

Hello, !

Academy Awards. Grammy Awards. Nobel prizes. Super Bowl. Presidential elections. Accreditation. World Series. World Cup Soccer. NCAA March Madness. Wimbledon. Olympic Games. Miss Universe. American Idol.

Wait, accreditation? OK, you may raise your eyebrows or drop your jaw if we associate accreditation with these well-publicized and orchestrated events. Why include accreditation in this list? Accreditation rarely hits the airwaves or social media because it is hardly a topic of national focus, nor is it a spectacular event that would excite the general public.

But accreditation resembles the other events in that its consequences tend to be substantial for the players in the contest. Losing accreditation can be the equivalent to "game over" for a college, its students, and surrounding community. Success means passing numerous hurdles under pressure and with solid preparation. **Knowing how to overcome those hurdles is essential for success.**

That said, this issue of *Perspectives* has content linked to accreditation that should spark a little buzz and add to our knowledge base. In this issue, you can read about the connection between our system's accreditation agency (ACCJC) and the RP Group (our inaugural op-ed piece by Julie Slark and Linda Umbdenstock). We also have insights about the Quality Focus Essay (from Bob Pacheco) and integrated strategic planning (from Denice Inciong).

This issue rounds out its coverage with a glimpse at the emerging movement of guided pathways (from Rob Johnstone), and a rigorous test of multiple measures assessment for math in the Los Angeles Community College District. Both of these articles could factor into accreditation as well, given their focus on improving student success and institutional effectiveness.

Game on!

Sincerely,  
Willard Hom, Consulting Editor

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## Statewide Spotlight | Guided Pathways Demystified



**Author:** *Rob Johnstone*, Founder and President, National Center for Inquiry and Improvement

Greetings my California colleagues! Let's explore the notion of guided pathways--a movement gaining considerable momentum at both institutional and state system levels across the country. In my 13 years of community college experience, I have never been more excited and optimistic than today; at the same time, we are at a very important fork in our collective community college road.

Down one path, we have the traditional approach to the student experience, one that has produced roughly the same completion and success rates decade after decade. Down the second path, we see the dawn of some major evolutions, including the adoption of guided pathways--efforts to better structure student connection, entry, progress, and completion of credentials with market value or transfer to baccalaureate-level institutions with junior standing in a major. Early data suggests these changes will increase student success. While we may not know exactly how many more students will complete under a guided pathways model, history tells us what will happen if we continue down the traditional path.

To expand understanding and exploration of guided pathways, my good friends at the Community College Research Center (CCRC), Teachers College, Columbia University, recently released [Redesigning America's Community Colleges: A Clearer Path to Student Success](#) (2015). In November, I produced a companion paper titled [Guided Pathways Demystified: Ten Commonly Asked Questions about Guided Pathways](#), exploring issues that practitioners commonly raise about implementing this approach. I compiled this list along with my colleagues from CCRC, Jobs for the Future, and Public Agenda, as they arose repeatedly in presentations and workshops, both within the [Completion by Design](#) initiative and on related pathways projects in other states.

These questions group into three main categories.

### **Compromising our higher education values:**

- Isn't college a meritocracy where the strong and smart succeed, and the weak, underprepared, or unmotivated don't?
- Isn't free choice the cornerstone of American higher education?
- Won't guided pathways hurt quality?
- Won't we lose the heart of a liberal arts education when we make students' journeys more

structured?

### Control and enrollment:

- Won't faculty lose control over what is taught?
- Won't we lose enrollment at our college if we decrease swirl with increased structure or add requirements?

### Impact on students' learning and development:

- Won't this "hand-holding" create graduates who can't navigate the workplace and the "real world?"
- Don't students benefit when they "find themselves" ("wandering" to the outside observer)?
- Can students make career decisions at age 18 or 19?
- Don't students change careers four to seven times? So, why would we put them on structured pathways?

