



Centering the Role of Advising Redesign for Effective Guided Pathways Implementation

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AUTHORS

*Kathy Thompson
Lisa Dunning
Raina Dyer-Barr
Brett Visger
Jason Keist*

PARTICIPATING INSTITUTIONS

*Community College of Aurora
(Aurora, Colorado)
Prince George's Community College
(Largo, Maryland)
Sinclair Community College
(Dayton, Ohio)
Claflin University
(Orangeburg, South Carolina)
Johnson C. Smith University
(Charlotte, North Carolina)
Winston-Salem State University
(Winston-Salem, North Carolina)*

GUIDED PATHWAYS

Guided Pathways is a proven, whole-college framework that enables students to navigate higher education with greater clarity and purpose, supporting them in achieving both educational and career goals. The model organizes programs around clear maps, embeds proactive advising and wraparound supports, and emphasizes learning with measurable outcomes. As a result, students take fewer excess credits, complete credentials more quickly, and move seamlessly into transfer programs or living-wage employment. Developed by researchers at the Community College Research Center (CCRC), the model addresses the inefficiencies of the traditional “cafeteria-style” approach, where students often face an overwhelming array of choices without adequate direction. Guided Pathways has evolved from a model into a refined, evidence-based framework, strengthened through ongoing implementation across colleges nationwide, which has demonstrated measurable gains in student persistence, credential attainment, and pathways to success.

A cornerstone of effective implementation is the **redesign of advising systems**, shifting from transactional, course-selection support to proactive, relationship-based guidance. Through case-managed advising, success coaching, and integrated use of technology, institutions provide students with sustained, personalized support to navigate program maps, make informed choices, and stay on track toward timely completion. This evolution in advising ensures that students not only enter clear pathways but also receive the ongoing guidance and encouragement needed to persist and succeed.

This case study highlights six institutions—three community colleges and three Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)—that have redesigned advising to align with Guided Pathways and related reform models. Among the community colleges, two are full implementers of Guided Pathways, while one represents a partial adopter. Complementing these examples of Guided Pathways, the case study also features three four-year HBCUs implementing the Pathways and Career Pathways models, underscoring how advising redesign and structured educational pathways can be applied across different institutional contexts to drive access and student success.

In addition, colleges have strengthened program mapping, aligned curricula with labor market demand, and created seamless transfer pathways, helping students move efficiently from entry to completion and into meaningful careers. While initially designed for community colleges, the principles of Guided Pathways—clarity, structure, proactive support, and student-centered design—are increasingly being applied within four-year institutions, expanding their reach as a proven framework for student success and institutional transformation (Community College Research Center, n.d.; Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015).

Building on these innovations, the Guided Pathways framework is grounded in four interrelated pillars that provide the framework for institutional transformation. These pillars—clarifying paths, helping students enter and stay on their path, ensuring learning occurs, and redesigning supports—serve as the foundation for advancing equitable student outcomes and guiding systemic change across colleges and universities (Community College Research Center, n.d., Jenkins, & Bailey, 2017).

GUIDED PATHWAYS FOUR KEY PILLARS:

- 1. Clarify the Path:** Colleges design and clearly present structured program maps that outline the sequence of courses, critical milestones, and learning outcomes required for completion. These maps are developed in collaboration with faculty and industry stakeholders to ensure alignment with labor market demands and transfer opportunities.
- 2. Help Students Choose and Enter a Path:** Colleges provide proactive support to assist students in selecting a program of study that aligns with their interests and career goals. This includes enhanced onboarding processes, career exploration activities, and early academic planning to ensure students embark on a path suited to their academic and career aspirations.
- 3. Help Students Stay on the Path:** Colleges implement continuous monitoring and support mechanisms to keep students engaged and progressing toward their goals. This involves regular advising sessions, early alert systems to identify and address academic challenges, and structured schedules that facilitate course completion.
- 4. Ensure Students Are Learning:** The model emphasizes the importance of high-quality, applied learning experiences that are relevant to students' fields of study. Faculty collaborate to ensure that instructional practices and assessments are aligned with program outcomes, fostering deeper learning and skill development.

For this case study brief, “**student success**” refers to the principle and practice of ensuring that all individuals have access to, meaningful participation in, and pathways to success from postsecondary education. Grounded in this understanding, Guided Pathways and advising redesign are not simply structural reforms; they are opportunities to build inclusive systems focused on removing systemic barriers, addressing disparities, and intentionally supporting underserved groups, so that every learner has the support and resources necessary to succeed.

By adopting the Guided Pathways framework, colleges aim to improve student outcomes, including higher completion rates, reduced time to degree, and decreased differences among the student populations. Although implementing the Guided Pathways framework requires significant institutional commitment and cultural change, evidence indicates positive impacts on student success metrics and other benefits for students and communities, all of which underscore the importance of this institutional reform effort.

To operationalize the four pillars of Guided Pathways, institutions must undertake a comprehensive redesign of key student support services—most critically, advising. Effective implementation of the Guided Pathways model requires a holistic redesign of institutional practices, including advising structures and processes, to foster a more coherent, cohesive, and supportive educational environment. More specifically, within the Guided Pathways model, advising is not a peripheral service but a central component that ensures students are effectively guided through their educational journey.

Advising redesign involves a comprehensive transformation of advising practices to create a more proactive, personalized, and equity-focused approach. This transformation includes implementing systems and processes in which advisors are assigned a specific cohort of students to foster continuous and more meaningful engagement as well as integrating technology to enable real-time tracking of student progress to allow for timely interventions and support. The holistic advising redesign required by Guided Pathways encompasses not only academic guidance but also considers students’ personal circumstances, aspirations, and challenges and aims to build trust and rapport to ensure that students feel supported and understood throughout their college experience (Advising Success Network, 2022).

Advising is not a peripheral service but a central component that ensures students are effectively guided through their educational journey.

A crucial aspect of advising redesign is its potential to address longstanding equity gaps in higher education. Traditional advising models, often characterized by sporadic, transactional interactions and lacking the structure required to effectively support students in making informed academic and career decisions, have proven especially insufficient for meeting the needs of today's diverse student population—especially racially minoritized and first generation students, who often face systemic barriers and require more tailored support. Holistic advising redesign that is proactive and equity-centered seeks to dismantle these barriers through the implementation of intentionally designed advising practices and processes that are inclusive and responsive to the diverse needs of all students. These practices include assigning students to dedicated advisors, embedding career and transfer planning into early advising sessions, and leveraging predictive analytics to intervene early when students get off-track. For Guided Pathways reform to be truly effective, it must be implemented with an equity lens (CCRC, n.d.), which means not only clarifying program paths and strengthening student supports, but also actively working to remove systemic obstacles that disproportionately impact underserved student groups.

Advising redesign is not merely a supplementary component of Guided Pathways, but a fundamental element required for the reform model's success. Research from CCRC indicates that institutions implementing proactive, equity-centered advising as part of Guided Pathways reforms experience marked increases in student engagement, retention, and completion (Bailey et al., 2015). By transforming advising practices to be more proactive, personalized, and equity-focused, institutions can better support all students in navigating their educational journeys and subsequently lead to improved outcomes and reduced equity gaps.

Because Guided Pathways originated to support student success in the community college context, there are many examples of 2-year colleges implementing comprehensive or holistic institutional change via the four pillars of the Guided Pathways framework. In contrast, within the 4-year college context, fewer institutions have embraced Guided Pathways as a holistic institutional reform effort, but many have implemented elements of the model within specific programs to advance student success metrics (e.g., degree completion) or to support a specific population (e.g., adult learners). As such, there appear to be some differences in the Guided Pathways implementation and advising redesign efforts of the community colleges and universities highlighted in these case studies. Community colleges embrace more systemic approaches, while universities focus more on targeted programmatic success. Further research is warranted to better understand Guided Pathways elements at 4-year minority-serving colleges and universities.

Advising redesign is not merely a supplementary component of Guided Pathways, but a fundamental element required for the reform model's success.

Guided Pathways and Career Pathways Institutions

The three two-year colleges featured in this case study were selected for their progress in implementing Guided Pathways and redesigning advising systems to strengthen student outcomes. The three HBCUs were chosen for their innovative advising reforms that support the Career Pathways model, which intentionally aligns academic programs with employer demand, career advancement opportunities, and transfer pathways. Together, these institutions demonstrate how advising redesign can both deliver immediate value to students and promote long-term economic mobility.

