

Barriers to Student Success

RCCD

In March 2024, RCCD counselors district-wide met and discussed the various barriers with which they assist students at each stage of the student journey. This is based on Completion by Design's Loss/Momentum Framework. Altogether, the counselors identified **83 barriers** that are regular obstacles for students. Certain barriers were submitted multiple times by several groups, and the top 15 barriers are paraphrased below (in no particular order but organized according to the student journey).

In addition, counselors were asked to propose possible solutions for these barriers and came up with 59 suggestions. The initially proposed solutions are also listed below.

CONNECTION

1. Outreach

- a. **Problem statement:** There is a negative stigma about community colleges leading to low enrollment and a low college-going rate in the Inland Empire.
- b. **Proposed solution(s):** Outreach related to the cost savings of going to community college. Outreach from peers. Promotion of dual enrollment as a free way to experience community college.

2. Applications and Registration

- a. **Problem statement:** Returning students are not aware that they need to reapply in order to reactivate their registration date assignment.
- b. **Proposed solution(s):** Program a system alert to notify students of the need to reapply when they log in and the system knows they are not active.

3. CCCApply Programs of Study List

- a. **Problem statement:** The list of programs of study in CCCApply is overwhelming and the lack of an "undecided" option leads to inaccurate major selection and an inability to monitor students who need career development support.
- b. **Proposed solution(s):** Add an "undecided" option on CCCApply. Add small descriptions of career paths and what different majors can do on CCCApply.

4. Career Pathways

- a. **Problem statement:** There are limited vocational pathways available to students depending on which college they apply to, especially in the health sciences, and it is not clear to students how educational options connect to their career goals.

- b. **Proposed solution(s):** Infuse more career information in high schools. Use more social media to inform students about college and career pathways. Offer more vocational choices, such as EKG, radiologic technology, surgical assistant, medical pathways, animal science, sonography, MRI, etc.

ENTRY

5. E-mail and Password Issues

- a. **Problem statement:** Both the initial e-mail and password setup process and the password reset process are complicated, which leads to student frustration, a lack of communication flow, and wasted time in counseling sessions.
- b. **Proposed solution(s):** Create a better process for resetting passwords (or perhaps eliminate passwords in exchange for an easier authentication method). Give counselors access to reset student passwords directly. Provide better information to students about how to reset e-mail / passwords.

6. Math and English Placement

- a. **Problem statement:** English and Math placement is hard to understand and the registration process is complicated, especially when support courses are involved. This leads to registration issues, delayed enrollment, and student confusion.
- b. **Proposed solution(s):** ENG/MAT with support courses should be combined classes, not two separate classes. Consider changing MAT-112 to a different number to avoid confusion with MAT-12. Give counselors the ability to clear placements and pre-requisites directly instead of completing a form.

7. Counselor Availability

- a. **Problem statement:** There are not enough counselors available to meet with every student and this makes it difficult for students to get appointments during peak periods, necessary career counseling, and a full-program plan by the end of their first semester.
- b. **Proposed solution(s):** Establish a standard of care at all three colleges that ensures students can get the advising they need to make important college decisions about their career, major, and choice for college attendance.

8. Add/Drop Deadlines

- a. **Problem statement:** Add and drop deadlines often fall on non-business days and holidays making it impossible for students to get critical questions answered and support with manual registration processing when needed.
- b. **Proposed solution(s):** Establish a policy that ensures important dates and deadlines only fall on college business days.

9. Prerequisites and Transcripts

- a. **Problem statement:** Transcripts from non-RCCD colleges are not automatically evaluated and in-progress coursework from non-RCCD colleges does not clear prerequisites resulting in unexpected registration blocks and enrollment delays.
- b. **Proposed solution(s):** Create a process for up-front evaluations of incoming college transcripts. Evaluate transcripts automatically at entry rather than making students request it. Allow in-progress grades at other colleges to temporarily clear prerequisites so students from other colleges can register for RCCD courses (and create a deregistration process for those who do not submit proof of a passing grade before the term begins).