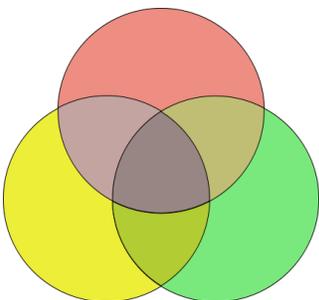
In *Guided Pathways Demystified*, I share some of my non-traditional responses to these questions--questions that typically come from a strong concern for students among the practitioners who raise them. These responses are in no way designed to represent the "right" way of addressing these important issues. Rather, I share my thoughts to help you facilitate conversations with colleagues about these redesign strategies.

California's community colleges are beginning to explore ways to adopt the guided pathways model. For example, Bakersfield College (BC) was recently selected as one of 30 institutions across the country to participate in the American Association for Community College's Pathways Institute. As part of the initiative and as a stimulus for the concept in California, BC has teamed up with Irvine Valley College, Butte College, and the College Futures Foundation to hold a [February 2016 summit](#) on guided pathways featuring Davis Jenkins.

### Resources:

- [Guided Pathways Demystified: Ten Commonly Asked Questions about Guided Pathways](#) (includes link to discussion guide)
- [Redesigning Community College Summit](#), February 2016
- [Redesigning America's Community Colleges: A Clearer Path to Student Success](#)
- [Completion by Design](#)

## Research | A Study of Multiple Measures Math Assessment in the Los Angeles Community College District



**Author:** *Willard Hom*, Consulting Editor

We have heard much talk about the assessment and placement dilemma in the community colleges and about the potential for the multiple measures assessment (MMA) approach to help us assess and place students. In a recently completed study, Frederick Ngo and William W. Kwon (2015) explore the effectiveness of MMA for the placement of math students in the Los Angeles Community College

District (LACCD), the largest district in California.

Ngo and Kwon analyzed student-level assessment and enrollment data from the LACCD for 44,228 learners who were first-time students and who took a placement test between the 2005-2006 and 2007-2008 academic years. They thus identified each student whose raw test score was below the cutoff score at the institution in which they took the placement test, but whose multiple measure points resulted in an adjusted test score that was *above* the cutoff score. Ngo and Kwon classified students who met these criteria as having received the multiple measure "boost." They could then count the total number of students who received a multiple measure boost in each college between 2005 and 2008 and the number of boosted students by level of developmental math. They used transcripts for seven years of outcome data for this sample.

Below are quotes from Ngo and Kwon for a concise summary of this study.

- **Our analysis of LACCD data provides validation for two specific measures--prior math background and high school GPA.** Even though these measures are known to be predictive of college outcomes, current conceptions of validation highlight the need to examine actual outcomes in contexts where measures are used to make placement decisions... (p. 462)
- The results suggest that community colleges can increase placement accuracy by using multiple measure information in conjunction with placement test scores. Evidence from the LACCD colleges demonstrates that those **students who were placed into higher-level developmental math courses using multiple measures performed no differently from their higher-scoring peers.** Since these students were given the opportunity to take a higher-level course and performed at least as well as their higher-scoring peers, these students were more accurately placed than they would have been by placement test scores alone... (pp. 462-463)
- We observed improvements in placement accuracy for students who scored around the placement cutoff, but these students did not match or outperform their higher-scoring peers. This suggests that **although measures of prior math can increase placement accuracy, they should probably be used in conjunction with placement test scores.** (p. 463)
- ...high school GPA is highly predictive of college persistence and success. However, the finding that students who received a multiple measure boost based on GPA outperformed the entire range of students in the same level suggests that **GPA may be a very useful measure for making placement decisions, and underscores the role of effort and self-control in college achievement....**Further research should examine the extent to which making placement decisions based solely on GPA, either self-reported or obtained directly from high school transcripts, can lead to even greater improvements in placement accuracy. (p. 463)
- ...while boosted students are just as likely to be successful as their peers, our analyses also show that the **goals of mitigating disproportionate impact in remediation are not being fully realized....**Our simulated placements with and without multiple measures show that the use of these particular multiple measures only marginally increased access to higher level math courses for African-American and Latina/o students, and only in some colleges. (pp. 463-464)

#### **Resources:**

- Ngo, F., & Kwon, W. W. (2015). Using multiple measures to make math placement decisions: Implications for access and success in community colleges. *Research in Higher*