THE GUIDED PATHWAYS COLLEGES ARE:

- Community College of Aurora (CCA), located in Aurora, Colorado
- Prince George's Community College (PGCC), located in Largo, Maryland
- Sinclair Community College (SCC), located in Dayton, Ohio

THE HBCU CAREER PATHWAYS UNIVERSITIES ARE:

- Claflin University (CU), located in Orangeburg, South Carolina
- Johnson C. Smith (JCSU), located in Charlotte, North Carolina
- Winston-Salem State University (WSSU), located in Winston-Salem, North Carolina

Collectively, these six institutions offer diverse perspectives on how advising redesign can be leveraged to strengthen Guided Pathways and Career Pathways implementation. While each college and university operates within its own context, their experiences reveal common strategies and innovations that inform the broader field. The following themes—centered on advising redesign and structural innovation—highlight the approaches these institutions have used to prioritize student support, integrate holistic and proactive advising, harness data and technology, and foster cross-campus collaboration.

Cross-Case Analysis

Our team conducted interviews with administrators in advising and student success to gain insights into academic advising redesign and guided pathways at 2-year public, 4-year public, and 4-year private institutions. The questions focused on institutional redesign approaches, the integration of guided pathways, the role of data and technology, pathways to success, and the importance of student voice. Key themes were identified throughout the interviews that highlight strategies to enhance student success through academic advising redesign and the integration of guided pathways.

In analyzing these case studies, effectiveness and student outcomes serve as both a guiding principle and an evaluative lens. The analysis focuses on ensuring fair access to opportunities, providing consistent support, and achieving measurable improvements in student results. Each institutional example is therefore assessed not only for efficiency or innovation, but for how well it strengthens student achievement across different groups.

COMMON PRACTICES AND STRATEGIES OBSERVED INCLUDE:

- Targeting student needs and providing support to all students
- Proactive and holistic advising support
- Cross-functional collaboration
- Tracking student progression through technology and data-informed practices

The responses from each institution show collaboration among campus stakeholders. Holistic advising addresses the overall needs of students for academic and career success. Efforts are aimed at expanding support for diverse student populations and improving quality through staff feedback to mitigate advisor burnout. The findings show that each institution is committed to improving student success. The institutions are implementing advising redesign practices and integrating an inclusive and supportive environment through guided pathways.

Advising Redesign and Structural Innovation Themes

1

STUDENT-SUPPORT CENTERED MODELS

Results show the institutions have developed student-centered advising models to prioritize student needs. Similar to the broader trend among the 2-year colleges, each of the 4-year colleges transitioned to a primary-role advising structure to bolster a student-centered approach for advising and student success. For instance, Claffin transitioned from traditional faculty advising to a professional success coaching framework (STARS program) to enhance student success through consistent, year-round support. The ASN has developed a set of recommendations for institutions based on the collective expertise of partner organizations. Institutions that have undergone holistic advising redesign—or redesigning and aligning student supports to provide an integrated student experience—are successfully supporting students as they define and achieve their personal, academic, and career goals. The Advising Success Network encourages institutions to adopt an equity-minded approach and engage in holistic advising redesign with recommendations listed [here](#).

2

PROACTIVE ADVISING AND HOLISTIC SUPPORT

In their article “Appreciative Assessment in Academic Advising” (2016), Ye He and Bryan Hutson discuss how appreciative advising emphasizes “...students’ assets and strengths and the inquiry process” as well recognizing that, “students with different backgrounds may define and achieve their successes through their unique pathways rather than follow a pre-set developmental pattern that is generalizable for all students (p. 218). The 2-year and 4-year colleges are committed to addressing students’ supportive and holistic needs, which extend beyond academic and target non-academic-related resources and student needs. This is demonstrated by Prince George’s Community College’s “Care Units,” which provide tailored support; and the Community College of Aurora’s emphasis on student needs and guided pathways. Furthermore, Winston-Salem State University (WSSU) undertook a comprehensive advising redesign in collaboration with the National Institute for Student Success (NISS). WSSU’s implementation of the Appreciative Advising model has been central to their redesign efforts.

3

INTEGRATION OF DATA ANALYTICS AND TECHNOLOGY

Ongoing use of data analytics was a common thread throughout each of the case studies. Campuses regularly review reports with a variety of data analytics on student success to strengthen services to students. While the content of these reports and dashboards vary, they were all generated by student success software. The 2-year and 4-year institutions are utilizing technology software to monitor trends in student progress, improve communication, outreach, and interactions with students, and foster effective student support to aim for improvements in retention and graduation rates.

With the adoption of technology like EAB Navigate to support their redesigned advising practices and the utilization of early alert platforms within the EAB Navigate platform, Prince George's Community College has enhanced faculty involvement in monitoring student progress. Their strategies show that early alert usage has increased from 10% to 33%. Similarly, Clafflin utilizes a Business Intelligence dashboard to consolidate student data and assist advisors in providing proactive support.

4

CROSS-FUNCTIONAL COLLABORATION

Among both 2-year and 4-year institutions, there is a standard practice of engaging faculty, staff, administration, and including student voice in the advising redesign process. The Community College of Aurora demonstrates this by incorporating student feedback into advising processes, making its advising model more responsive to student needs and expectations. The redesign process involved cross-functional collaborations among faculty, staff, and students, ensuring the advising model addressed the holistic needs of students. Similarly, Clafflin implemented a cross-functional approach to redesign its advising and guided pathways model, aiming to better support advising during the summer months and streamline degree planning.

5

CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

Continuous quality improvement is evident across each of the institutions. There is an emphasis on adapting advising practices based on feedback, with regular reevaluations of advising processes and training for faculty and staff. Specifically, Johnson C. Smith University is engaged in student feedback through focus groups, fostering a culture of transparency and collaboration to refine advising services.

Key Themes on the Impact of Guided Pathways Implementation on Advising Redesign

Several common themes emerged from the implementations of Guided Pathways at the **Community College of Aurora**, **Prince George's Community College**, **Sinclair College**, and **Claflin University**.

The responses reflect a comprehensive approach to implementing Guided Pathways, demonstrating that the institutions are utilizing a balanced approach to improve student outcomes.

- Each of the institutions has significantly restructured its advising practices as part of implementing guided pathways. Their guided pathway implementation demonstrates a more proactive and holistic advising model that prioritizes student success. **Sinclair College** is a great example of how it has enhanced student completion outcomes through Guided Pathways, featuring structured program plans, My Academic Plans (MAPs), and consistent support from specialized advisors. The college's "recipe for success" highlights key learning goals, like earning nine (9) credit hours in a major within the first 30 credits, to improve retention and completion rates. **Claflin University** is committed to providing equal support to all students, including those in the Pathways from Prison Program, with necessary adjustments to address unique challenges.
- Two-year institutions have implemented strategies to identify and address biases in their advising practices.
- There is a common standard across the institutions to utilize data to inform advising practices and curricular decisions. Each college utilizes data to guide its advising redesign efforts, track student progress and retention, and identify areas for improvement.
- Each of the 2-year and 4-year institutions demonstrates that they have worked to simplify course offerings and program pathways, making it easier for students to navigate their academic journeys.
- The successful implementation of Guided Pathways throughout the institution involved collaboration among departments and campus stakeholders to foster cohesive communication among faculty and staff.
- Each institution has developed structured academic and early intervention strategies, as well as enhanced onboarding experiences, to provide holistic support that improves student success and retention rates.

Sinclair College is a great example of an institution that has enhanced student completion outcomes through Guided Pathways.

CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED DURING THE TRANSITION TO A NEW ADVISING MODEL

Many institutions noted that advisors encountered challenges when transitioning to a proactive advising model, such as navigating staff concerns about role changes and job security, and difficulties managing new caseloads while addressing student needs. Further, increased demands on advisors raised concerns about burnout. Several institutions also emphasized the need for ongoing professional development for all advisors. The shifting job duties resulting from redesign, combined with the relatively high turnover in the advising staff, necessitate regular training. The changes have been consistent with guidance developed by the Advising Success Network. Furthermore, it was noted that transitioning to a newly designed advising model presented a variety of challenges, including initial technology adoption with the EAB Navigate platform, ensuring equitable support for all students, and the commitment to integrating student feedback into advising practices.

