Is Guided Pathways Misguiding Us? Let’s Explore the Latest Theoretical Postsecondary Reform

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What is Guided Pathways Exactly?

• Welcome and thank you for coming!
• Today we will explore exactly what guided pathways is and how it may affect institutions and students, positively and negatively
• What are the best parts and the worst parts?
• And is the guided pathways approach misleading us?
• In other words, what is the net effect of the guided pathways reform?
What is Guided Pathways Exactly?

• Dr. Thomas Bailey, of the Community College Research Center, author of *Redesigning America’s Community Colleges* (2015a), coined the term around 2015

• IMPORTANT: Bailey is a labor economist

• His philosophy on education revolves around the economy: jobs, jobs, jobs (his CAPSEE organization revolves around “labor market outcomes”)

• Likewise is his approach to community colleges
What is Guided Pathways Exactly?

• PREMISE: Bailey views community colleges as institutions that should be designed to produce certificates and degrees (or transfer) almost exclusively.

• His work primarily focuses on having students obtain jobs, much like technical college missions.

• Guided pathways creates a system to streamline students from high schools to two-year colleges to jobs.

• Here are some quotes from the book showing this:
What is Guided Pathways Exactly?

Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins (2015a):

“The failure of students to complete college represents a loss to the overall economy, which has prompted calls from the federal government, major foundations, and public intellectuals for a significant increase in the number of people with postsecondary degrees” (p. 1).
What is Guided Pathways Exactly?

Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins (2015a):

“...these low completion rates [about 40% at 2-year colleges in 6 years or 44% after 8 years] reflect widespread failure.... The disappointing outcomes of community colleges and indeed many four-year institutions have not gone unnoticed by policymakers, who have called for more transparency in and accountability for postsecondary performance” (p. 1).
What is Guided Pathways Exactly?

Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins (2015a):  

“Although studies indicate that attending college without earning a credential provides some benefit in the labor market, they also show that earning occupational credentials, such as certificates or associate degrees, provides further labor market benefits...” (p. 6).
What is Guided Pathways Exactly?

• So now we know why Bailey et al. proposes this reform, what is it exactly?

• First, it is a comprehensive approach: This is crucial to remember because there are interconnected parts that do not work if other parts are not implemented

• More specifically, it has approximately four parts

• Let’s look at some quotes that help us define what it is essentially before we explore the parts:
What is Guided Pathways Exactly?

CCRC Dougherty, Lahr, & Morest (2017):"This new approach has four central elements: systematically designing courses and programs to facilitate transition to employment and further education; emphasizing guided student choice of programs and careers and creating a comprehensive educational plan for every student; revamping advising structures and processes to ensure that students are making timely progress along their educational plan; and improving instruction” (p. 12).
What is Guided Pathways Exactly?

CCRC Dougherty, Lahr, & Morest (2017)\textsuperscript{10}:

“Unlike previous community college reform efforts, which tend to be characterized by a scattering of discrete reforms that encompass only a few students, the guided pathways model aims for comprehensiveness” (p. 12).

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What is Guided Pathways Exactly?

Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins (2015b):  

“The idea behind guided pathways is straightforward. College students are more likely to complete a degree in a timely fashion if they choose a program and develop an academic plan early on, have a clear road map of the courses they need to take to complete a credential, and receive guidance and support to help them stay on plan” (p. 1).
What is Guided Pathways Exactly?

• Now that we know what the goal of guided pathways is, how do Bailey et al. propose to enact this holistic reform?

• There are four essential changes and two means by which to achieve these changes

• They correspond to the six chapters in their book

• Here is an overview of them:
What is Guided Pathways Exactly?

1. Limit student program choice by creating *meta-majors*
2. Create a holistic *intake process* and increase *advising* (tracking students with support)
3. Improve *instruction*
4. Limit *remediation* (with corequisites/acceleration)
5. Get *faculty buy-in*
6. Have institutions *rethink how to spend money*
What is Guided Pathways Exactly?

• Let’s look understand what the CCRC recommends in terms of specific changes

• What is the net effect this theoretical design may have on institutions, as well as its potential problems?

