

Drexel University

Research Brief

A Multisite Case Study of the Alignment of Institutional Change Strategies and Culture for
Guided Pathways Reform Implementation in California Community Colleges

By

Jeffrey D. Archibald
Drexel University
November, 2020

Supervising Professor:

Editors:

Dr. Penny L. Hammrich
Professor and Dean

Dr. Rajashi Ghosh

Associate Professor and Department Chair for Policy, Organization, and Leadership

Dr. Kathy Geller

Associate Clinical Professor

Christine Galib

EdD Student

Copy Editor:

Anthony Hopkins

Director of Marketing and Communications

A Multisite Case Study of the Alignment of Institutional Change Strategies and Culture for
Guided Pathways Reform Implementation in California Community Colleges

Jeffrey D. Archibald

Drexel University

Abstract

As more than 200 community colleges implement a guided pathways reform framework, they must engage a faculty fatigued by change initiatives that have been implemented with varying degrees of faculty participation and success. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the alignment between the strategies used to implement guided pathways-based organizational change and faculty engagement in guided pathways reform initiatives within the organizational culture of two California community colleges with the goal to understand the role of organizational culture in transformational change and identify best practices in faculty engagement. Preliminary findings supported the role of organizational culture to spur faculty engagement and guide transformational change strategies.

Aim

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the alignment between the strategies used to implement guided pathways-based organizational change and faculty engagement in guided pathways reform initiatives within the organizational culture of two California community colleges with the goal to understand the role of organizational culture in transformational change and identify best practices in faculty engagement.

Problem

Community colleges in California have participated in multiple reform initiatives in the past decade that have resulted in major changes to the system. Jenkins and Cho (2013) proposed a framework for a “guided pathways” model that included “clear roadmaps to student goals,” “on-ramps to programs of study,” and “embedded advising, progress tracking, feedback and support,” which helps students track progress and stay on their chosen educational pathways (pp. 28-29). Prompted by \$150 million in grant funding, all 114 community colleges in California are “actively working on or implementing a Guided Pathways model” (California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office, 2019, para. 4). The speed and constancy of change, coupled with varied faculty involvement in decision-making, can produce the reduced enthusiasm that is a telltale sign of change initiative fatigue (Reeves, 2010). As community colleges implement

mandated and incentivized transformational change, they must secure the participation and buy-in of increasingly fatigued faculty stakeholders or risk the resistance and failure of the change initiatives.

This study was guided by the overarching research question: How has the alignment of organizational change strategies and the organizational culture of three California community colleges selected to participate in the national implementation of guided pathways influenced faculty participation in the reforms and the success of the implementation? Two subquestions were:

1. How have the community colleges involved their faculty members in the organizational change initiative?
2. How have the community college’s organizational strategies to implement “guided pathways”-based change aligned with their organizational cultures?

Preliminary Research Findings

Two California community colleges served as research cases. At each case site, seven faculty and administrator participants completed a one-on-one interview via Zoom. Documents related to guided pathways implementation and meetings as well as recordings of pathways convenings and events served as confirmatory data for triangulation. Data were coded using descriptive and in vivo methods and codes combined and analyzed to reveal the following case themes and sub-themes:

Case A	Case B
1. Slow, deliberate change <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis on formal governance • Focus on building “buy-in” 	1. Constant, iterative change <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distributed leadership structure • Flexibility and revision
2. Cultural factors affecting change <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comparisons to other colleges • Top-level leadership issues 	2. Cultural factors affecting change <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pride in being a model college • Strong executive influence
3. Challenges with momentum <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty leadership turnover • Sustain and widen participation 	3. Valuing faculty involvement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis on collaboration • Expectation of new and adjunct faculty participation

Preliminary cross-case analysis revealed common themes of handling resistance through adaptation and emphasizing the inevitability of change as well as centering the student experience through narratives, data, and a connection to student equity efforts.

Preliminary Conclusions

Colleges A and B both utilized implementation strategies aligned to their institutional cultures but saw results at different speed and levels of success. Implications linked to the research include:

- College A's value of formal governance slowed implementation but increased comfort with change. This cultural framework was less conducive to rapid, transformational change in contrast to College B's informal, flexible, and experimental culture.
- College B's faculty expressed higher levels of engagement linked to a campus climate that values and socializes faculty into a change-based, participatory culture.
- College A's faculty leadership transition and past administration-faculty trust issues clearly impacted change strategies, speed, and success.
- College A and B effectively used student success and its connection to the college mission and faculty intrinsic motivation to drive change efforts.

Preliminary Recommendations

- Colleges implementing transformational change must be sensitive to the institutional values and processes that shape the organizational culture. The pace of change may be adapted to these cultural norms and to minimize resistance.
- The socialization of new faculty to be both adaptive to change and participatory in decision-making processes is critical to long-term success of organizational change and creating an organizational culture that is responsive to the need for transformational change. Colleges should focus on keeping new faculty active in decision-making processes and involving them in change efforts.
- Colleges should keep the student experience in both narrative and quantitative form at the center of any transformational change efforts. Student focus allows a clearer connection to the college mission and taps into the shared values of constituent groups that will need to buy into and facilitate the change process.

References

California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO). (2019). *Guided Pathways*.

Retrieved from <https://www.cccco.edu/Faculty-and-Administration/Guided-Pathways>

Jenkins, D., & Cho, S. W. (2013). Get with the program... and finish it: Building guided pathways to accelerate student completion. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 2013(164), 27-35.

Reeves, D. B. (2010). *Transforming professional development into student results*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Author Biography

Jeffrey Archibald is an Ed.D. student in the Educational Leadership and Management program expected to graduate in December 2020. Jeffrey has been Dean of Social Sciences at Pasadena City College in Pasadena, California since 2017. Prior to his role at PCC, Jeffrey was a Professor of Communication at Mt. San Antonio College from 2000 to 2017. Jeffrey also co-directed the Forensics (speech and debate) program at Mt. SAC for 14 years which was recognized as the top community college program in the nation eight times. Jeffrey earned an M.S. in Communication Studies from Illinois State University in 1997 and a B.A. in Government from Cornell University in 1995. Jeffrey's research interests include guided pathways implementation in higher education, faculty involvement in organizational change, and the experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals in higher education. Jeffrey has also served 13 years in the United States Marine Corps Reserves. He currently resides in Altadena, California but is a Philadelphia native who still loves the Eagles and Flyers.