ADVISING REDESIGN AND STUDENT SUCCESS APPROACHES

This analysis presents the advising approaches that 2-year and 4-year institutions are deploying to target students' diverse needs and provide holistic support in advising redesign and guided pathways implementation. Technology such as EAB Navigate aids advisors in effectively tracking student progress. The colleges demonstrate a significant focus on relationship-building, proactive and balanced advising, and timely interventions. For example, Sinclair College focuses on Guided Pathways to identify challenges and improve results for all students.

The development of advising practices and processes at the 2-year and 4-year institutions prioritizes student voice by incorporating student feedback in the redesign. Sinclair College demonstrates the use of disaggregated data to identify areas for improvement and inform initiatives such as expanded mental health support. Its data-driven approach has improved outcomes for students and supported programs like the African American Male Initiative.

The interview outcomes indicate that the institutions have implemented student-centered advising models and integrated guided pathways support. Each institution highlights its efforts to make ongoing enhancements in student success and fosters inclusive environments by focusing on proactive and holistic student support, data and technology integration, and collaboration with stakeholders.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the analysis of advising redesign and Guided Pathways implementation across two-year and four-year institutions, several key recommendations emerge for institutions seeking to strengthen student success, and completion outcomes:

1

Institutionalize Student-Centered Advising

Institutions should adopt advising redesign strategies that explicitly address student success gaps. This includes:

- Disaggregating student outcome data to identify disparities.
- Embedding goals for improving student outcomes in advising protocols and performance evaluations.
- Designing targeted initiatives, such as culturally responsive advising and affinity-based supports (e.g., Sinclair's African American Male Initiative).

2

Articulate and Plan for Holistic Approaches to Student Success that Include Structured, Scalable Academic Pathways

Institutions should aspire towards holistic student-centered reform that requires collaboration across academic affairs, student services, IT, and institutional research. Within these models, students should have clear guidance and structures that enable them to complete their desired credentials in a timely fashion. To achieve this, Institutions should:

- Engage data-informed student success planning committees that include faculty, advising staff, administrators, and students.
- Develop academic program maps with term-by-term plans for both full-time and part-time progression, including meta-majors for undecided students.
- Ensure that pathways and advising structures are aligned with labor market demand and regularly reviewed and updated to ensure relevance to students and the market.
- Utilize campus-wide summits or data retreats to foster a shared sense of responsibility.

3

Invest in Dedicated, Primary-Role Advisors Structures

Transitioning from faculty-led to professional advising or coaching models (as demonstrated at Claflin and JCSU) ensures year-round, consistent support. To ensure consistent, high-quality advising in these models, institutions should:

- Provide 12-month contracts for advisors or success coaches.
- Allocate manageable caseloads tailored to student risk levels.
- Build hybrid models that strike a balance between academic guidance and life coaching.
- Require regular training on curriculum changes, career planning, and inclusive advising.
- Implement knowledge inventories or competency assessments for advising.
- Offer mentorship, shadowing, and cross-unit learning for continuous improvement.

4

Integrate Student Voice into Continuous Improvement

Institutions should regularly incorporate student feedback into advising redesign by:

- Using formal tools such as advisor feedback surveys and focus groups.
- Engaging students in co-designing programs, particularly for non-traditional learners.
- Making changes visible to students to reinforce institutional responsiveness and trust.

5

Leverage Data Analytics to Enhance Proactive Engagement

Using data analytics has been shown to provide advisors and students with critical information to support effective decision-making. Implementing CRM systems such as EAB Navigate, Ellucian, and Microsoft Power BI dashboards allows for:

- Real-time academic planning and risk tracking.
- Early alert systems that prompt timely outreach and intervention.
- Advisor collaboration through shared notes and analytics dashboards.

Based on the analysis of advising redesign and Guided Pathways implementation across two-year and four-year institutions, several key recommendations emerge for institutions seeking to strengthen student success, and completion outcomes.

INSTITUTIONALIZE
**STUDENT-CENTERED
ADVISING**

ARTICULATE AND PLAN FOR
**HOLISTIC APPROACHES
TO STUDENT SUCCESS**
THAT INCLUDE STRUCTURED,
SCALABLE ACADEMIC PATHWAYS

INVEST IN DEDICATED
**PRIMARY-ROLE
ADVISORS
STRUCTURES**

INTEGRATE
STUDENT VOICE
INTO CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

LEVERAGE
DATA ANALYTICS
TO ENHANCE PROACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

COMMUNITY COLLEGE OF AURORA

The Community College of Aurora (CCA), located in Aurora, Colorado, is a designated Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI). It is hailed as the “most diverse college in Colorado” with over 30% of its student population identifying as Hispanic/Latinx, and more than half identifying as Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC) ([Community College of Aurora](#), n.d.). The student body is also diverse along other demographic lines and enrolls many first-time students, adult learners, English language learners, international students, and veterans.

CCA implemented the Guided Pathways model by organizing all offered degrees and certificates into six broad academic pathways of study:

1. Communication & Languages
2. Creative Industries
3. Health
4. People, Societies & Ideas
5. Professional Studies & Public Service
6. STEM ([Community College of Aurora](#) / [CCA2](#), n.d)

CCA describes its implementation of the Guided Pathways model in the simplest terms as its way to intentionally onboard students into their chosen academic and/or career paths with a clear pathway or trajectory from entry to completion.

In addition to its curriculum redesign (i.e., development and implementation of academic pathways as part of its adoption of the Guided Pathways model), CCA has also undertaken a redesign of its advising structure and processes, which is a primary condition for effective Guided Pathways implementation.



ADVISING REDESIGN PROCESS

Before its advising redesign, CCA employed a traditional advising model described as more reactive than proactive and lacking the structured support necessary to meet the needs of its increasingly diverse student population. Thus, in alignment with its strategic plan and its adoption of the Guided Pathways model, CCA undertook a comprehensive advising redesign to better serve its diverse student body. Key changes in the advising model included implementing proactive advising strategies, integrating technology to enhance student support, and fostering a culture of care and community. Stakeholder engagement was also central to this process, with cross-functional collaborations among faculty, staff, and administration to ensure the advising model met the holistic needs of students.

When redesigning its advising model, CCA maintained the use of primary-role advisors but significantly revised advisor caseloads for efficiency and to help with advisor burnout. More specifically, advisors were not only reassigned to align with academic pathways in which they had expertise, but much of the activities based around registration, shifted from the advisors to the registrar's office and Registration Clerks who became responsible for building students' academic plans, freeing advisors to focus on reviewing and revising academic plans with students to ensure alignment with their academic and career goals.

According to the Senior Administrator, this shift in responsibilities means that advisors can now devote more time to meaningful conversations with students about their goals, opportunities, and strategies for success, rather than primarily focusing on registration logistics. This shift is also closely aligned with one of CCA's advising redesign goals—to make advising more relational rather than transactional. Freeing up advisors with registration clerks created time and space for advisors to develop relationships with students that ultimately impacted their experiences and outcomes. Restructuring advising to prioritize human support over technical labor, boosted retention, allowed for the correction of past advising errors, and ensure all students began their CCA journey with a customized and compliant academic plan.

“Advisors are spending the same amount of time with students, achieving the same outcomes—or, rather, better outcomes. However, they’re having more intentional conversations with students around obstacles, opportunities, and goal setting.”

—Senior Administrator

Another significant component of CCA’s advising redesign was the adoption of the EAB Navigate platform ([Community College of Aurora](#), n.d.), a student information system used to track student success. This technology facilitated better tracking of student progress and allowed for timely interventions, contributing to more equitable outcomes for all student groups.

According to CCA administrators, EAB Navigate has allowed advisors to triage students according to the level of support required and personalize advising interactions accordingly. More specifically, students are grouped into three tiers to tailor support: those consistently progressing, those with strong potential for accelerated gains, and those who could benefit most from additional support. Advising caseloads are not only assigned by pathway expertise, but also by student risk profile, so that no advisor is overwhelmed with high-need students. Ultimately, this tiered, dynamic and responsive advising model adapts to student profiles, prevents advisor overload, and enhances retention and proactive engagement.

In combination, the shift to registration clerks and the use of EAB Navigate allowed CCA to effectively demonstrate its position that “efficiency is not the enemy of advising” to its advisors and faculty concerned about job loss due to the implementation of these changes. CCA administrators pointed out that their advising redesign efforts embraced efficiency precisely because advisors were overwhelmed mainly by serving as the catch-all for student needs well beyond academic guidance. Rather than eliminating jobs, innovations like EAB Navigate and registration clerks allowed advisors to reclaim their core purpose: relationship-centered, student-development work. This model also acknowledges both student and staff wellbeing. By offloading logistical tasks and restructuring job scopes, CCA supported advisors in making deeper, more effective connections with students—while also reducing burnout.

