

Prepared for College Futures Foundation

Proposal

Student Journey Project

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FOUNDATION *for* CALIFORNIA
COMMUNITY COLLEGES



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Description of Project

A troubling number of students who set out to attend California Community Colleges never do. Some are lost before or during the application process. Hundreds of thousands of others do complete an application, but never enroll. The process of choosing a goal and a college is daunting. Then, enrolling involves a series of choices, deadlines, forms, and events, many months after a prospective student submits an application. Changes to how community colleges guide students in these early interactions can help students successfully apply, enroll, and negotiate their first year of college in such a way that they are most likely to achieve their higher education goals.

The earliest interaction a student has with community colleges is likely an online one. Student-facing technology platforms touch all 2.1 million students in California's community colleges (CCCs), yet their design largely prioritizes institutional needs, not the student experience. And, by failing to help prospective students feel a sense of connection and competency in an unfamiliar environment, these online experiences can contribute to feelings of isolation, confusion, and even incompetence at a time when a feeling of self-efficacy is essential to move forward.

A core commitment in the CCCs *Vision for Success* (July 2017) is to "Always design and decide with the student in mind." The CCC Chancellor's Office and the Foundation for California Community Colleges propose a project to apply the lens of behavioral science to reduce subtle barriers that hinder students' progress through the early phases of matriculation and educational path-choosing, and use that information to design interventions to help set students on a path to success at the beginning of their college journey. The work will be applicable broadly to community college and adult education students while particularly considering the experience of community college students who face the greatest barriers and who are least likely to achieve their educational goals: low-income students, first generation college students, students of color, English language learners, students with disabilities, and returning adults. These populations comprise the vast majority of the CCC system's 2.1 million students.

Our ultimate goal is to transform the student user experience through Student Centered Design and Practices. The strategy includes redesign of a student's experience of onboarding and path-

choosing at CCCs, primarily by improving user experience in the technology tools students use to begin their personal pathway toward academic and career success. The work will begin with a “Journey Map” of how and when various requirements, people, and technologies touch a student’s journey, then focus on the first two of four pillars of the innovative “Guided Pathways” approach to community college reforms underway. Pillar One is “Clarify the Path” and Pillar Two is “Getting Students on the Path”.

As a result of the project, we expect to:

- discern what motivates prospective students and gets them on the path to success and what stands in their way from analyzing actual students’ interactions and choices in the system’s application and enrollment-related technology platforms,
- better understand the role technology tools play in a student’s educational journey,
- reinforce the student experience as the guiding framework for future technology development and other interventions,
- make system-wide student facing technologies and interventions feel cohesive, connected, relevant and helpful to students,
- streamline collection of student data with student experience in mind to reduce fatigue, repetition, intimidation and confusion,
- improve handoffs between the onboarding tools developed by the Chancellor’s Office and the tools, processes and people who guide the student experience at individual colleges.

Of particular interest in this project is CCCApply, managed at the CCC Technology Center (Tech Center) on behalf of the Chancellor’s Office. Introduced in 2001, CCCApply is the statewide online admission application suite to streamline the admission application process for students and for California’s community colleges. CCCApply offers several versions of the application, including the Standard, Spanish, International, and California College Promise Grant (formerly the Board of Governors Fee Waiver) versions. In addition to accepting applications, the CCCApply suite also assigns individual college identity numbers to prospective students, and processes applications with system-wide consistency, compliance, and support. The 112-question application, and its timing many months before enrollment, presents barriers to providing a welcoming, comfortable onboarding process that connects prospective students to their goals, their chosen college, their future social and educational peer groups on campus, their next steps, and their ultimate pathway to success.

Outcomes

Short-term outcomes to be achieved during the project period will be:

1. A guiding framework and principles to establish cohesion and synergies between all student-facing systemwide technology tools.
2. Framing of 6-10 research-based student user personas with associated journey maps that can be used to redesign our onboarding systems to adapt, customize and contextualize and guide all student-facing tools, systems, processes and practices to get and keep prospective and new students on path to reach their educational goals.
3. A diagram of all student-facing systemwide technology tools to the Guided Pathways four pillar framework for integration in current community college redesign efforts, plus prioritized recommendations for improvements to them based on behavioral analytics.
4. Improvements to CCCApply's user interface and user experience to be more aligned with Guided Pathways Pillars 1 and 2. Strategies include tailoring content and messaging to student user types identified through student personas; streamlining the user flow through simpler, more intuitive navigation; connecting the CCCApply experience to students' ultimate goals; and helping students to start college.
5. Increased capacity at the Chancellor's Office for design with the student user in mind through training and changes to contracting requirements for student-facing technologies and other Pillar 1 and 2 interventions.