• **NET EFFECT:** Most institutions are not actually making all of these changes; instead, they implement piecemeal changes (low-cost or easy) and call it guided pathways; could it cause more harm than good due to unsupported reforms?
1. Meta-Majors and Restricted Pathways

• Main reform the CCRC wishes to enact is to require students to choose a major immediately, but if not, then they should choose a meta-major
• They recommend about four meta-majors total
• What is the net effect this may have?
• Remember that this is a theoretical design and has not been tested or studied; theory based on social science
• Some random colleges are doing this, none holistically
1. Meta-Majors and Restricted Pathways

• A prime component of meta-majors and pathways is the change from algebra to statistics gateway course.

• It is related to their developmental education proposals (see 3) because they also recommend intro to statistics for a remedial math pathway.

• The Dana Center Math Pathways project is at the vanguard on this idea.

• Question: Is this beneficial? What is algebra? Is this a change mostly in pedagogy or also content?
1. Meta-Majors and Restricted Pathways

POSITIVE Effects:

• Institutions are assessing their programs and the courses required for those programs
• Aligning them better sequentially/content
• Redesigning them to make them easier to understand for students and advising
• Guiding students into the redesigned programs
• Clarity and ease are always welcome
1. Meta-Majors and Restricted Pathways

NEGATIVE Effects:

• Students may spend longer in unwanted programs
• May be signed up unwillingly for programs
• May be discouraged to go into other programs
• May not get the necessary knowledge or preparation for their career if certain courses are restricted or eliminated (if they redesign programs correctly, this should theoretically not happen); i.e., stats versus algebra; different English courses
2. Holistic Intake, Advising, and Tracking

• The second main reform the CCRC recommends is to create a streamlined intake and tracking process.
• It is a great idea that many colleges have been working on for a long time.
• They also recommend continuous advising support.
• Essentially, they recommend hiring more advisers and training those advisers to support students for several years; it is perhaps the most important feature.
2. Holistic Intake, Advising, and Tracking

POSITIVE Effects:

• Institutions are looking at their intake process
• Redesigning it to be smoother
• Redesigning it to be holistic
• May start tracking students
• May hire more staff to assist with all this
• Could use nudging to encourage registration and completion
2. Holistic Intake, Advising, and Tracking

NEGATIVE Effects:

• Institutions may hire a few more advisers and call it guided pathways
• The net effect may be very little and in name only
• Anecdotal evidence suggests institutions are redesigning their pathways to restrict choice but are not hiring more advisers, nor are tracking students
• Worse yet, multiple (single) measures for placement’s net effect is to eliminate prerequisite remediation in several states; back to “right to fail”
3. Improve Instruction

• The third reform the CCRC recommends is to improve instruction
• I’m sure no one would disagree with this goal
• However, it is much easier said than done; unfortunately, Bailey et al. stereotype some instructors, especially developmental educators
• This comes from Grubb (2013)\textsuperscript{11}, a book highly biased against remedial instructors (with no comparison groups assessing nonremedial instructors)
3. Improve Instruction

Quote from the book *Redesigning America’s Community Colleges* (2015a)¹:

“The current system of developmental education is hampered by inadequate placement information, lengthy prerequisite sequences, and, in many cases, *uninspiring instruction* [emphasis added]. As a result, most students who enter [DE] never successfully emerge from it...” (pp. 14-15).

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3. Improve Instruction

This is contradicted by CCRC research by Zeidenberg, Jenkins, & Scott (2012):

“...we found that many introductory college-level courses in other subjects also served as obstacles to completion for many students, and these latter courses posed obstacles just as great as college math and English” (p. 28).
3. Improve Instruction

POSITIVE Effects:

• Theoretically, if institutions took these recommendations seriously and helped faculty with professional development, time, and money, it would help student success, perhaps greatly

• More professional development monies would be allocated to faculty

• Faculty and administration would have frank and open discussions, thus leading to positive change
3. Improve Instruction

NEGATIVE Effects:

• I have yet to hear about one institution actually increasing the money and time they allocate to faculty for professional development and pedagogy
• If anything, this is being cut severely
• Words like “uninspiring instruction” and “ineffective” repeated continuously have had a large negative effect on morale and harm efforts at improving faculty buy-in and development
4. Accelerate or Eliminate Remediation

- The fourth reform the CCRC recommends is to accelerate or eliminate remediation or developmental education.
- Almost since Bailey et al. began analyzing community colleges, they have concluded that remediation is a barrier and is ineffective.
- The damage started with Connecticut and Florida laws, and has continued with laws banning prerequisite remedial courses in TN, GA, and elsewhere.
4. Accelerate or Eliminate Remediation

