role to suit his or her situation and schedule of classes.

In the years since its initial introduction, faculty advisement also has changed from a single isolated feature of the CI to being folded into a much larger “student success team” configuration that includes counselors, school ambassadors, school educational advisors, and peer mentors. The role of faculty in this configuration is continuing to evolve today (as are many features of the initiative).

More about the situation of the college’s counselors as part of the CI is discussed in the next section.

#### **4 & 5. Connecting college to careers; models of student care**

The two pillars “connecting college to careers” and “models of student care” are grouped together because their services tend to overlap and draw on many of the same campus resources and features.

In fact, although the pillars of the CI are each treated individually in this report—and a specific CI subgroup was assigned to each—none of these stand alone. Various interview subjects all agreed that the pillars of the CI were envisioned as interlocking with each other and with existing programs on the campus.

Take peer-to-peer mentoring, for example, which is one of the hallmarks of the models of student care pillar. It is based on the pre-existing Men of Color Mentoring Program (MCMP) at the college, explained Dr. Gustavo Ocegüera, who oversees the college’s student equity initiatives.

That successful program, he said, has assigned five mentees (first-year students) with a peer mentor (typically a second- or third-year student) who helps them with their day-to-day needs. There are also regular group/one-on-one activities (everything from playing cards to coaching sessions) to build a community of support. MCMP has been so successful, notes Ocegüera, that it resulted in the creation of another similar group, the Lean In Circle, which is primarily for women and that builds a similar community of support.

“Basically we adapted this for our model of student care,” he said. “A lot of people don’t realize that this is where it began. Our peer mentoring program was a direct recommendation from students who told us during the brown bag lunches what they felt they really needed,” said Ocegüera.

This is just a single example of how the CI pillars overlap with each other as well as with other programs. The “connecting college to careers” pillar is in fact an amalgam that draws on all of the CI’s features—meta majors/schools, pathways, faculty advisement, counseling, etc.—to help students see the career outcomes of their academic choices. A career assessment was even recently added in the college’s onboarding and orientation process to help students start with the ultimate end in mind. Helping students see how their college work is directly linked to a future employment is something that several interviewees agreed is an area of the CI that still needs improvement.

### *A continuous evolution*

For schools that haven't taken the pathways plunge, a brief word of advice: *Don't expect quick solutions*. In 2017 and 2018, the CI working group and the Student Services team tackled the “models of student care” pillar with a number of iterations of peer mentoring, the creation of student success teams, the role of the school's counselors, and the onboarding experience. Any school community that is contemplating an initiative of their own should realize that the process must stay fairly opened-ended because of the trial-and-error nature of the process.

“If one size fit all, this wouldn't be such a big deal for everyone,” said Campo. “You have to figure out how the pathways model works for your school and situation.”

That has been true for Norco College's Student Services, which has struggled to refine and improve systems that have been in place for many decades.

The struggle has been especially acute in the area of onboarding, which is one of the most critical early moments in an incoming student's journey. If the onboarding experience is too difficult or confusing—as it was for the hypothetical student “Joe” presented in this report's introduction—many prospective students will be lost before they have even set foot on campus.

Every student's journey begins with an application. When the CI working group started its work in 2016, the onboarding process at Norco College was very long and drawn out—it was not unusual to lose students at this early stage (like “Joe”) due to confusion or frustration over the process. Typically, a new student spent eight days going through the entire matriculation process before being given a chance to register for his or her classes. A key problem was that the college didn't warn students that the process—which involved the option of an online orientation, standardized assessment testing, submission of an online education plan, followed by registration—would take this long. Most applicants entered the process without any clearly defined sense of its endpoint.

“We say we're an open access school,” said James, “but can we say that when we make students jump through so many hoops just to get in the door?”

### *Results*

Rather than have students jump through hoops, a concerted effort has been made to streamline the entry experience and to create a variety of support touch-points to help students at each step of the process.