“Efficiency is not the enemy of advising.”

“ When you start talking efficiency, advisors will push back, and they will say, ‘You’re trying to take my job, and I say, no, I’m trying to free you up so you have more time to work with students directly, you know, to build those meaningful, trustful relationships’... I’m trying to get them out of transactional land and into relational land. ”

—Senior Administrator

Community College of Aurora has strategically integrated EAB Navigate as a comprehensive, campus-wide student success platform, broadening its application well beyond traditional advising functions. More than 325 faculty, staff, and instructors actively use Navigate, including all professional advisors (including TRIO advisors), department chairs and deans, institutional research and data teams, tutors, faculty and instructors, as well as staff from career services, veteran services, financial aid, registration, and marketing. This broad adoption reflects CCA’s strong commitment to shared responsibility for student success, positioning Navigate as a central hub for communication, data access, and coordinated student support across the institution.

CCA’s redesign process also highlighted the importance of incorporating student voices into advising practices. By actively gathering student feedback and involving students in developing advising services, CCA ensured that the new model was responsive to student needs and expectations. For example, CCA’s use of student feedback collected through both informal and formal mechanisms uncovered a recurring institutional issue—the tendency to overbuild course schedules based on faculty preferences instead of actual student needs. This often led to the cancellation of courses required for graduation, disrupting student progress, reducing adjunct faculty income, and eroding trust in institutional planning. In response, CCA committed to ensuring the availability of courses needed for graduation, even if they had low enrollment, to prevent delays caused by cancellations, and to create a leaner, more predictable yearly schedule that could be scaled when necessary. In this way, student voice was a key driver that shifted CCA away from reactive, faculty-driven scheduling toward thoughtful, scalable, and student-informed academic planning.

Overall, CCA’s advising redesign process was a collaborative and intentional effort to create a more equitable and effective advising system that supports students’ success throughout their educational journey.

325+
FACULTY, STAFF, AND INSTRUCTORS
ACTIVELY USE NAVIGATE

CCA
COMMITTED TO ENSURING THE
AVAILABILITY OF COURSES NEEDED
FOR GRADUATION

IMPACT OF GUIDED PATHWAYS IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation of Guided Pathways at CCA had a significant impact on their advising redesign efforts. CCA's curriculum and advising overhaul reflects the broader Guided Pathways principle of simplifying academic choices and ensuring that all course offerings are both purposeful and available. By empowering faculty to lead in redesign, reducing catalog bloat, and using data-informed tools like Ad Astra, the institution moved closer to a model where students are more likely to complete degrees without detours or delays.

One prime example of the impact of Guided Pathways implementation on CCA's advising redesign efforts and subsequently on equitable student experiences and outcomes was the removal of "Undecided" and "Associate of General Studies" from its application. CCA recognized the importance of ensuring all students are placed in programs that align with their goals and provide clear pathways to transfer opportunities and career advancement, maximizing their potential for success.

Moreover, CCA completed an audit that revealed racial bias in program placement. Analysis indicated that Latino men were disproportionately being funneled into the non-transferable Associates of General Studies, which consequently negatively impacted their economic and social mobility. By analyzing student placement data and identifying racial bias, the institution corrected these practices that disproportionately placed Latino men in programs with limited transfer and labor market value, and also showcased the effects of its data-informed, justice-oriented shift in advising practices. This shift in strategy also ensured that students without a defined major still made academic progress by embedding exploration within a transfer-friendly framework. This design maximized credit efficiency, accelerated degree completion, and exploration within a structured framework that honored students' decision-making process.

Additionally, since adopting EAB Navigate, CCA has begun tracking return on investment (ROI) through both financial and student success outcomes. Findings from Fall 2025 show notable gains with respect to:

- **Increased credit enrollment and revenue:** Students registering through Navigate enrolled in 2.4 more credit hours on average, generating approximately \$1.4 million in additional tuition revenue (exclusive of state FTE funding).
- **Reduced financial risk:** The amount sent to collections decreased from \$2 million in 2023–24 to \$650,000 in 2024–25.
- **Improved retention:** Full-time student retention increased from 56.9% (2020) to 63% (2024), while part-time retention rose from 46.7% to 53% over the same period.
- **Stronger completion metrics:** Median credits to degree dropped from 66 to 63; the average number of credentials awarded annually increased by one percentage point.
- **Enhanced financial aid:** Communication plans in Navigate allowed financial aid staff to increase average state/federal grants by \$300 per student and Pell awards by \$1,500 annually for Pell-eligible students.
- **Academic success gains:** Average GPA increased from 2.87 to 3.03 between Fall 2024 and Fall 2025. The number of course repeats declined from 1,175 to 820, and instances of major switching fell by nearly 800 students.

These data points suggest that CCA's intentional, campus-wide investment in EAB Navigate is producing measurable benefits across financial, operational, and student outcome metrics. Moreover, the institution has seen a 17-point increase in its Navigate Maturity Curve over the past two years, demonstrating rapid progress in the adoption and alignment of practices.

Ultimately, by focusing on proactive and holistic advising, the college improved student onboarding experiences, retention rates, and overall student success. The integration of technology enabled better tracking of student progress and timely interventions, resulting in more equitable outcomes for all student groups. CCA's commitment to student success and continuous improvement, combined with its strategic redesign of advising, has positioned the college as a leader in implementing effective Guided Pathways, ensuring that every student receives the necessary support to succeed.



PRINCE GEORGE'S COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Prince George's Community College (PGCC) is a large suburban, Associate Degree-Granting institution founded in 1958 and located in the city of Largo, Maryland. In fiscal year 2024, PGCC enrolled 26,939 students (Open Doors, 2024). PGCC is designated as a minority-serving institution (MSI), with 58.7% of enrolled students identifying as Black or African American, 19.2% as Hispanic, 3.4% as Asian, and 3.7% as White (U.S. Department of Education, 2024). More specifically, because at least 40% of PGCC's student body is Black or African American, the college is considered an enrollment-based predominantly Black institution (PBI) (Nguyen et al., 2022).

ADVISING REDESIGN PROCESS

Advising at Prince George's Community College involves a comprehensive student-centered approach whereby students' goals, needs, programmatic timelines, and requirements are aligned with the college's resources to ensure that students are following the correct path towards completing their program of study in a timely manner. By using an appreciative advising approach that emphasizes "student's assets and strengths" and recognizes that students "may define and achieve their success through their unique pathways rather than follow a pre-set developmental pattern that is generalizable for all students" (He & Hutson, 2016), academic advisors (dubbed "pathway advisors") empower students to consider their academic and career trajectories during their initial intake.

Through these efforts, PGCC is attempting to institutionalize an appreciative model of student development across the college, as Crystal Smith (Dean of Student Success and Achievement) used the title "appreciative staff member" on more than one occasion to refer to colleagues outside of the advising sphere.


PGCC has invested significantly in its advising redesign process by crafting and funding the necessary staff and student worker positions to implement a multifaceted student support ecosystem. At the professional staff level, the Retention Manager is responsible for overseeing and reporting on all projects and initiatives related to student retention. This person is also responsible for supervising pathway advisors. As part of PGCC's advising redesign initiative, "faculty partner" positions were also created to initiate and extend follow-up communications with students regarding their academic progress and/or the need for specific interventions.

The importance of faculty engagement with students throughout the semester is highlighted by PGCC's proactive use of early alert systems, which are housed within their CRM system (EAB Navigate). All PGCC faculty, staff, and administrators have access to EAB Navigate. Faculty and pathway advisors use the platform to connect with students who may be veering off track within their program, while also leveraging the technology to communicate words of encouragement and celebration when students are performing well. Due to focused efforts to encourage faculty to normalize the use of early alerts with their students, PGCC has seen an increase in usage from 10% to 33%. To help facilitate student engagement with the EAB Navigate app, PGCC created innovative student-level positions called "Navigators." These student workers are tasked not only with encouraging their peers to download and use the app but also with serving as technical support specialists who help students troubleshoot and answer app-related questions. While PGCC views EAB Navigate as a critical tool in supporting student success, they have not yet completed a return-on-investment analysis.