Long-term outcomes expected three to five years after implementation:

- A larger percentage of students will progress from applying through enrolling to attending, and then persist through the first year of study.
- All student-facing, system-wide technology tools will be designed or redesigned with the student user experience primary and the Guided Pathways Framework integrated.
- Access to community college and adult education will be more equitable due to improvements in accessibility for prospective and new students who only have access to the internet on mobile devices, who (as adults returning to education) would like to receive credit for prior learning such as military training, who are not familiar with college because they are the first in their families to attend, who have disability-related technology accessibility challenges, or whose primary language is not English.

Milestones

The following are key milestones for the project (please see timeline below under “Project Management and Timeline”).

- **Begin with a research-based framework.** Work with ideas42 to develop a framework that details how students interact with technology throughout their journey into higher education, with principles finalized.
- **Train staff in student-centered design.** As part of this work, an internal advisory group on student-centered design, and a broader group within the project team and Chancellor’s Office will be trained on student centered design to build institutional knowledge.
- **Understand student needs through personas.** Personas are a way to represent clusters of student users with similar behavioral and situational characteristics, ensuring that technology tools are addressing the diverse needs of our student population. A set of personas will be developed that are representative of CCC students using a combination of qualitative measures (interviews with students and college representatives) and qualitative data and research. This work will help to inform what user experiences are ideal for each student persona type and ensure that tools will be redesigned to adapt to student needs, rather than asking students to adapt to inflexible systems.
- **Identify critical milestones through student journey maps.** Using the finalized personas, a series of journey maps will be developed to visually illustrate the diverse paths of CCC students as they enter higher education. On a macro level, these journey maps will show how each student persona interacts with the numerous technology tools offered during this part of their educational journey. On a micro level, these journey maps will focus on the interaction each student persona has with the CCCApply tools in order to understand specific barriers to progress which this project can address. After documenting the “current state” journey of each persona, a “desired state” journey map will be created that will illustrate how each student journey could be improved.
- **Reduce barriers introduced by data collection requirements.** The project will analyze statutory data collection requirements and related policies to see how to eliminate, simplify, streamline, or disperse questions along the students' journey, instead of burdening students during their CCCApply experience.
- **Implement a first iteration of CCCApply improvements.** Drawing upon the desired state journey maps, specific opportunities for improvement in CCCApply will be identified, focusing on those that are consistent across the experiences of multiple

personas. This first iteration of development will serve as a framework and include principles that can later be expanded to future technology development.

- **Extend improvement strategies to future technology projects.** Ultimately, this project will develop a framework and set of principles that will guide all system-wide technology projects. The framework will be based on the Strategic Vision and aligned with the four pillars of Guided Pathways. The improvements to CCCApply will serve to inform later development improvements for key system technology tools; specific examples include the career exploration tool Here to Career (app and desktop versions) and Program Mapper to connect student goals to program pathways beginning with meta-majors then moving toward declaring a major and a goal (transfer, degree, and/or certificate).

Indicators and Data Collection Plan

The project plans to track improvements in CCCApply by comparing before and after states. Specific indicators include:

- Abandonment rates
- Percent who enroll after application completed
- Mobile users as percentage of users of CCCApply
- Numbers of applications and numbers of enrollments

Project Strategy

This project is built upon two key strategies:

- Build system-level leadership and framework for aligning all technology projects to two new, overarching, principle-setting guiding documents for the CCC system: *The Vision for Success* and the *CCC Guided Pathways Program* – helping to break down silos in student-facing technology platform development to smooth user experience.
- Apply a behavioral science lens to analyze the prospective and new student user experience to identify key stumbling blocks to matriculation and enrollment, and then recommend and prioritize fixes to system-wide technologies and related interventions.

Project Management and Timeline

Staff

The project is a partnership between the CCC Chancellor's Office and the Foundation for California Community Colleges. A project team will be developed to guide it. For expertise on best practice deployments and student user frustrations and needs, the project will engage

ideas42, a cutting edge behavioral psychology design partner for the team. Researchers specializing in community college students will ground the student user personas in what is verifiably known about the system's students. A technology expert will serve as project manager. The project team will include representation from key stakeholders, including a student. Internal expertise will be both tapped and developed by inclusion of Chancellor's Office staff on the project team, since one of the explicit purposes of the project is to begin to bring student-centered design concepts into Chancellor's Office work, overall.