That is in stark contrast to the impersonal nature of the process when the CI first began. Over the past three years, since 2016, the student application and entry process has gone through several—some would say “a bazillion”—iterations as Student Services has sought to simplify and shorten the process.

Originally, too much of the process rested squarely on student shoulders, including the creation of their class schedules (which, for any new student, can be as daunting as studying a foreign language). One of the major hurdles to the process was standardized assessment testing, which Student Services finally removed (in alignment with the State of California AB 705 legislation) in favor of creating a more holistic assessment that consider multiple aspects—mindset, learning, study skills, decision-making ability—of every new student applicant.

“For forty years that standardized assessment had been the required standard, and it was a big deal to get rid of it,” said James. “By shrinking that assessment into a 15-minute survey, we’ve been able to focus on other things and provide more tailored, intentional support for each student.”

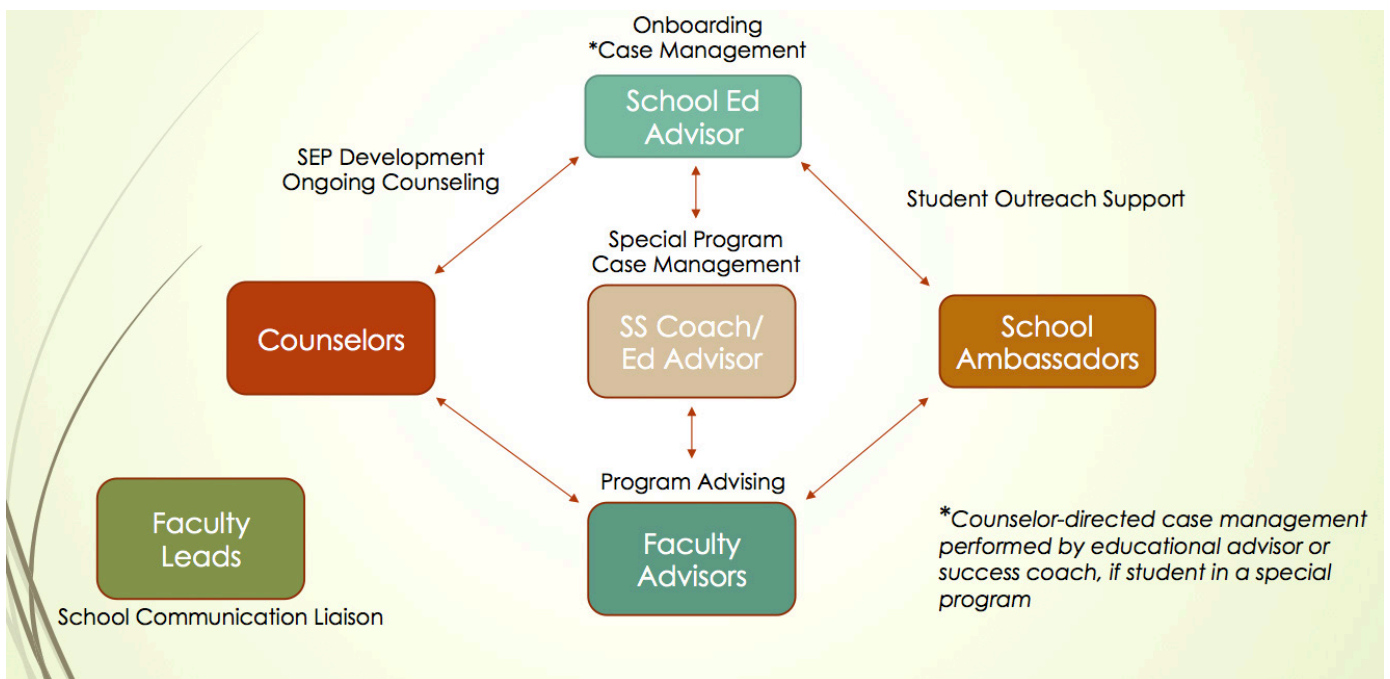
Another feature that promotes increased personal interaction (like peer mentoring) is the introduction of educational advisors. These advisors—who are not to be confused with the faculty members in the faculty advisement pillar or the school ambassadors who assist faculty and administrators in each of the four schools with a range of organizational needs—meet with students during the onboarding process. These advisors also field logistical questions and use trailheads to guide students as they create their schedules. These advisors can help a student to figure out, for instance, what lab to take depending on what kind of science major they want to pursue, and to remind them to meet with their counselors for more in-depth discussions. In addition, the school is testing the EduNav platform to provide another avenue of support for creating multi-semester class schedules.