A critical component of PGCC advising redesign efforts is "Care Units," which ensure students receive holistic support. Each unit is tailored to students' individual needs; an ecosystem of student-selected/advisor-suggested supports that leverage the talents of pathway advisors, faculty, and staff to foster holistic cross-college collaboration. These customized supports are designed to enhance students' academic success by building upon their strengths and connecting them with resources that support their holistic development and wellbeing. During intake, students are assessed to see if they would benefit from/qualify for further connection to specific campus resources. Examples of non-academic resources available at PGCC include an on-campus food pantry, a student wellness center, and a laptop loaner program.

“ We typically equate advising to GPS; the directional tools we've put in place to make sure that students have a clear understanding of the opportunities, the requirements, the benefits, and the resources available based on designated pathways. ”

—*Senior Administrator*



Pathway advisors are either academic- or transfer-focused, depending on the students' pathway interest identified at intake. While students are not required speak to a pathway advisor unless they are on academic probation or receiving funds through an academic restricted grant program, pathway advisors are responsible for reaching out to students regularly during the semester. In concert with the efforts of pathway advisors, advisors within student support offices such as [TRiO](#), [Veterans Services](#), and [Disability Support Services](#) assist eligible students in navigating college and program-specific resources. Since all students receive a pathway advisor upon enrollment, some students also receive additional support within their Care Unit through these specialized offices.

PGCC requires all staff members with advising responsibilities to participate in online training twice a month. Training topics vary each month and include relevant content in areas such as curriculum development, transfer, EAB Navigate, special populations, and career services. To ensure that the training is relevant to PGCC staff needs, participants complete an assessment at the end of each training session to offer suggestions for improvement in future trainings. In addition to the monthly all-staff training, advisors complete an annual Advisor Knowledge Inventory. If an advisor does not score at least an 80% on this written assessment, they will receive additional skill-building supports via job shadowing and/or further training. In an effort to assess accurate on-the-ground practice scenarios and the relevant skill sets required to be effective in the position, advisors are asked to submit example questions for inclusion on the Inventory that they believe reflect their day-to-day duties and the challenges they face.



DATA IN ADVISING

PGCC takes a data-driven approach to advising by capturing multiple data points on student progress within their programs of study. To maximize student success, PGCC advisors have developed the requisite knowledge and infrastructure to capture, analyze/interpret, and take an action-oriented approach to meet the needs of their students. For example, by monitoring academic progress patterns, advisors can proactively connect with students to provide targeted support and resources that help them achieve their academic goals. The EAB Navigate system is robust enough to track a range of criteria, allowing advisors to pair it with their field expertise and determine which metrics they are interested in focusing on for their retention efforts. This “retention reporting” is part of advisors’ yearly performance evaluation. Currently, PGCC is collaborating with the software development company *Moonshot* to soon begin implementing their software, which tracks which students have academic plans and their status of following those plans.

Student voice is critical in informing the creation and adjustment of student-centered services on PGCC’s campus. After students meet with their advisors, they complete an *Advisor Feedback Survey*, which is then used to inform any necessary changes. Open- and closed-ended questions, such as “In today’s appointment, I learned about...” and “After meeting with the Advisor, I feel more prepared to meet my goals,” are asked to better understand students’ perspectives on the efficacy of their advising experiences. Moreover, members of the PGCC leadership attend student governance meetings to stay informed about issues important to PGCC students, which can inform changes in campus policies, processes, and/or programs.

IMPACT ON GUIDED PATHWAYS IMPLEMENTATION

PGCC’s implementation of a Guided Pathways approach to advising has significantly impacted not only the ways/means that students receive pertinent information but has also shifted the overall advising structure and culture to one that is responsive, data-driven, and knowledge-centered. Crystal Smith, Dean of Student Success and Advisement spoke of her background efforts to prepare for a comprehensive advising redesign at PGCC. One such effort was to visit and learn from other institutions engaging in similar advising redesign work. In doing so, she gained a better understanding of the overlapping structural components necessary for success, as well as potential barriers. Guided Pathways stresses collaboration across college departments, offices, and positions. PGCC’s implementation of Guided Pathways facilitated interdependence among all student-facing stakeholders at the college, including senior leadership, whose support helped create amenable conditions for college-wide change. Lastly, PGCC hosts career and transfer fairs, as well as creates commercials to spread the word about opportunities for community members to pursue their areas of career and academic interest.

SINCLAIR

SINCLAIR COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Sinclair Community College is a predominantly white community college in Dayton, Ohio, serving 17,431¹ students. As a PWI, 64% of the student body identifies as White, 15% as Black or African American, 5.2% as Hispanic, 5% as two or more races, 2.7% as Asian American or Pacific Islander, 2.1% as US nonresident, 1.4% as Indigenous American, and 4.6% as unknown. While Sinclair is a PWI, the college identified significant outcome gaps based on race, gender, and ethnicity, and has made significant progress in closing those gaps.

Sinclair has built a culture of deep commitment to student success, driven by a genuine commitment to data-driven decision-making. Sinclair has advanced several student success strategies, including Guided Pathways implementation starting in 2015, as well as several iterations of advising redesign. The commitment to data and equitable outcomes intensified with the annual all-college summit in 2016, which provided a transparent examination of student outcomes disaggregated by age, race, ethnicity, and gender. Engaging the entire campus in the conversation enhanced transparency and established common expectations for all Sinclair employees. These equity summits have catalyzed the start of several successful initiatives focused on closing equity gaps for groups of learners.

Before undergoing redesign, advising at Sinclair had historically been provided in each division by advisors of the same rank as faculty and reporting to the divisional deans. While this approach allowed for deep knowledge of the division, there were differences across divisions in advising outcomes. The next iteration of advising redesign centralizing advising into a single center, with all advisors being generalists. The college then created a first-year advising center in an effort to deepen relationships with learners and foster a sense of belonging. However, learners were reassigned in their second year to advisors within each division. With each iteration of advising described above, Sinclair staff and administrators relied on data analyses to identify challenges and gaps in student services and looked to address those issues in the redesign. Learning from multiple advising redesign initiatives has culminated in the current model of centralized, specialized advising. Moreover, iterations of advising redesigned and supported effective Guided Pathways implementation.

“ Student Success has been at the heart of all the advising redesigns. ”

—Senior Administrator

ADVISING REDESIGN PROCESS

Sinclair has had several iterations of advising redesign, all ensuring that each credential-seeking student develops a term-by-term My Academic Plan (MAP) to meet their academic goals. At present, Sinclair employs a centralized specialized model of advising; students are assigned academic advisors for the duration of their credential by academic division or college on the main campus (Business, Health Services, Liberal Arts, and STEM). While there is divisional advising, it is still centralized, ensuring both specialized knowledge of disciplines and professionalization of advising. Each division has a manager who oversees a caseload and ensures advisors have relevant training materials. Sinclair employs a total of 45 advisors who engage in 35,000 student appointments annually.

Sinclair College leverages technology to support advising functions. In the early 2010s, advisors could track student completion of MAPs on their homegrown Student Success Plan (SSP) software². This open-source software, developed by the college, tracked student progress, MAPs, and holistic case management. While SSP created a strong foundation, maintaining the system proved challenging for the college; the person who created it left the college. Over time, Sinclair found it increasingly difficult to update the software to meet current needs. As a result of these challenges, Sinclair researched various student success software vendors and is currently in the process of migrating to EAB's Navigate 360. All Sinclair staff and faculty have access to EAB Navigate in some capacity, notably success modules, communication tools, and dashboards. All 45 professional advisors use Navigate to track their student interactions, but continue to utilize portions of SSP for academic planning during the transition. It is anticipated that all functions will be on Navigate for students in the 2026 catalog year. Due to the ongoing transition, Sinclair has not conducted a return on investment analysis of its investment in EAB Navigate. Regardless of the platform used, Sinclair has sought to maximize case management by effectively utilizing data and technology.

SINCLAIR

ADOPTED A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO ENHANCING LEARNER OUTCOMES, PARTICULARLY FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES

Sinclair College has used technology and data to interrogate and address gaps. All student outcome and advising data is disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, age, enrollment intensity, and type of program. In addition to being available for review throughout the college, these data are heavily used by the Academic Advising Committee. This committee meets monthly and includes representatives from each division and other college staff who analyze trends and impacts reflected in standardized reports. They are responsible for identifying areas for improvement and sharing findings during divisional advising meetings. For example, the committee is currently focused on ensuring consistent access to mental health support for all students.