Quote from the book *Redesigning America’s Community Colleges* (2015a):

“The current system of developmental education is hampered by inadequate placement information, *lengthy prerequisite sequences* [emphasis added], and, in many cases, uninspiring instruction. As a result, most students who enter [DE] never successfully emerge from it...” (pp. 14-15).
4. Accelerate or Eliminate Remediation

• Using CCRC research as a basis, organizations such as Complete College America (CCA), Jobs for the Future (JFF), and the Education Commission of the States (ECS) (using funding from various organizations such as Lumina, Gates, etc.) have partnered with state university and college systems and legislatures to create laws that eliminate or relegate remedial courses to such frameworks as one lab hour per week (OK, TN, GA), which is termed corequisite support.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Developmental Education Enrollment</th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012-13 to 2014-15</td>
<td>-42%</td>
<td>-44%</td>
<td>-46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College-level Enrollment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-13 to 2014-15</td>
<td>+30%</td>
<td>+10%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pass Rates</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-13</td>
<td>55.7%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014-15</td>
<td>46.8%</td>
<td>70.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Corequisite Data from Tennessee (2017)
4. Accelerate or Eliminate Remediation

POSITIVE Effects:

• For a small segment of underprepared students who are near the cut-off for college-level courses, this reform may allow them to accelerate their coursework by one semester or more

• More students may pass gateway courses (and more fail them paradoxically)

• Increased graduation data is lacking currently
4. Accelerate or Eliminate Remediation

NEGATIVE Effects:

• For a large proportion of remedial students, this reform may not provide the necessary time, practice, and knowledge that will help them in later coursework and in completion; no prereq dev ed is bad for at least 37% of community college remedial students (weakly prepared)\textsuperscript{19}

• Guided pathways is supposed to be a comprehensive reform package; students in corequisites and other reforms should thus have stronger support, tracking, etc., throughout their time in college; this is not happening
Figure 7.
SIX-YEAR PERSISTENCE AND ATTAINMENT: Among 2003–04 beginning postsecondary students who first enrolled in public 2- or 4-year institutions, percentage distribution of students according to their postsecondary persistence and highest degree attainment as of 2009, by remedial course enrollment and completion status: 2003–09

Students beginning at public 2-year institutions
- Remedial completers: 35% completed, 22% partial completers, 26% noncompleters, 17% nonremedial students
- Partial remedial completers: 47% completed, 27% partial completers, 22% noncompleters, 4% nonremedial students
- Remedial noncompleters: 67% completed, 18% partial completers, 12% noncompleters, 4% nonremedial students
- Nonremedial students: 47% completed, 14% partial completers, 24% noncompleters, 15% nonremedial students

Students beginning at public 4-year institutions
- Remedial completers: 22% completed, 16% partial completers, 7% noncompleters, 55% nonremedial students
- Partial remedial completers: 34% completed, 24% partial completers, 9% noncompleters, 33% nonremedial students
- Remedial noncompleters: 44% completed, 17% partial completers, 9% noncompleters, 30% nonremedial students
- Nonremedial students: 19% completed, 10% partial completers, 4% noncompleters, 67% nonremedial students

Legend:
- No degree and not enrolled
- No degree but enrolled
- Attained an associate's degree or certificate
- Attained a bachelor's degree

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5. Get Faculty Buy-In to Make Changes

• The fifth reform the CCRC recommends is to get faculty buy-in to make these changes.

• Clearly, this is extremely important.

• Are administrators applying a holistic approach to redesigning college pathways and including faculty with more professional development? Anecdotal evidence and some research suggest otherwise: Full-time faculty have lower pay, fewer positions, etc.
5. Get Faculty Buy-In to Make Changes

POSITIVE Effects:

• If faculty were actually brought in to the decision-making process, as described in Bailey et al.’s book, it would only help any reform

• Faculty buy-in would benefit the college because they would do more work and better work
5. Get Faculty Buy-In to Make Changes

NEGATIVE Effects:

• Top-down, mandated reform is the most typical approach

• For example, several university systems have recently mandated changes and have not allowed much faculty input

• Perhaps more communication is happening on the ground
6. Rethink How to Spend Money

• The sixth reform the CCRC recommends is to get presidents and boards to rethink how they spend money

• This involves a recalculation, moving from “cost per student” to “cost per student completion”

• This is a math trick; however, if it works to get administrations to spend more on reform, then all the better. Reforms need monetary support in addition to design change
6. Rethink How to Spend Money

POSITIVE Effects:

• If a college president, board, or state legislature would actually increase the amount of money spent on such reforms, it would be very beneficial if used thoughtfully and holistically.

