

# **Student Success Pathways**

## **A Charge to the Faculty and Staff at Albany Tech**

**Terry O'Banion—May 1, 2014**

In the last decade or so the idea of a “Student Success Pathway” has come to dominate most of the discourse about student success, particularly the key indicators of retention and completion. Hundreds of universities and community colleges use this idea to make visible to their students and to each other what they mean when they say their role is to help the student navigate his or her journey through the college or to take the student where she is and help her get to where she needs to be.

If we as educators and citizens were serious about student success we would begin working with students in Kindergarten to help them create and monitor a Student Success Pathway as a life-map from these early years through the end of their lives, or at least through the final steps of their formal education. The conditions for creating this kind of life-long road map for students do not currently exist, but we can at least take responsibility for designing and implementing a Student Success Pathway for the students we have; in the community college that means designing a pathway for new high school graduates and returning students or students who have been out of education for a while from the first point they connect to the college to the point they fulfill their goals at the college and move on to the next phase of their lives.

The leaders at Albany Tech have been charged with creating a model of the Student Success Pathway that can serve as a road map to improve the success of their students. This is not an easy task. Creating a model is always more complex than originally thought. Once the model is created it needs to be implemented and evaluated which will lead to a number of changes. And someone or some appointed group will need to lead the implementation and to monitor the progress.

For this phase of this initiative it seems appropriate for the College to begin at a foundational level in outlining the basic structure of the pathway. Think of this task as drawing the outlines of a garden or of a building that will be filled in later once participants agree on the overall basic design.

To accomplish this task you need to envision a pathway, a series of steps, the student will take with the College’s help to achieve a goal. The pathway then will begin with the student’s goal, what the College will provide in services and programs to achieve that goal, and a set of markers or Milestones that will help both the student and the College determine progress. When the pathway is eventually fleshed out it will provide a framework for monitoring individual student progress, making interventions to get the student back on track, recording activities and evaluations of progress, determining what practices and programs and which personnel should be involved in the student’s itinerary, and checking and celebrating Milestones. The following are some of the questions you need to begin to answer to create a model of the Student Success Pathway for Albany Tech:

1. What is this student's goal? (The student's goal is where we must begin. If her goal is to take one course in writing just to brush up on her writing skills so she can be more effective in her current job, the Student Success Pathway (SSP) is very simple. And if she makes a passing grade in the course she and the college have been enormously successful. If her goal is to earn an Associate's Degree and transfer to the University of Georgia the SSP is more complex. If she reads at the 5<sup>th</sup> grade level and her goal is to earn an Associate's Degree and transfer to the University of Georgia the SSP becomes even more complex.)

From this brief review of various student goals it should become apparent **that there will be many versions of the SSP to meet the needs of the diversity of students who attend community colleges.** You will likely create a version for returning adult students, a version for recent high school graduates, a version for working adults who just want to brush up on skills, a version for students who are undecided about their goals, and others depending on the kinds of students attending Albany Tech. For the task of creating a model SSP that can apply to a majority of students let's begin with a SSP for recent high school graduates.

2. For students who are recent high school graduates and whose goal is to earn an Associate's Degree and transfer to a university what are the key services and programs the College should provide for students?
  - If the College already has programs (dual enrollment, summer bridge programs, college counselors working in the high school, developmental courses offered by the college in the high school or on the college campus, etc.) with the high schools the SSP begins here in these connections with the high school.
  - Or it begins with the first moment the student contacts the College and begins to navigate what is usually referred to as the "intake services."
  - These services usually are referred to as admissions, assessment, placement, orientation, advising, financial aid, registration, etc. Organizing these services and programs and making them available to students at appropriate times is the first major effort of creating an effective Student Success Pathway. This is not easy, and some of these services such as advising, assessment, and orientation are extraordinarily complex. And colleges often make them more complex by separating them into different functions as if they were not even connected and by assigning them to different professionals thus creating silos. In this beginning design try to ignore these institutional barriers and concentrate on the ideal way these services should be organized and prioritized to best serve the student.
  - Consider whether some or all of these services and programs should be mandatory—and, if mandatory, for which groups of students.
  - Consider also the importance of ensuring that these services are effective in preparing the student for the next step in the pathway.
3. If these intake services have done their work effectively the student is now ready to engage in learning activities that are provided through the curriculum and through instruction.

- If the student has been assessed and determined to need remedial (developmental) work then the next big step on the SSP is Developmental Education (DE). There is currently a great deal of controversy about what works in DE and what does not work. If your DE program is unclear or undergoing a great deal of examination at this time reserve a spot on the SSP for DE and move on to creating the basic outline of the SSP.
  - If the student qualifies to begin college-level courses then the SSP should reflect the student's "program of study" to include required and elective courses with prerequisites and a 2 to 3 year "plan" of which courses are to be taken and when. This is, of course, the "meat" of the SSP because it is through courses that we offer learning opportunities currently measured by grades and credits. Many educators agree that grades and credits are poor indicators of learning, but that is currently the coin of the realm in education. You may want to track a particular program of study—general education, nursing, or teaching—to illustrate this long section of the SSP.
4. What markers or Milestones should the College agree on and post as indicators of short-range success? These Milestones appear on the SSP at significant points of progress to motivate students and to encourage momentum and to allow the College to check on its progress and to celebrate with students these success points. Milestones can include any achievement the college deems of value. Many colleges use these kinds of Milestones: completion of a gateway course with a C or better, completion of the Developmental Education sequence, earning 15 college credits, earning 30 college credits, earning an Associate's Degree or a one-year certificate. Considerable thought should be given to what kinds of Milestones are appropriate for the kinds of students who attend Albany Tech. For some students passing their first college course with a C or better is a Milestone; for others returning for the second term might be a Milestone. Be creative and encompassing with the Milestones you tack on to the SSP.

This should get you started. Let the student's needs guide you through the process. Keep asking yourself "Is this what I want my son or daughter to experience at Albany Tech, and is this the best we can do to help them navigate the college experience successfully?" Do not be held back by what you have done in the past. You are just beginning to create an outline, a basic framework and foundation, on which you can continue to work in the coming months.

**The timeline is for you to complete a first draft of the basic Student Success Pathway by May 30 and to submit it to me for critique and comments. I will respond by June 13.**

**Best wishes to you in this important work.  
Terry O'Banion—May 1, 2014**