In 2016, data revealed significant differences in completion rates for first-time, full-time African American males (13% compared to 24% overall), highlighting the need for stronger support systems that build upon students' strengths and aspirations. As a result, the college formed a committee to develop strategies to address this challenge and improve outcomes. Sinclair adopted a comprehensive approach to strengthening student achievement, particularly for African American males.

The college provided staff and faculty with transparent information about attainment and completion trends, redesigned advising into a caseload model, transitioned developmental education to a corequisite format, and used data to confirm when students had earned credentials rather than requiring a petition. These efforts led to college-wide improvements in degree and credential attainment.

Sinclair also sought to create a stronger sense of connection and engagement among African American male students through the African American Male Initiative (AAMI). AAMI offers advising support, financial aid assistance, fellowships, service-learning opportunities, and other targeted activities. In FY 2022, the 150% time completion rate for African American males was 36.9%, compared to the overall college rate of 38.3%.

Administrators at Sinclair emphasize that no single initiative accounts for the improvement in completion rates; rather, the combination of coordinated efforts contributed to better student outcomes. Due to recent state and federal policy changes, Sinclair is currently reviewing how programs like AAMI will continue to support student engagement and success.

IMPACT OF GUIDED PATHWAYS IMPLEMENTATION

Sinclair has explicitly prioritized closing gaps for the entire college. While Sinclair is a PWI, the college identified significant outcome gaps based on race, gender, and ethnicity, and has made significant progress in closing those gaps. This commitment is elevated through the expression of the college's mission, core values, and key strategy drivers. The commitment to closing gaps was a significant driver in Sinclair College's decision to implement Guided Pathways.

Advising redesign and Guided Pathways implementation at Sinclair College have been inextricably intertwined. Some of the iterations of advising redesign predate Guided Pathways implementation, but the work towards the current model aligns with the start of Guided Pathways in 2016. Sinclair's implementation of Guided Pathways has included construction of term-by-term and course-by-course recommended academic plans for each credential offered at the college. These plans with course sequencing are available for students attending both full- and part-time and include recommended electives and term-by-term program notes to identify relevant milestones. Recommended electives reduce the guesswork for students and assist with planning, but creating recommended electives was initially met with anxiety from faculty members. Some faculty members believed that recommending electives would lead to them not being able to teach their favorite class. While this proved true in some cases, it often resulted in more distributed course-taking across departments. These program guides were developed through collaborative work with academic departments and advisors and are reviewed annually to ensure they are timely and up to date. Program guides remove guesswork for students in developing their MAP.

Sinclair has explicitly prioritized closing gaps for the entire college.

Sinclair does not permit students to declare an undecided major. Students who are less certain about their choice are encouraged to select a major in the division they perceive as the most interesting. The centralized, specialized advising within that division and program guides provide students with information to move forward toward an academic goal, but planning follows a meta-major approach. Within meta-majors, students meet broader requirements for a variety of majors in their division while taking coursework to help narrow and affirm their major choice. If they elect to choose a different major, meta-major coursework still applies to a broad array of majors in the chosen division.

Student completion outcomes have improved at Sinclair College through the implementation of Guided Pathways. The use of program plans, MAPs, and centralized specialized advisors that remain consistent throughout the student's journey enables learners to be more effectively guided towards successfully meeting their academic goals. Sinclair also developed a data-informed "recipe for success" that embeds student learning goals that have been shown to improve student retention and completion, such as earning 9 credit hours of coursework in their major within their first 30 credits. For the 2013 cohort (prior to Guided Pathways implementation), IPEDS reported completion rates for first-time, full-time degree-seeking students within 150% of the program completion time as 18% overall. For the fall 2021 cohort, the IPEDS graduation rates for first-time, full-time degree-seeking students within 150% of program time had more than doubled from the 2013 cohort to 39.9% overall.

In addition to improving outcomes for African American males, Sinclair has also worked to improve outcomes for students with Appalachian heritage, the LGBTQ+ community, returning citizens, and members of military families.

“ There was a data summit for everyone on campus. Instead of going to your office that day, we all attended a Data Summit, where we got to see the numbers for our college firsthand. Some of the outcomes were abysmal, particularly for African American males. From then on, it was, “Okay. Now, what are we going to do about it? ”

–Senior Administrator

CLAFLIN UNIVERSITY

Clafin University (CU), affiliated with the United Methodist Church, is the oldest Historically Black College and University (HBCU) in South Carolina. Guided by its motto, *“The World Needs Visionaries,”* Clafin is committed to developing forward-thinking leaders prepared to drive social and systemic change.

In 2020, Clafin was selected by the U.S. Department of Education as a Second Chance Pell Experimental Site, enabling the university to expand access to higher education for incarcerated individuals. The grant provides need-based Federal Pell Grants to individuals incarcerated in federal and state prisons. In 2021, in partnership with the South Carolina Department of Corrections (SCDC) and Clafin’s Center for Social Justice, the university launched the Pathways from Prison Program under the Second Chance Pell Grant initiative. Administered through the Center for Professional and Continuing Studies, the program offers two academic bachelor’s degree programs: Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and Bachelor of Science in Organizational Management. [1]

Clafin’s approach to developing an effective prison education pathway is rooted in integrating its broader student success strategies. [2] By aligning academic advising, curriculum, and student support services, the university ensures equitable access to and a high-quality educational experience for incarcerated scholars that parallels traditional students. A key focus of the initiative is to facilitate smooth transitions post-incarceration, supporting students’ continued progress toward degree completion and successful reintegration into society.

ADVISING REDESIGN PROCESS

As part of its institution-wide commitment to student success, Claflin undertook a comprehensive redesign of its advising program in 2022, furthering its broader efforts to support student success. The university transitioned from a traditional faculty advising model to a **professional success coaching framework** through the **STARS program (Students Tracked, Advised, Retained to Succeed)**. The STARS model provides students with consistent, year-round support from 12-month, contracted success coaches, many of whom also serve as first-year seminar instructors, building strong advising relationships early. These coaches support students throughout their academic journey and collaborate closely with departmental faculty liaisons who ensure curricular alignment and communication. Although some departments initially resisted the change, broad stakeholder engagement, input from student focus groups, and clear evidence of advising gaps ultimately led to strong institutional buy-in and the establishment of a more coordinated, student-centered advising system.

STRUCTURAL INNOVATIONS

Institutional leaders designed the redesigned implementation process to be cross-functional and inclusive, beginning at the cabinet level and extending through departments by engaging respected faculty and staff across the campus. The redesign addressed a key institutional challenge—limited summer advising access under the faculty model—by introducing year-round advising support and streamlining degree planning and course registration processes. Despite some initial resistance, the structured process, stakeholder engagement, and input from student focus groups resulted in strong institutional buy-in. The transition has since become a cornerstone of Claflin's student success infrastructure, benefiting all students, including those in the Pathways from Prison Program.

APPROACH TO STUDENT SUCCESS

Clafin defines its guided pathways model through the “15 to Finish” initiative and a robust success coaching framework designed to keep students on track for timely graduation. [3] Student success is central to Clafin’s student success philosophy: incarcerated students receive the same support and services—including ADA accommodations, academic advising, and instructional quality—as their traditional peers, with necessary adjustments for institutional constraints. Faculty and administrators are committed to meeting students where they are, both academically and contextually. This includes recitation courses to be added to traditional lecture courses, strengthening foundational skills and building upon students’ existing knowledge base.

DATA-DRIVEN DECISION MAKING

Clafin University utilizes a range of data elements to inform its advising and student success strategies. These include GPA, course rigor, standardized test scores, and academic history, particularly for students who have been incarcerated and are returning to academic study after a prolonged absence. Student feedback also plays a vital role in shaping institutional decisions. For example, based on student input, Clafin reinstated developmental math courses to better prepare students for college-level algebra. Many students indicated that *Quantitative Reasoning* was more manageable than *College Algebra*, especially considering the varying levels of prior math exposure they received in high school or college as well as the length of time since they last engaged with core math subjects.