• The only funding increases I have heard about are in grant form, such as for ASAP\textsuperscript{14,15} and the initiatives in several states (Gates, Lumina, etc.), which is a fleeting source of funding.
6. Rethink How to Spend Money

NEGATIVE Effects:

• Once again, the book allows institutions to claim they are implementing guided pathways but to avoid certain recommendations such as this one.

• This reform is supposed to be holistic.

• In other words, not spending money on needed components such as support for weakly prepared students and tracking students with support for several years makes the other reforms, such as corequisites and multiple measures, possibly ineffective or harmful.
Is the Guided Pathways PREMISE Correct?

Remember the PREMISE of Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins (2015a):

“The failure of students to complete college represents a loss to the overall economy, which has prompted calls from the federal government, major foundations, and public intellectuals for a significant increase in the number of people with postsecondary degrees” (p. 1).
Is the Guided Pathways PREMISE Correct?

Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins (2015a) view current graduation rates as a “failure”:

“...these low completion rates [nearly 40% at 2-year colleges in 6 years or 44% after 8 years] reflect widespread failure.... The disappointing outcomes of community colleges and indeed many four-year institutions have not gone unnoticed by policymakers, who have called for more transparency in and accountability for postsecondary performance” (p. 1).
“Highest Educational Attainment Levels”

Highest Educational Attainment Levels Since 1940
Adults 25 Years and Older With a Bachelor’s Degree or Higher

Percent

35
30
25
20
15
10
5
0

1940 '47 '50 '52 '54 '55 '59 '62 '64 '70 '80 '90 2000 '10 '16

4.6%
33.4%

Data on educational attainment were not collected in all years before 1964.

Source: 1940-2010 Censuses and Current Population Survey
www.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps.html
www.census.gov/prod/www/decennial.html

U.S. Department of Commerce
Economics and Statistics Administration
U.S. CENSUS BUREAU
census.gov

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Is the Guided Pathways Premise Correct?

• Actually, overall 4-year grad rates are on the rise and the slope is the same though more students are in college

• Moreover, the NSCRC (2017) recently reported updated graduation rates for two-year public colleges

• Overall graduation rates after tracking for 6 years is about 38%

• Follow these students for two more years, and the certificate and degree completion rate is 44%
Is the Guided Pathways Premise Correct?

Bailey et al. thus believe that two-year colleges should be more like degree factories (Belfield & Jenkins, 2013):

“In fact, in many ways a college education is like the factory production process: students start at the beginning and then, after a sequence of ‘inputs’ in the form of courses and support services, some graduate successfully at the end” (par. 2).
Is the Guided Pathways Premise Correct?

In fact, there is evidence that there is no “skills gap” or lack of an educated work force, in both manufacturing and even in STEM fields (Fivethirtyeight.com):

“Even if companies invested in more training, though, it’s unlikely they would go on a hiring spree. Ultimately, the slow pace of job growth in manufacturing isn’t companies’ fault any more than it is workers’. The cause is more fundamental than that: Due mostly to automation, U.S. factories now produce more than ever with fewer workers. That’s a trend no job-training program will reverse” (Casselman, 2016, par. 11).
Is the Guided Pathways Premise Correct?

Paul Krugman (NYT) on the lack of a “skills gap”:
“...there’s no evidence that a skills gap is holding back employment. After all, if businesses were desperate for workers with certain skills, they would presumably be offering premium wages to attract such workers. So where are these fortunate professions? You can find some examples here and there. Interestingly, some of the biggest recent wage gains are for skilled manual labor—sewing machine operators, boilermakers—as some manufacturing production moves back to America. But the notion that highly skilled workers are generally in demand is just false” (par. 8).
“Where STEM Jobs Are (and Aren’t)” (2017)

- Life Sciences*: 183k
  - 12k
- Engineering: 169k
  - 51k
- Physical Sciences: 43k
  - 9k
- Mathematical Sciences: 33k
  - 7k
- Computer Science: 107k
  - 108k

*Does not include health care occupations.