### *Challenges*

As of the writing of this report, the onboarding process has been trimmed down from 8 days to 2-3 days. That is a considerable difference; in the age of Amazon and same-day delivery, though, it is still too long. And, even though a holistic assessment piece has now been developed as a part of the onboarding process, it hasn’t yet been determined how this data can be best used to assist new students.

More important, still under development is a case management model that creates “student success teams” and brings together various efforts—the streamlined application and assessment process, trailheads, educational advisors, and peer engagement—to provide targeted support for students on an individual basis.

Whereas in the past a student might have had only a single touch-point—a counselor—to provide him or her with career and academic guidance, the new system creates a multi-member configuration of steady support for each student. By the summer of 2018, that system’s interaction had been addressed in the following graphic:



To allay any concerns related to territoriality, this model indicates (in the asterisked section) that overall case management is counselor-directed and that counselors maintain an important role of providing constant contact through the year. The new model provides for additional guidance by faculty advisors as well as educational advisors and school ambassadors (along with peer mentors).

This model presents the ultimate ideal of serving students because every student lives and works within this system, which creates robust contact and attention that will keep most students moving steadily towards their goals. In terms of staffing and expense, though,

this model—which would also eventually embed counselors within specific schools—remains a big hurdle.

“Moving to a caseload management style is something that for-profits do all the time and the case managers have a clear incentive: there’s a commission on each of the students they handle,” explained Dr. Samuel Lee, who succeeded Dieckmeyer with her departure in 2018. “But we’re trying to do this without the same kind of for-profit incentives.”

Counselors have expressed concern—and some resistance—to the proposal of being shifted to school-centric roles for a variety of reasons. These include the fact that their staff is not currently large enough to accommodate such a change. Many are already carrying full appointment loads as well as additional areas of leadership and responsibility, which has resulted in using more adjunct counselors to help with the overload. It is not an ideal situation, and Lee acknowledges that this poses a significant challenge to achieving the case management model.

A potential solution involves the college using a customer relationship management system (like Salesforce) to manage the student population and provide an integrated, overall view of every student’s progress. But this solution, like hiring more counseling staff, requires additional funding to purchase and fully integrate the CRM system.

“Other schools starting the pathways process need to be prepared for this,” he said. “When there’s a lack of resources and staff bandwidth, as there is for almost every institution, you need outside funds if you’re going to develop a case management-style approach on your campus.”

For Ocegüera, another important factor besides additional funding is faculty buy-in. To create a deeper sense of community within each of the four schools—and to make the peer mentors and student ambassadors more effective—requires faculty to take the lead.

“Without the faculty it’s impossible to build community,” he said. “But I think they want better-defined roles and expectations for these mentors and ambassadors so they understand what they’re signing on to. That’s perfectly understandable.”



## 6. An unexpected leader: Norco College joins the California Guided Pathways Project -

Norco College has made significant progress in the three years since the Completion Initiative was first approved and a working group was created. Although many of its key participants say that much remains unfinished, the college's successful development and implementation of various elements has won it attention and recognition as a true pioneer in the state guided pathways program, which was announced in the spring of 2017.

The California Guided Pathways Project (CGPP) is based on the American Association of Community Colleges Pathways Project, which is a national effort (supported by funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation) to assist community colleges in implementing their own pathways restructuring.