The university developed and will implement a new comprehensive Business Intelligence (BI) dashboard using Microsoft Power BI to support data-informed advising. This platform consolidates student information—including course schedules, degree audits, transfer evaluations, and advising notes—into a single, accessible interface. Advisors, faculty, and administrative staff use the dashboard to collaborate across departments, ensure continuity of care, and respond proactively to student needs. Integrating real-time data and cross-functional communication tools enhances institutional responsiveness and supports continuous improvement.

Student feedback also plays a vital role in shaping institutional decisions.

COMMUNICATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Student voice plays a central role in Clafin's continuous improvement efforts. Student focus groups directly shaped the transition from faculty advising to success coaching, which highlighted critical gaps in summer advising access and inconsistencies in support. In the Pathways from Prison Program, students regularly share feedback about their experiences and needs, which informs leadership decisions ranging from instructional adjustments to support services. Senior administrators, including the Vice President for Enrollment Management, regularly visit correctional facilities to maintain strong communication channels and student engagement.

The advising redesign process emphasized transparency, collaboration, and responsiveness, incorporating insights from faculty, staff, and students at every stage of the process. The Assistant Vice President for Student Success now leads ongoing refinement, strengthening the infrastructure to meet the evolving needs of Clafin's diverse student population. The university remains committed to maintaining parity, and dignity, in its advising services, ensuring that all students receive the guidance and support necessary to succeed, regardless of their circumstances.



JOHNSON C. SMITH UNIVERSITY

Johnson C. Smith University (JCSU), a Historically Black College and University (HBCU), is affiliated with the Presbyterian Church (USA) and recognized as the top-ranked private HBCU in North Carolina. Guided by the university's enduring motto, *Sit Lux* ("Let There Be Light"), JCSU is committed to preparing graduates who communicate effectively, think critically, collaborate productively, and demonstrate excellence across various professional and academic pathways.

Johnson C. Smith University has established strategic partnerships with Fortune 500 companies to expand academic offerings, enrich experiential learning opportunities, and create strong career pathways in entrepreneurship, finance, research, and technology. These initiatives have earned JCSU national recognition, including being named the best small college in North Carolina for job placement outcomes.

Through its **Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning** and the Adult Degree and Online Program, JCSU demonstrates a longstanding commitment to adult learners by providing flexible degree pathways, personalized support services, and a culture of sustained engagement. The university's **Metropolitan College of Professional Studies** offers accelerated degree programs specifically designed to meet the needs of working adults. These programs are delivered conveniently and include fully online options in Business Administration (with concentrations in Accounting and Management), Criminology, Interdisciplinary Studies, and Sport Management. [1]

JCSU's comprehensive and intentional approach to career pathway development is grounded in a commitment to student success, employer engagement, and equitable workforce readiness.

ADVISING REDESIGN PROCESS

In 2023, Johnson C. Smith University (JCSU) enhanced its advising model by **institutionalizing a success coach framework** originally pioneered in its Adult Degree Program. Under this model, every student is assigned a dedicated success coach upon enrollment to provide continuous guidance throughout their academic journey. As of fall 2024, approximately 10 success coaches serve 1,042 traditional students, while one coach supports 260 adult learners, who comprise 20% of the total student body of 1,302 students. [2]

The model emphasizes holistic, wraparound support beyond academics to address life circumstances and barriers to success. For traditional students, coaching is primarily academic, while for adult learners, the focus is often on career planning, work-life balance, and long-term goals. **Coaches collaborate with faculty academic advisors and may be assigned based on academic major or student affinity groups.** This redesign reflects the university's goal to provide consistent and equitable support for all students.

STRUCTURAL INNOVATIONS

Implementing the success coach model represents **a strategic and resource-intensive innovation** at JCSU. Despite limited funding, institutional leadership invested substantially in hiring, training, and sustaining a network of dedicated coaches, signaling a clear priority on student retention and degree completion. The advising redesign also introduced Navigate, an Ellucian-powered customer relationship management (CRM) platform, as the university's data and case management system.

Through Navigate, JCSU is building the capacity to track student interactions, academic progress, and co-curricular needs in real-time. While still in its early stages, the platform enables advisors and faculty to access shared notes, identify gaps, and coordinate interventions across departments. This innovation marks a critical step toward a fully integrated, data-informed student support infrastructure.

APPROACH TO STUDENT SUCCESS

JCSU defines guided pathways as intentional, structured processes that help students progress efficiently toward degree completion. **This approach includes personalized advising, peer mentorship, and leadership development for adult learners.** The Adult Degree Program is particularly notable for its strong peer support culture, where non-traditional students often mentor traditional students, fostering a vibrant and collaborative learning environment.

The university takes a student-centered approach to academic planning by acknowledging the unique life experiences of adult learners and tailoring support accordingly. Through continuous feedback loops and student involvement in program design, JCSU adapts its offerings to reflect evolving needs and expectations, reinforcing a culture of persistence and inclusion.

DATA-DRIVEN DECISION MAKING

JCSU leverages student data to inform advising and programmatic decisions, with EAB Navigate serving as the central data platform. Through progress reports administered two to three times per semester, faculty and coaches assess attendance, assignment submission, academic performance, and classroom engagement. These indicators identify at-risk students, evaluate cohort-specific trends, and inform targeted support strategies to address their needs.

EAB Navigate also enables the university to analyze advising and academic outcomes by dormitory, major, cohort, and student activity groups. While the platform is still being scaled, JCSU is developing the capacity to examine student transitions between majors, measure persistence rates, and support early intervention practices. In parallel, student feedback and qualitative data continue to shape program design, especially within the adult learner community.



COMMUNICATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Student voice is central in shaping student success initiatives at JCSU, especially within the Adult Degree Program, where non-traditional learners frequently advocate for improvements and participate in decision-making. Their engagement has fostered open dialogue between students and administrators, resulting in a responsive and inclusive support culture.

While the adult learner model demonstrates a strong foundation in two-way communication, qualitative feedback mechanisms are less formalized on the traditional side. Most decisions rely on academic performance trends and retention data as indirect indicators of student sentiment. JCSU recognizes this gap and is working toward scaling the more participatory feedback structures used in the Adult Degree Program to the broader student population.

Student voice is central in shaping student success initiatives at JCSU.



WINSTON SALEM STATE UNIVERSITY

Winston-Salem State University (WSSU), located in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, is a distinguished Historically Black College and University (HBCU). As a member of the University of North Carolina System, WSSU is guided by its enduring motto, *“Enter to Learn, Depart to Serve,”* reflecting a deep commitment to academic excellence, community engagement, and student success. The university offers a high-quality liberal education, supported by robust systems tailored to meet the diverse needs of its student body.

WSSU consistently ranks among the top HBCUs in North Carolina for graduation rates and overall value, and it is nationally recognized as a leader in promoting social mobility among graduates. The university is actively engaged in workforce development, offering guided pathways for both traditional and non-traditional (adult) learners in high-demand fields such as healthcare, nursing, mathematics, motorsports management, and technology.

WSSU plans to launch an online interdisciplinary studies (IDS) degree program designed for students seeking to complete a bachelor’s degree in healthcare or educational studies to further expand opportunities for adult learners. This initiative will support career readiness and access to graduate programs. In 2025, the university established the Transfer and Adult Student Services Unit—an integrated support hub that offers enrollment assistance, onboarding, academic advising, and wraparound services to ensure the success of transfer and adult learners from entry through graduation.

ADVISING REDESIGN PROCESS

WSSU has embarked on a comprehensive **redesign of its advising program in collaboration with the National Institute for Student Success (NISS)**. At the core of this change is the university's implementation of **Appreciative Advising**, which creates individualized academic journeys by involving students in meaningful conversations about their expectations and ambitions. This student-centered framework recognizes and addresses the varied needs and backgrounds of WSSU's student body.

Before its redesign efforts, WSSU's advising structure was primarily centered in University College. This college supported students during their first 40 credit hours, after which they transitioned to departmental advising.

The university is considering two distinct models for their advising structure.

1. **A professional advising model** where dedicated advisors support students continuously from their freshman year through graduation.
2. **Embedded academic success counselors** within specific departments, providing specialized support for students in particular majors. Both models aim to create more consistent advising experiences across the institution.

Across the university, **collaborative engagement** has been an enormous asset to this redesign effort. The faculty governing bodies, advisors, deans, and department chairs collaborate to develop the new advising structure. Although each academic department currently has defined pathways for its majors, the **faculty remains central** in shaping how Guided Pathways will be included in the redesign and in creating the curriculum. The **Office for Student Success** assists in coordinating various student support initiatives. The **Academic Standards and Curriculum Committee**, which is essential in monitoring curriculum changes, will have the final say over any significant changes to the curriculum.