So Many Degrees, So Little Demand

The number of graduates with technical majors (shown: bachelor, master and Ph.D. degrees awarded in 2015-16) tends to outpace job openings (shown: 2014-24 projections, annualized). Computer science is the exception.
Is the Guided Pathways Premise Correct?

Community colleges are far more than just technical degree factories. Let’s view the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center’s *Snapshot Report 26*:

“In the 2015-16 academic year, 49 percent of all students who completed a bachelor’s degree at a four-year institution had been enrolled at a two-year public institution at some point in the previous 10 years” (2017, p. 1).
Percentage of 2015-16 Bachelor’s Degree Earners with Previous Enrollments at Two-Year Public Institutions

The states in the map represent the states in which bachelor’s degrees were awarded. In this analysis, baccalaureate-granting institutions that predominantly award associate degrees (at least 65 percent of the undergraduate degrees awarded are associate degrees) are classified as two-year institutions. As such, enrollments at these institutions count in the numerator, but bachelor’s degrees awarded by them do not count in the denominator. Alaska and D.C. are labeled N/A on this map because the two-year public institutions in those two areas report data to the Clearinghouse under the same institutional profile as four-year public institutions.
Is the Guided Pathways Premise Correct?

• Does this mean that a focus on training students for jobs is wrong?
• No, but it may mean that graduating more students with degrees may not necessarily add jobs, fill vacant jobs, or increase quality jobs in the US
• Guided pathways may be an excellent way to improve the intake and flow of students through community colleges, but it may be based on a flawed premise
• It may also harm certain subgroups of students
Update on Guided Pathways Implementation
Most Recent Report on Guided Pathways

• In Sept. 2018, the CCRC released a report summarizing their work on implementing guided pathways in several of 100 total institutions they are working with in the nation (Jenkins et al., 2018).

• The report involves 13 institutions in Tennessee.

• They argue that early momentum key performance indicators (KPIs) are the best metric for success.
Most Recent Report on Guided Pathways

• They focused on four “completion practices” (p. 4):
  1. Mapping pathways to student end goals
  2. Helping students choose/enter a program/pathway
  3. Keeping students on path
  4. Ensuring students are learning

• Results show small gains in credits earned and passed, which may be due to the post-recession economy and a concerted effort by all to improve relatively low metrics
CCRC Report (Jenkins et al., 2018) 

Figure 11. Proportion of Students Who Earned 12+ College Credits in Their First Term by Age

- 18-19
- 20-24
- 25+
- All students

Fall Cohort of First-Time-Ever-in-College Students
Figure 16.
Proportion of Students Who Completed Both College Math and College English in Their First Year by Race/Ethnicity

- White
- Black
- Hispanic
- All students

Fall Cohort of First-Time-Ever-in-College Students

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Overview:
Possible Positive Effects of Guided Pathways

• A few more students may graduate and go into the labor market better prepared
• Choices in college are clearer; students less confused about intake, placement, registration, and advising
• Students may arrive and progress better prepared due to a focus on holistic, well-supported developmental education, dual enrollment, and continued support
• Institutions will eventually be able to implement more programs with support due to successes
Overview:
Possible Negative Effects of Guided Pathways

• Counselors may simply choose random majors for students if they are undecided, and some students may spend longer in unwanted programs

• It may reduce choice and the mission and philosophy of community colleges

• The net effect may be that choice and access will be restricted; few of the crucial supports may be implemented, thus harming faculty, institutions, and ultimately students
Overview:
Possible Negative Effects of Guided Pathways

• It changes requirements of algebra to statistics for many majors (highly contested program change)
• It is cost prohibitive, meaning it takes a lot of money to spend on counseling, advising, staff, and training, as well as development and follow-up interventions
• Institutions can implement the easy parts and call it guided pathways (or worse, eliminate what they wish to eliminate and call it guided pathways)
Overview:
Possible Negative Effects of Guided Pathways

• The primary problem with holistic reform is that it must be comprehensive to work.

• ASAP\textsuperscript{14,15} has been proven to work; it is a comprehensive reform, well-designed and well-funded ($7K per student per year=double grad rates)

• Has there been an example of guided pathways in action with proven results? Not yet...time will tell...

• In the mean time, is it misguiding rather than guiding?
Thank you!

Keep up the good work!

References below and more reading available:

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(Links to sources on next page)


