



Guided Pathways Liaisons Memo

December 2018

Wait!

What are you doing to my department?

When were you going to tell me?

Communication, which is always the bedrock of effective governance, becomes even more important during times of transformation, especially a transformation as fundamental and comprehensive as guided pathways.

For many colleges, the guided pathways effort requires careful attention to communication rules and tools because we are no longer primarily talking among ourselves in our own departments or divisions. We can't rely on hallway conversations or personal contacts. The integration of the campus (and the hoped-for destruction of siloes) means that we must communicate in many more directions: What student services decides can no longer be seen as divorced from what an instructional department does; what the English department implements for AB 705 compliance affects virtually every other department and service on campus.

Each decision affects the entire network of our college communities so we must integrate our communications with the goal that everyone has the opportunity to consult and advise with the result that decisions are made from a position of wisdom. We do well to remember that collaborative dialogue creates mutual understanding.

Since guided pathways is primarily, by law, a faculty-driven effort under the 10+1 guidelines, the establishment and practice of a solid communication plan should be a priority of faculty leaders working with administrators and staff. Respect for the collegial consultation and participatory governance processes will help the college avoid damaging rumors, surprises, and lost support.

Most colleges have a governance handbook or participatory governance plan which establishes the communication pathways through the network of committees back to their governing bodies, the college council and the academic

senate. This formal reporting structure is a solid beginning for a communication plan, and the reports through the “chain of command” should be available in a public space, perhaps a web page or document repository.

The structural communication plan might be a mix of web pages, notifications via e-mail or text, central document storage, joint communications by the academic senate president and the college president, committee notes and minutes, an annual report, etc. The mechanical aspects of the plan are essential and will vary by college resources and preferences.

But so much of our work is done outside of the formal structure that the governance plan is only a start. The guided pathways effort is complex and will involve nearly every person on campus. Those hallway conversations and departmental discussions are not divorced from what happens in the president’s cabinet meeting. They need to be captured and published.

Collaborative dialogue creates mutual understanding

The title of this article is an overheard quote: “Wait! —What are you doing to my department? When were you going to tell me?”

A major change to a department’s planning was announced, and neither the chair of that department nor any of his colleagues had any idea that a change was in the works. There had been no announcement of a needed change, no consultation, no advice sought or given – just a pronouncement: “This is what we’re going to do.”

It doesn’t matter whether that was a person or a committee or a governance body who announced the change. It matters that the proper communication did not take place before the decision was made. Without inclusive and collaborative communication so a decision is based on full knowledge, information, alternatives, and finally buy-in, there is resentment, resistance, and a breakdown of trust.

Notification is not consultation, and notification does not encourage collaboration and trust.

It might be that the department change in the example above was necessary, mandated, even irrevocable because of laws. But even in that case, a collaborative discussion that allowed all points of view to be aired would have encouraged understanding and would have built trust. Most changes need not be rigid: There are a variety of ways and a multitude of ideas that need to be considered to make a wise, helpful, and creative decision.

When decisions are made in collaboration, the most important piece of the college culture is enhanced: trust. When we trust each other, there are few obstacles that cannot be overcome.

“When were you going to tell me?” is an indictment.

Sometimes, decisions don't go the way we want them to go, but if we understand why the decision was made and if we had the opportunity to weigh in with advice and counsel, we are more likely to accept and understand the decision.

These sample campus-wide commitments for all stakeholders might be a start:

1. Information should be available to every member of the campus community. Transparency, except for matters that require confidentiality, is the key to trust. This means that whatever vehicle the college uses for dissemination of information is readily available, comprehensive, and up-to-date.

2. Decisions, principles, timelines, persons responsible for specific tasks, and objectives should be clearly stated and posted.

3. New processes and decisions under consideration should be announced broadly as early as possible so collaborative discussion, including objections and alternatives, can be heard and considered before a decision is made and announced.

4. Any time a process or decision under consideration will affect a specific group or an individual, a targeted outreach should be made to those affected to ask for collaboration.

5. When in doubt, over inform: Repeat information, place information in several sources, and reach out to individuals who might miss something that pertains to them.

6. Beware of stuffing e-mail in-boxes with a thousand announcements, which will be ignored. Consider a periodic, regularly scheduled bulletin that consolidates announcements.

7. Recognize that communication is not a one-way street but a network that knits together everyone on campus. Your hallway conversation just might be a solution to a larger problem: Share, record, and discuss.

8. Trust. Trust the process. Trust the intent of others. Trust that as a system we share the common value of helping students succeed.

And a reminder, a vast number of resources have been made readily available at the following links:

[ASCCC Guided Pathways Resources](#)

[ASCCC Guided Pathways CANVAS Resources](#)

[ASCCC Guided Pathways Resource Team Request](#)

As the 2018 year comes to a close, the ASCCC leadership and our Guided Pathways Taskforce would like to thank you for your commitment to Guided Pathways efforts. Rest and relax with families and friends during the holiday season and start the new year with energy. Wishing you Happy Holidays and a 2019 filled with HEALTH, PROSPERITY and HAPPINESS!

~ASCCC Guided Pathways Task Force