- [Assessing Development Assessment in Community Colleges: A Review of the Literature](#) (CCRC Working Paper No. 19 by Katherine L. Hughes and Judith Scott-Clayton, August 2010)

## Planning | What Does "Integration" Mean? A Few Starting Points



**Author:** *Denice Inciong*, Planning and Policy Chair, RP Group; District Director of Research, Planning, and Data Management, South Orange County Community College District

What does the word "integrated" mean when we discuss planning? Some say it means we have all the "right" pieces of planning (e.g., program reviews, SLOs, strategic plan, enrollment management plans, technology plans, facilities plans, student success plans, equity plans, and workforce development plans) and link or relate these pieces to one another. Others say that the institution's goals and objectives are integrated and that they drive the budget allocation process. Still others say integration means the priorities and strategic directions are integrated at all levels of the institution--students, faculty, and staff--where everyone from grounds keeper to the president is fluent in the institution's priorities and in the part each person on campus plays in accomplishing these goals.

In my recent experience with planning at the district level, integration meant we all worked together to create a district-wide strategic plan. This plan represents not just the Chancellor's priorities or the individual college's strategic goals, but a collective process and direction. We established district-wide goals and objectives that represented priorities of both the colleges *and* the district. A good amount of thought, time, listening, debating, editing, patience, and laughter ultimately resulted in a shared set of four goals and 13 objectives.

We also created a district-wide planning and decision-making manual--an important piece of our integration process. For our district, this detailed specification of how we reach consensus was an important facet of our integrated process. We needed to outline our committee structures and relationships, including how we made decisions and how we handled disagreement. It was vital to (a) articulate how we are inclusive, ensuring broad representation in major committees and councils, and (b) state that we may not always agree, but that we try to hear everyone's perspective. At the same time, we must have a mechanism to reach agreement even if we can't define precisely where decisions will be made. Lastly, we found it helpful for integration to have a formal process with standards for agendas, minutes, committee charge, and membership list, as well as the posting of all of these documents on our intranet site.

In retrospect, I realize how I adapted, given that the skills for the role of planning leader were beyond traditional IR training. For our strategic plan, I needed to provide colleagues motivation, to maintain their focus, and to do follow-up with them. These skills have so much weight in the integrated planning framework because human interaction is critical for linking the diverse elements in the integrated strategic plan.

Yes, I experienced a host of challenging questions in the process. How are we evaluating the impact we have on the priorities we set based on the strategic directions? How do we know that our integrated planning process is working (i.e., are there metrics for that)? Are the plans really making

any difference, especially for students? Have we changed the direction of an institution? These questions expose the core of effective planning, but few of us have the opportunity to step back, survey the planning landscape at the 30,000-foot level, and reflect on these issues.

In closing, remember that integrated strategic planning is not a one-size-fits-all approach for planning, and there are so many aspects of planning that integration can cover across an institution. To help anyone work through this approach, the [Institutional Effectiveness Partnership Initiative](#) (IEPI) will host a series of workshops this academic year. These workshops will include panel presentations from colleges and districts on effective integrated planning principles and engage practitioners to share practices across institutions. The RP Group and IEPI will continue to reinvigorate me, and I look forward to building the new integrated planning toolbox.

### **Resources:**

- [A Practical Guide to Strategic Planning in Higher Education](#) (Society for College and University Planning publication by Karen E. Hinton, 2012)
- [Multi-Campus Program Review and Integrated Planning Model. Ventura County Community College District](#) (ACCJC Regional Workshop presentation, October 2012)

## Assessment | Back to the Future: Finding Quality in What We Do



**Author:** *Robert Pacheco*, Assessment Chair, RP Group

*Editor's Note: This article summarizes the session "Capturing Our Pledge to Quality" held at the Strengthening Student Success Conference last fall. This article's author will co-present a general session at the ASCCC's Accreditation Institute on February 20 on the topic of the Quality Focus Essay. Find registration information for the institute [here](#).*

An institutional self-evaluation has always had a retrospective, if not reactive, air to it. The process has always looked backward at the work done over the previous accreditation cycle, appearing more like a post mortem than a diagnosis for improvement.