California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office

Van Ton-Quinlivan, Vice Chancellor for Workforce and Digital Futures, will provide oversight and ensure integration with overall system technology strategies. Van Ton-Quinlivan is a nationally recognized thought leader in workforce development with a proven track record for driving large-scale organizational change. She oversees federal and state funding to advance the workforce mission of the community colleges, and the Chancellor's new Digital Futures work.

Omid Pourzanjani, EdD, Visiting Vice Chancellor, will serve as the primary point person from the Chancellor's Office. Dr. Pourzanjani served the community college mission at Golden West College for over 23 years prior to joining the Chancellor's Office as a Visiting Vice Chancellor. During his time at GWC, he held positions as a Professor, Department Chair, Senate Officer, Instructional Dean, Chief Student Services Officer and Chief Instructional Officer. Concurrent to these experiences, Dr. Pourzanjani served in executive leadership positions in high-tech multinational companies focused on organization efficiency through business process re-engineering and information technology solutions. In his new role, he plans to work with all the CCC stakeholders to improve the integration between our many systems, processes, and practices to better guide our students through their educational pathways.

Laura Hope, Executive Vice Chancellor of Student Services and Special Programs, will oversee linkage with the guided pathways framework. Laura Hope joined the Chancellor's Office in 2017 to oversee Student Services and Special Programs Division, which provides both leadership and technical assistance for policy and programs supporting student access, equity, and success and is playing a critical role in the widespread adoption of the California Community Colleges' Guided Pathways framework. Prior to joining the Chancellor's Office, Hope was dean of instructional support at Chaffey College.

Paul Feist, Vice Chancellor for Communications, will oversee communications and student outreach strategy. Paul Feist joined the Chancellor’s Office in 2011 with responsibilities over marketing, media relations, website design and content, reports and publications. In this role, he develops communications strategies to keep the public, policymakers, community colleges and Chancellor’s Office employees informed of community college news and accomplishments. Feist has an extensive background in communications, working for over two decades as an award-winning reporter and managing editor at various Northern California newspapers.

Foundation for California Community Colleges

Bryan Miller, Vice President of Communications and Technology, will act as Project Manager and lead the Foundation for California Community College’s work on the project, providing strategic context, directing staff, overseeing consulting, coordinating with the Tech Center, and ensuring grant outcomes. Bryan Miller oversees the Foundation’s communications and technology projects. Miller works with a team of communications strategists skilled in external communications, outreach, branding, publication, software development, and web design.

Emily Robinson, Technology and Special Projects Director, will direct the day-to-day operations of the project for the Foundation for California Community College’s work on the project, providing implementation direction and guidance to ensure project objectives are achieved. Emily Robinson leads the software development for all Foundation technology projects and manages a wide range of projects within the Foundation’s Advancement Team, working in close partnership with a fully developed communications and technology team. Projects include enterprise-level software development, data sharing initiatives including implementation of complex large-scale system adoption, website development, and marketing campaigns.

Catherine Foss, Communications and Technology Specialist, will analyze user flows to develop journey maps, identify behavioral characteristics for student personas through surveys or interviews, and draft wireframes. Catherine Foss, works on a wide array of communication and technology projects, including identifying website requirements, developing content and communication strategies for websites and software tools, and crafting content that will appeal to and be understood by a wide audience.

Emily Gerofsky, Communications and Technology Project Specialist will track day-to-day deliverables and milestones to ensure project objectives are achieved within timeline and budget, and prepare project updates for stakeholders, and coordinate activities of the project team. In her role at the Foundation for California Community Colleges, Gerofsky designs, implements, and promotes technology-related projects designed to improve the educational experience of CCC students. Her prior experience includes development and implementation of statewide media and public relations campaigns.

Consultant: ideas42

The Foundation for California Community Colleges will contract for behavioral analytics with ideas42, which uses the power of behavioral science to design scalable solutions to some of society's most difficult problems. In its educational consulting portfolio, ideas42's goal is to use behavioral science insights to design low cost interventions that improve student outcomes. From a small project at Harvard in 2008, when a team of top academics joined forces to create the first behavioral design lab in the world, ideas42 has grown into an organization with global reach and influence, with offices in New York, Boston, Washington, D.C., and San Francisco.

For this project, ideas42 will diagnose behavioral bottlenecks and design solutions for the student applicant pathway, including analysis of the CCCApply application process and related barriers to matriculation.

The ideas42 team of four will be managed by Anthony Barrows, who is a Managing Director at ideas42 where he focuses on domestic poverty, local government, post-secondary education, and civic engagement. Anthony previously worked over ten years in child welfare, spanning positions in direct service, supervision, training, advocacy, project management and system improvement. Barrows holds a Masters of Public Administration from Harvard's Kennedy School of Government where he was a Gleitsman Fellow at the Center for Public Leadership.

