



INSTITUTE for EVIDENCE-BASED CHANGE

IEBC'S CURRICULUM TO CAREER CHOICES (CTCC) SMARTPATHWAYS® OVERVIEW

Guided Pathways help students “clarify their goals, choose and enter pathways that will achieve those goals, stay on those pathways, and master knowledge and skills that will enable them to advance in the labor market and successfully pursue further education.”¹ Clearly, guided pathways are a promising approach for addressing many of the poor outcomes plaguing America’s community colleges.

However, college work to design and implement guided pathways needs to involve more than reshuffling and mapping courses that make up a pathway. That work further requires thoughtful sequencing and scaffolding of courses (and course-level learning outcomes), leading a student to completion of program-level learning outcomes, transfer into a university with junior standing in the chosen major, or directly to the world of work. While student learning outcomes (SLOs) should be central to this initiative, as yet there has been no identified framework for incorporating SLOs into guided pathways.

A recently published research study by IEBC about the impact of SLOs clearly showed that students benefit from well-designed, thoughtful SLOs that are linked to course syllabi, curriculum, assessments, and career pathways ([Horowitz, Phillips, & Yopp, 2016*](#)). The study also found, however, that faculty are inconsistent in their use of SLOs and vary in their capacity to develop and use well-crafted SLOs as part of their pedagogy. In response, IEBC developed the *CtCC SmartPathway* process.

This faculty-led process is designed to create smart pathways that support student achievement of appropriate and clear learning outcomes. Whether students choose pathways in the arts and sciences, in professional and technical areas, or in hybrids of the two, the process begins with consideration of the knowledge and skills required in specific related career areas and helps colleges scaffold learning outcomes through courses within each pathway, leading cumulatively to desired program-level outcomes. Importantly, the process is grounded in the local college academic context.

Based on almost two decades of experience working with colleges around the country, IEBC’s process has features that acknowledge the ways colleges really work. It is has been designed for a compact timeframe—completed over the course of one term—and aligned with the natural arc of college work. IEBC’s method for devising career-centered, learning-focused pathways relies on data that is useful, usable, and actionable, combined with readily available national sources that can be localized to the region a community college serves. The *CtCC SmartPathway* process is institution-adaptable and faculty-driven so both the process and the outcomes are owned by direct participants and the greater college community

IEBC’s *CtCC SmartPathways* is a collaborative, program-centered design process that ensures the academic learning experiences identified by faculty can align to the expectations of employers. The O*NET-based descriptions of career knowledge and skills are the basis for beginning a facilitated, collaborative process for creating smart pathways. Faculty first examine available information regarding employer expectations of graduates in careers that are aligned to a pathway. They then engage in working to align curriculum and career requirements. From this work, they develop implementation

¹ AACC Pathways Project, “The movement Toward Pathways”

plans for improving identified misalignments. This results in an institution-specific and community-sensitive process for pursuing smart pathways. Furthermore, faculty gain the skills needed to develop and use SLOs linked to the careers supported by the institution's identified pathways.

This process consists of four stages that can be accomplished in one term. Each of these work sessions includes IEBC team-facilitated discussions taking place in a professional and safe environment in which conversations are open, honest, and free from judgment:

- ❖ Stage I builds on the deep work that colleges have done, mapping their programs and placing them into clusters or meta majors. Regional needs are considered and we facilitate selections about which pathways are best suited to begin the work.
- ❖ Stage II continues the preparation with planning the facilitated meetings. IEBC's team works closely with the local institutional leader and team championing the endeavor.
- ❖ Stage III includes facilitated faculty-focused collaborations. The central focus is on faculty work to identify where pathway and course SLOs align with employer expected competencies and to address any gaps, where appropriate. Work is conducted between the meetings to ensure the process is ongoing.
- ❖ Stage IV finalizes the work. Faculty revisit identified misalignments to ensure these have been addressed. A plan is developed for ensuring knowledge and practice are kept current. A final meeting begins the implementation phase, integrating faculty-identified SLOs into the pathway curriculum.

Subsequent steps may include transferring the experiences of designing pathway-specific SLOs for the initial set of pathways and occupations to other pathways and different careers. These steps may be accomplished by applying the model with training or coaching as needed from IEBC experts.

*J.E. Horowitz, B.C. Phillips, and J. Yopp., *Tuning in Community Colleges: A Study of the Development and Uses of Student Learning Outcomes*, Journal of Applied Research in the Community Colleges, Spring, 2016, Vol 23, Issue 1.