Currently, in the field of "academic quality" (the new synonym for "accreditation"), we aim to develop quality improvement plans that are forward-looking, multi-year efforts to tackle the larger challenges colleges face. The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior College (ACCJC) iteration of the notion of a quality plan is called the "Quality Focus Essay" (QFE).

The notion of an "essay" may conjure up memories of all-nighters, but the QFE really is a plan, a model for guiding college efforts over the next accreditation cycle.

### **Not a New Idea**

There is a kerfuffle about the QFE, its content, and its purpose, but the idea is not new. Colleges in the Higher Learning Commission region have the option to pursue the [AQIP](#) (Academic Quality Improvement Plans) pathway to reaccreditation.

Institutions in the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools complete [Quality Enhancement Plans](#), or QEPs.

While these plans have different monikers, the purpose is largely the same. Colleges use the self-evaluation process not just to make summative judgments on past performance, but also to look forward.

The nine Los Angeles Community College District colleges, the College of Micronesia, and College of the Siskiyous are the first colleges to produce QFEs this spring. Napa Valley College piloted the idea with the ACCJC last fall. Visit the ACCJC college websites to see QFEs, and look at AQIPs and QFEs in the other accrediting regions. They're worth the time. The quality improvement plans, their contents and structures, vary as colleges differ, and that's a good thing.

### **The Manual and the Guide**

Information about the QFE itself is in two ACCJC documents, the *Manual for Self-Evaluation* and the *Guide to Evaluating and Improvement Institutions*. The two documents are not totally aligned, and comparing language in the two resources is a worthy endeavor.

Colleges must identify two to three data-based action projects:

- A product of the institution's self-evaluation process;
- Something connected to the institutional mission; and/or
- An area of expansion, institutionalization, development or needed change to improve student learning and achievement.

The projects need to identify goals and outcomes and to include a timeline, project leaders, and resource needs (Standard III, Human, Physical, Technology, and Financial) to get the job done.

The plan should be terse (5,000-word limit), and importantly, include a meta-evaluative component to examine the progress on the goals and the effectiveness of the plan process itself.

According to the ACCJC manual, the areas identified in the essay become critical focal points for the institution's *Midterm Report*. Evaluation teams, and the Commission itself, will comment on the institution's QFE to offer constructive advice or assistance.

### **Some Final Pointers**

My work with colleges to write QFEs over the past year has uncovered a few key writing tips. First, start early. The QFE will be a key component of the college midterm. Spending the extra time now reflecting on the projects will help the college plan, and this will make the preparation of the midterm report that much easier three and a half years from now. Don't wait.

Second, build a team. Handing the QFE writing to one person is a formula for potential miscommunication. Make sure that the college senate is on board with the plan from the outset.

Third, pick outcomes that are observable and within the college's control. Work with the college researcher to identify reasonable and attainable outcomes. Selecting projects that are too aspirational in nature could lead to poor conclusions about college efforts and hurt college capacity to achieve its mission. Observable outcomes help the institution pivot and innovate based on the findings.

Fourth, connect the plan to what you already do. Look at your current master and strategic plan data to help guide the process. If the QFE points to a direction opposite to the direction shown by your planning data, you will need to reconcile that.

Finally, distinguish the QFE from the changes and plans arising from the self-evaluation process (Section I of the new self-evaluation report). We will discuss how colleges are addressing this new expectation and connecting it to the QFE in the next issue of *Perspectives*.