Timeline

PHASES (to be refined in collaboration with ideas42)	1st Quarter	2nd Quarter	3rd Quarter	4th Quarter
Student Experience Framework Finalization	X			
Student Persona Research and Definition and Student Journey Mapping	X			
Technology Tool Student Experience Review	X	X		
CCCApply Redesign: User research and testing resulting in recommendations		X		
CCCApply Implementation of Changes		X	X	
CCCApply Validation Phase: Test and iterate changes			X	X
Refinement of framework, based on lessons learned during CCCApply pilot				X

Organizational Rationale

The project is a collaboration between the CCC Chancellor’s Office and the Foundation for California Community Colleges (Foundation). The Chancellor’s Office and Foundation serve the largest system of higher education in the nation, with 114 colleges in 72 self-governing districts. The mission of the California Community Colleges Board of Governors and the Chancellor’s Office is to empower community colleges through leadership, advocacy and support. The Foundation is a nonprofit organization founded in 1998 as the official auxiliary to the CCC Board of Governors and Chancellor’s Office. As the trusted partner of the CCCs, the Foundation facilitates collaboration, accelerates innovation, and increases system-wide resources. Its work benefits all CCC students, colleges, college foundations, and the system as a whole by strengthening communities, accelerating paths to economic and social mobility, and reducing barriers to opportunity for all Californians.

The Foundation is also a nexus for philanthropic technology innovation, providing system-wide, innovative, and entrepreneurial solutions to support the priorities and initiatives of the

CCCs, including LaunchPath.com, Career Experience Suite, Nursing Resource Center's Centralized Clinical Placement System, and Here to Career. The Foundation's communications, marketing, and public relations team provides strategic messaging and branding, comprehensive website and publication design services, marketing support, and media outreach for the Foundation's programs and its partners, and has won numerous state and national awards for its work, including national Gold awards from both the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) and the National Council for Marketing and Public Relations (NCMPR).

CCCApply is managed, on behalf of the CCC Chancellor's Office, by the CCC Technology Center (Tech Center) hosted by Butte College, and this project will be used to inform its technology development. The Tech Center provides technology services, manages contracts, and disburses funds, aiming to provide secure, scalable, and integrated technology solutions for the California Community Colleges that take advantage of economies of scale and are facilitated by governance from the colleges themselves. Its projects include some student-facing technology tools and many behind-the-scenes tools for colleges themselves. Among its projects are CCCApply, Information Security, Accessibility Center, Education Planning Initiative, and the Online Education Initiative.

The Foundation has a strong partnership with the Tech Center. In 2016, the Tech Center established a contract with the Foundation to assist with communications for several technology initiatives and the Tech Center overall, including CCCApply. The work of this project will build on this partnership, and will help to create a system framework to guide and better align technology development in the future, including the key student-facing projects housed at the Tech Center.

Project Risks or Challenges

A neutral, high-level guiding framework and principles are intended to mitigate the greatest challenge: currently, technology solutions are perceived as discrete projects and a proprietary feeling develops among separate people for each separate tool, making integration and other changes difficult. In addition, all technology projects include the risk of vendor problems, issues about migrating data between systems, and potential legal challenges related to ownership.

An additional risk is that people who are used to designing and deciding with the colleges, districts and overall system in mind cannot shift that mindset significantly toward designing and deciding with the student in mind. Grounding that shift in behavioral science is intended, in part, to remove negative judgement of how things have been done in the past from the dialog about how we can do things differently in the future, and why we should.

The greatest risk, however, is in not doing this work because potential students who would be better served by community colleges are lured to expensive for-profit colleges that provide students easy entry points to a simple college pathway where they will rack up debt beyond their ability to repay.

Project Budget Narrative

The Foundation respectfully requests \$957,000 to conduct the Student Journey Project. Salaries: Include expert internal staffing in technology design, project management, communications, and direct project administrative support.

Other Expenses:

- Travel: Includes travel for focus groups and stakeholder meetings
- Training: Includes a combination of UI/UX and behavioral science training for at least four Foundation and Chancellor's Office staff members.
- Communications: Print materials, design assets, and Snaply technology license
- Focus Group Incentives: Incentives for student and stakeholder participation
- Consultant - ideas42: Behavioral science analysis and recommendations
- Consultant - UI/UX design - Assistance with translating ideas42 findings to design mock-ups for CCCApply; consultant TBD.
- Indirect: Indirect costs are calculated at 10% of project expenses.