Focus groups, surveys, and innovative approaches, such as social media analytics, are some ways WSSU demonstrates its commitment to integrating **student perspectives**. Creating a **communication specialist** position demonstrates the university's commitment to understanding how students interact with available resources and services.

STRUCTURAL INNOVATIONS

Through several structural improvements, WSSU has strengthened its advising structure. The institution has clearly defined tasks within its advising system. Students receive guidance from academic success counselors (ASCs) based on meta-majors and group-related courses. This approach maximizes applicable coursework while facilitating seamless transitions for students who switch majors.

Complementing the ASCs, **Resilience Coaches** provide specialized support for specific student populations. These coaches develop targeted interventions and connect students with wraparound services to enhance retention. These roles create a comprehensive support network that addresses academic progression and personal resilience.

The university has further enhanced its advising structure with several innovative systems.

- **Mandatory advising** for all students is enforced through a **PIN system** that ensures students meet with advisors before registration.
- The **RAM Ready Report** provides advisors with comprehensive student data, enabling them to engage in proactive outreach.
- **Early alert systems** using **EAB Navigate and Academic Planner** help identify students.

INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES PROGRAM

The **interdisciplinary studies program** is a showcase example of WSSU's redesign efforts. Developed in response to **labor market demands**, this program recognizes the value of prior knowledge and experiences. By honoring **transfer credits and prior learning**, the university creates accessible pathways for students who have completed previous coursework at other institutions.

In designing this program, WSSU employed a phased approach—starting with a concentration before expanding into a complete program. This required multiple layers of approval and resource allocation considerations, including faculty workload, course availability, and exceptions to the curriculum. [1]



APPROACH TO STUDENT SUCCESS

WSSU's commitment to access is evident in its differentiated support approaches, tailored to students' unique backgrounds. The university has carefully streamlined its **schedule, modalities, and course offerings** to meet the varied needs and lifestyles of its students. This flexibility benefits students who often balance academic pursuits with work and family obligations. Faculty and staff are encouraged to be aware of and responsive to students' external challenges, directing them to wraparound services such as student affairs, counseling, and academic success programs when necessary.

DATA-DRIVEN DECISION MAKING

The university leverages several technological tools to inform its student success efforts. **EAB Navigate, Academic Planner, and Slate** provide valuable data on student engagement, enrollment patterns, and potential barriers. This **data-driven approach** allows WSSU to make informed decisions about resource allocation and intervention strategies.

COMMUNICATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

WSSU has strengthened internal communication through innovative approaches, such as "**UC Matters**," a weekly digital newsletter that informs University College staff about key initiatives. Plans are in place to create an external newsletter that highlights student achievements and institutional progress for the broader campus community, amplifying positive impacts and fostering a sense of institutional pride.

As WSSU continues to evolve its advising framework, the university maintains its focus on the ultimate goal: ensuring every student who begins their academic journey successfully completes their degree. Winston-Salem State University demonstrates a deep commitment to creating pathways to success for all students by continually refining its advising structure, fostering collaborative engagement, and providing specialized support systems.

Conclusion

The case studies and cross-case analysis presented in this report illuminate how Guided Pathways and advising redesign, when approached strategically and equitably, can fundamentally transform the student experience. Whether through the proactive coaching model at Claflin University, the Care Units at Prince George's Community College, the student-centered advising at Sinclair College, or the student-informed scheduling at the Community College of Aurora, each institution demonstrates a commitment to removing barriers and promoting student success.

Collectively, these institutions show that redesigning advising is not merely a structural change but a cultural shift. By centering advising within the Guided Pathways framework, colleges and universities are building inclusive, transparent, and data-informed ecosystems of support. These reforms—when implemented with an equity lens—improve student engagement, retention, and completion, especially for students historically underserved by higher education.

As the landscape of postsecondary education continues to evolve, institutions must remain responsive to the needs of their diverse student populations. The lessons from these institutions provide a roadmap for implementing high-impact, student-centered advising models that ensure every student, regardless of their background or circumstances, has a clear and supported path to success.

Collectively, these institutions show that redesigning advising is not merely a structural change but a cultural shift.

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Endnotes

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Authors

Center for Innovation in Postsecondary Education (CIPE), College of Education & Professional Studies, at the University of South Alabama
Website: southalabama.edu/cipe

Dr. Kathy Thompson is the Founding Director of the Center for Innovation in Postsecondary Education and a faculty member in the College of Education and Professional Studies at the University of South Alabama in Mobile, Alabama. Before her current role, she served as Dean of Workforce Development and Technical Education at Bishop State Community College.

Email: kathythompson@southalabama.edu

Dr. Lisa Dunning, founder of Kaizen Education Group, focuses on enhancing student success in higher education. With nearly 30 years of experience, she is a consultant for the University of South Alabama's Center for Innovation in Post-Secondary Education. Previously, she worked for over 22 years at Delaware State University, where she served as Associate Vice President for Student Success.

Email: lisa@kaizeneducationgroup.com

Community College Research Praxis and Leadership (CCRPL), School of Education, at the University of Pittsburgh

Dr. Raina Dyer-Barr is the Director for Community College Research and Engagement in the School of Education at the University of Pittsburgh. Prior to joining the University of Pittsburgh, she served as the Assistant Director for Consulting and Public Engagement in the Office of Community College Research and Leadership (OCCRL) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Email: rdyerbarr@pitt.edu

Brett Visger is Senior Director of Pathways Strategy and Research in the School of Education at the University of Pittsburgh. In this role, he focuses on advancing equitable student success. His background includes work on higher education improvement in consulting, state higher education agencies, and philanthropy.

Email: brett.visger@pitt.edu

Jason A. Keist is an Adult Learning and Workforce Education Research Manager in the School of Education at the University of Pittsburgh. His background in Social Work and Education has led him to professional roles in areas of youth development, adult education, and community college teaching.

Email: JAK544@pitt.edu

Case Study Participating Institutions

INSTITUTIONS: TWO AND FOUR-YEAR	NAME	EMAIL ADDRESS
Community College of Aurora, Aurora, Colorado Website: ccauration.edu	Clair Collins, Vice President of Enrollment Management Bobby Pace, Vice President of Academic Success	clair.collins@ccauration.edu bobby.pace@ccauration.edu
Prince George's Community College, Largo, Maryland Website: pgcc.edu	Crystal Smith, Dean of Student Success and Advisement	smithcm@pgcc.edu
Sinclair Community College, Dayton, Ohio Website: sinclair.edu	Karla Knepper, Director of Academic Advising	karla.knepper@sinclair.edu
Clafin University, Orangeburg, South Carolina Website: clafin.edu	Reynoldo Brown, Vice President for Enrollment Management Deborah Cooper-Davis, Academic Career Coordinator Dr. Alexia Bailey-Webb, Assistant Vice President of Academic Coaching & Student Success	reybrown@clafin.edu dcooperdavis@clafin.edu abaileywebb@clafin.edu
Johnson C. Smith University, Charlotte, North Carolina Website: jcsu.edu	Dr. John Bannister, Director of the Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning Dr. Patrick Martin, Provost, Chief Academic Officer, and Chief Research Officer	jbannister@jcsu.edu pmartin@jcsu.edu
Winston-Salem State University, Winston-Salem, North Carolina Website: wssu.edu	Dr. LaVie Leasure, Acting Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education, Dean for University College, and Associate Professor of English	leasurela@wssu.edu

PARTICIPATING INSTITUTIONS

Community College of Aurora
Prince George's Community College
Sinclair Community College
Clafin University
Johnson C. Smith University
Winston-Salem State University

The Advising Success Network is a dynamic network of national organizations partnering to engage institutions in holistic advising redesign to advance success for all students, including Black, Latinx/a/o, Indigenous, Asian, and Pacific Islander students and poverty-affected students. The network develops services and resources to guide institutions in implementing evidence-based advising practices. Since its formation in 2018, ASN has supported over 267 institutions in 30 states and created more than 50 open-source resources for practitioners and students. ASN is coordinated by NASPA—Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, and includes partners Achieving the Dream, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, EDUCAUSE, NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising, the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, the Center for Innovation in Postsecondary Education, and Young Invincibles.



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