### **Resources:**

- [Materials from the SSSC session](#) (to find the file, click "Here" on the conference's home page, and then click through the following path: 2015 Strengthening Student Success Conference Materials>>Linking Accountability>>Capturing Our Pledge>>Capturing our Pledge to Academic Quality.ppt)
- [Manual for Institutional Self Evaluation of Educational Quality and Institutional Effectiveness](#)
- [New Accreditation Standards and Practices: Focus on Quality Improvement](#)

## Op-Ed | Why the Relationship between the RP Group and the ACCJC Matters



**Authors:** *Julie Stark and Linda Umbdenstock*, Founding Board Members, RP Group

Historically in California Community Colleges (as recent as the 1980s), data-informed decision-making, the value of institutional research and its professionals, planning, and the planning cycle had very low profiles and generated minimal interest. One of the primary drivers of the 180-degree change to the prominence of these functions was the positive relationship between the RP Group's mission and Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior College (ACCJC) leadership. There existed a mutually beneficial relationship between the two organizations with the end goals of encouraging institutional improvement, strengthening student learning, and promoting student success.

Previous ACCJC presidents often requested assistance from RP Group leaders during pivotal times. In fact, the current president of ACCJC was one of the founding presidents of the RP Group.

This relationship resulted in the evolution of accreditation standards that emphasize planning across the institution in order to accomplish college missions and that emphasize the use of data in all activities--practices that were not required previously. Placing a research and planning professional on each accreditation visiting team has become standard procedure. Additionally, the RP Group was called upon to co-sponsor with ACCJC and the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) the first Assessment Institutes in the 1990s, as student learning outcomes assessment unfolded. Subsequently, RP Group leaders conducted the initial student learning outcomes workshops throughout the state, and for many years ACCJC and the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges co-sponsored with the RP Group the very successful, annual Strengthening Student Success Conference. RP Group members participated each time the accreditation standards were updated or revised and promoted requirements for the implementation and integration of research and planning. Consequently, evidence of meaningful results and sustainability, not just written procedures, were emphasized by ACCJC, in keeping with growing public and federal demands.

The mission of the RP Group was advanced, the colleges weathered bad times, and institutional research and planning appropriately became high-demand and valued functions in our colleges. The RP Group has maintained its status as California's leading professional organization of institutional researchers and planners, and we hope, for the goal of promoting integrated research, planning, and decision-making in order to enhance student success.

On the other hand, for better or for worse, a majority of past accreditation sanctions of colleges resulted from deficiencies in institutional effectiveness and planning practices--an effect, for one thing, of standards that now place research and planning central to decision-making and college processes. At the same time, more and more demands are simultaneously being put in place for accreditation by the federal government. Of late, there is a new demand of the accreditation process to monitor and reduce colleges' student loan default rates. Further, the state government continues to enhance college and system accountability for student success and student equity.

In the context of the historical partnership between the two organizations to develop and uphold standards and foster quality, what would a productive future partnership include? These writers challenge readers and RP Group leadership to work cooperatively with ACCJC to continue to identify strategies for ensuring concrete evidence of colleges' results--not just good intentions and claims of "quality." Are students any better prepared for the changing society they live and work in now? Has equity in student success advanced? Do students reach their goals?

Along with developing metrics related to student success and college quality, including student loan issues, researchers and planners have a role in providing leadership for achieving system, college, and program quality and improvement. Researchers and planners are the keepers of the continuous "P-I-E" cycle of planning, implementation, and evaluation. Unaccompanied research, evaluation, assessment, metrics, measures, and statistics are not only useless, but potentially dangerous. Strong components of the "P-I-E" cycle, and linkages between each component, constitute institutional effectiveness, and require vigilance, skill, strategic direction and collaboration on multiple levels, with a range of partners, on our parts as professionals. Our collaboration matters.

**Resources:** Historical documents (available in hard copy only)

- *Criteria and Measures for Institutional Effectiveness* (1988): Julie Slark and Bob Jensen wrote this publication based on a workshop conducted by sponsoring organizations--ASCCC, ACCCA, CCCT, CACC (now CCLC), SCCCIRA, NORCAL, and ACCJC.
- *Institutional Research for Decision-Making and Accountability in California Community Colleges* (1988): This CACC (now CCLC) Commission on Research Issues Paper provided background for the annual state Research Agenda; CACC's Research Commission was the "third leg" of institutional research professional organizations which included SCCCIRA and NORCAL.
- *Creating a Research Pervasive Environment* (1990): This series of publications had input from participants at the annual research conference on what they wanted to see in such an environment and strategies for getting there.

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