For Fleming, who serves as the college's Interim Vice President of Strategic Development, the CGPP was a natural progression in the work of the state's Community College Chancellor Eloy Oakley, whose Long Beach College Promise program created a pathway to California State Long Beach for countless students in the Long Beach Unified School District.

"He took that experience with him to Sacramento and wanted to do something at the state level," Fleming said. "CGPP is the realization of that large-scale vision."

Norco College was invited as one of 20 schools—including American River College, Chaffey College, Los Angeles Trade Tech, Santa Barbara City College, and Yuba College, among others—to figure out how a pathways program could be implemented across the state. Because Norco College was already nearly three years into its work on the CI by the time that the CGPP was announced, it was regarded as a leader by the other participating schools.

"We were much farther down the road than the others," Fleming said, "and whenever we attend meetings and conferences everyone looks to us to explain how to do it."

For Bader, the first year of Norco College's involvement in the CGPP was a good one even though it forced the college to revisit issues and discussions that had long been settled.

“It was repetitive and a little frustrating,” she said, “but on the other hand it was a good gut check to see where we were. It validated a lot of what we’d already done and just confirmed that we were already on the right track.”

Interviewees for this report said that it has been very fortunate that the college’s CI ran parallel with what was being considered through the CGPP and the AACC’s national Pathways Project. As of today, Norco College has evolved its original five pillars of the CI into four pillars that align with the state’s program. That alignment has worked well, and the college’s pathway project continues today to work on developing the remaining elements of its plan—as well as wrestling with funding issues and other areas of change management noted in this report.

### *California Futures Foundation and Guided Pathways*

In two phases the California Futures Foundation awarded RCCD’s Norco College \$362,457 to improve marketing and website presence, technology development, professional development, documenting our path to becoming a pathways college, faculty engagement and special projects and staffing to better serve our underserved demographics of students. These Guided Pathways grants were for rethinking and re-engineering the existing college infrastructure to ensure student success and essentially create more college graduates in California.

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### *Today: Still a work in progress*

Today, when students apply to Norco College, they have an experience that is very different from what the hypothetical Joe experienced at the beginning of this report.

As discussed in this general overview, the schools, pathways, onboarding, and guidance processes now in place are far more interactive and personalized. Although much internal restructuring remains to be done—by some interviewee’s estimates, the school has only accomplished about 30 percent of its pathways goals thus far—the student experience has changed and improved in noticeable ways.

As the school celebrates the four-year anniversary of its very first summit held in the summer of 2015, another unexpected challenge has reared its head.

“We’re siloing again,” explained Campo. “Everyone has goals and functions now, and we’re all just focusing on getting them done. Sure, that’s how most institutions work, but

we're losing that larger awareness that we all had when everyone was first working on the initiative together.”

Many in the college community have expressed a desire for a bringing together of the college's various stakeholders—as happened in 2015 and 2016—to recharge the communal sense of urgency that first enabled the college to make such steady initial progress. Any college implementing a pathway of its own must bear in mind that the bureaucratic levers that typically slow down new initiatives and isolate members across campus will not vanish by simply waving the pathways magic wand.

Instead, what they will need to do, suggested Bader, is come together for another a-ha moment to recapture everyone's passion for change. “Any school that's considering this has to understand that you shouldn't do this because someone is ordering you to do it. It won't stick. You have to find your own ‘why.’”

Dr. Green, recently promoted as the interim President, has heard this rally-cry for reunification. “Here from the beginning of our work, she has deliberately asked the college community to pause this summer and celebrate our successes,” Fleming said. “At our 2019 end-of-summer BBQ, Dr. Green willingly handed the microphone to anyone present to share and acknowledge any milestone, endeavor, or significant process improvement, large or small. That collective celebration is not only symbolically important, but is helping us take stock of where we have been as well as where we are going.”

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The college's effort to recapture that sense of urgency—and describe the multiple iterations of the pathway effort that have taken place in late 2018 and 2019—will be the subject of another report in the future.