



**Guided Pathways Liaison Memo**  
**Deficits Be Damned**

**November 2018**

Greeting colleagues,

We begin with data, and the data tells us sad things about our colleges and our students: We're not measuring up! Our students aren't ready! We're not doing enough! We need to change! Deficits be damned.

Here's the thing: We are doing so much good and moving so many students through our system, that we're heroes and our colleges are practically magical: Imagine any other institution that helps students, no matter their prior experiences, achieve rich and fulfilling lives and sends thousands of students into the world ready to make a difference.

On most campuses, success is everywhere: students diligently work toward success, instructors innovate for success, programs and services are created for success. On graduation day, we watch our students march onto the stage, and there are few greater feelings than that. We are proud, and our students are proud – rightfully so.

Why not turn our thinking around? We teach our students that deficit thinking restricts creativity and success, that the base of metacognition isn't an examination of how they screwed up, but what they did that worked so they can replicate and grow the successes.

So why do we think that deficit thinking will somehow stimulate us to greater creativity and success?

That's not how the human mind learns. Wallowing in the margins where failure lives is a bleak enterprise. Beating ourselves up is not only abusive and debilitating – it is counterproductive. Deficit focus increases deficit thinking. It is a spiral downward that does not serve us, our colleges, or especially our students well.

Let's change the question. Instead of "What are we doing wrong, and how will we solve it?" Let's try, "What are we doing right, and how will we extend and replicate that experience for other student populations?" That, after all, is a fundamental purpose behind guided pathways: increase success.

Why not inventory for what you are doing right? Turn the statistics around: If 80% of students are succeeding, then look more carefully at their experiences: what did we do to get 80 out of 100 students past the goal posts? And what does that tell us about how we might help the 20 who are struggling?

Individually, we can do this in our classrooms because we realize that the base of all guided pathways is what happens in the instructor-student learning experience.

What are you doing right in the classroom? I introduced stress reduction education in my classes: two minutes at the beginning of most classes of instruction about how to use stress to our advantage and how to de-stress our lives. The result? Greater success for more students. Two minutes twice a week.

What college programs and services are working? What do students say about their successes: how did they do that? How can we replicate and institutionalize their experiences?

Successful students aren't magic, and they aren't taught by wizards (Alas). But when we teach students, fully aware of what they are capable of and fully engaged with practices that work, we're as close to magic as we need to be.

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## **NOVEMBER GUIDED PATHWAYS WEBINARS!**

### **Developing (or Re-thinking) your Guided Pathways Leadership Structure**

Register [HERE](#)

November 14 | 12:30p - 1:30p

How do you get a leadership team started for Guided Pathways? What if you have a team but things are just not moving like you thought they would? Join us as we look at several different strategies for beginning and sustaining leadership in your Guided Pathways efforts.

### **Guided Pathways Open Forum: Acknowledging Successes and Showing Gratitude**

Register [HERE](#)

November 21 | 12:30p - 1:30p

This will be an interactive session as we go into Thanksgiving and prepare for finals. Please come prepared to share what has been going well at your college with regards to Guided Pathways. At the end of this session, we will have a collection of the things that have worked so far for various colleges.

### **Starting the New Year Right: Listening to Students on Opening Day and Beyond**

Register [HERE](#)

November 28 | 12:30p - 1:30p

Student voices and experiences are a powerful asset when making your case for guided pathways and are crucial data when designing your college's guided pathways framework. But what are effective ways to engage students in guided pathways conversations and design? In this session, presenters will offer ideas for working with students and collecting data to inform your guided pathways efforts.