PROGRESS

10. Early Alerts

- a. **Problem statement:** The early alert process has a low faculty participation rate, often does not represent the faculty voice, and faculty are not informed of what happens after they submit an early alert. As a result, faculty have a lack of confidence in the early alert process and students in need of support do not receive the interventions they need to be successful.
- b. **Proposed solution(s):** An early alert process is needed that is embedded into the faculty instructional process (perhaps located in Canvas instead of WebAdvisor), allows for faculty customization of messaging, and includes a feedback loop that keeps faculty informed about when students are contacted and by whom.

11. Probation and Dismissal

- a. **Problem statement:** Probation and dismissal communications utilize negative and punitive language that makes students feel unwelcomed and threatened rather than supported. This leads some students to thinking that they should stop attending or that they have already been kicked out of school.
- b. **Proposed solution(s):** Need to rethink the probation and dismissal messaging with a positive behavior intervention mindset and clearly define terms to explain our desire to come alongside and support these students with success strategies.

12. SAP Appeals

- a. **Problem statement:** Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) notifications are worrisome and stressful to students and sometimes triggered just because a student is doing well and completes a certificate on their way to a degree. This causes students to panic and bottlenecks counseling and advising services with urgent requests for SEP revisions.
- b. **Proposed solution(s):** Make sure students understand if they will still qualify for the CCPG tuition waiver. Ask Student Financial Services offices to coordinate SAP

notifications with Counseling Offices to ensure that students can get appointments when told that they need them. Communicate clear timelines with students so they react with the appropriate amount of urgency.

COMPLETION & TRANSITION

13. Certificates

- a. **Problem statement:** The connections between certificates and their related associated degrees are unclear, some students lose financial aid by completing certificates without changing their program of study to the degree, and students who transfer early do not earn the CSUGE and IGETC certificates described in the Program and Course Approval Handbook (PCAH). Furthermore, the requirement for 50% of certificate coursework to be completed in residence requires some students who relocate to our district to take unnecessary duplicative coursework if they want to complete the program. This results in lower motivation to complete certain CTE certificates and fewer completions for students who just need a few courses to complete their certificate or who transfer without earning degrees.
- b. **Proposed solution(s):** Need to automatically notify/warn students who complete certificates about the need to change their program of study in order to maintain financial aid. Should reinstate the CSUGE and IGETC certificates so transfer-bound students have a program of study to follow and complete while they decide on a specific major or ADT and to ensure a completion record in the event that they transfer before completing a degree. Should rethink the district's policy on the 50% residency requirement for certificates.

14. Graduation Applications

- a. **Problem statement:** Graduation applications ask students to provide "program codes" which students are unfamiliar with and this results in graduation application submissions for the wrong degrees, unnecessary graduation denials, and sometimes students apply for fewer degrees than they are eligible for.
- b. **Proposed solution(s):** Create an easier graduation application process, perhaps one that can read the degrees which are already on the student's active program list or declared in EduNav and just have the student check boxes.

15. Employment Support

- a. **Problem statement:** Employment support for general students is limited at the colleges and students often do not graduate with skillsets that match industry requirements so they can get living wage jobs. As a result, many graduates who do not transfer see no increase in their wages and do not attain entry into their desired career field.

- b. **Proposed solution(s):** Robust employment services should be available to all students to assist them with getting work experience during college that reinforces their classroom learning and that guides them to into living wage jobs after graduation (even for non-CTE students).

ACTIVITY GUIDE: Addressing Student Barriers

In teams at your table, participants will select one barrier identified above, in which members are familiar and have some connection.

- Read the problem statement and discuss as a group.
- Review and evaluate the proposed solutions to answer the following questions:
 - Do you see additional approaches to solving this problem?
 - Are there known issues or challenges with solving this problem in the method(s) proposed?
 - What specific stakeholders should be involved in addressing this problem?
- What are some immediate next steps that could be taken to address this student barrier?
- A representative from each group will present by reading their problem statement, summarizing the proposed solutions (both those provided and those brainstormed), and read their recommended next steps to address the barrier.
- The problem-solution worksheets will be collected by district personnel at the end of the activity and appropriate workgroups will be formed in the following weeks to directly work toward resolution.