



COLLEGE
of the **DESERT**



***Guided Pathways
Student Support
Research Report
2018***



interact

Contents

Executive Summary & Research Brief	4
Introduction	5
Goals & Possible Outcomes	5
Contents of the Main Report and the Executive Summary and Research Brief	6
Brief Overview of Focus Group and Online Survey Methodologies	6
Focus Group: Methods & Demographics	
Online Survey: Methods & Demographics	
Summary of the Findings	10
General Overview	
Specific Findings	
Pillar 1: Clarifying the path (application and enrollment assistance)	
Pillar 2: Entering the path (degree and/or major selection assistance)	
Pillar 3: Staying on the path (degree and/or program completion assistance)	
Pillar 4: Ensuring learning (assessment & next steps assistance)	
Deeper Analysis: Overarching Issues and Concerns across the Educational Journey .	19
Overall Conclusions	20
Main Report.	21
Introduction	22
Goals & Possible Outcomes	22
Report Contents	
Section I: Focus Group Analyses, Results, & Conclusions.	24
Overall Methodology	24
Analyses & Results	24
Focus Group: Recruitment methods	
Focus Group: Analysis & Results ^{1,2}	
Focus Group: Pillar 1 (Perceptions of support services that “clarify the path”)	
Focus Group: Pillar 1 (What else should be done to “clarify the path?”)	
Focus Group: Pillar 2 (Perceptions of support services that help students “enter the path”)	
Focus Group: Pillar 2 (What else should be done to help students “enter the path?”)	
Focus Group: Pillar 3 (Perceptions of support services that help students “stay on the path”)	
Focus Group: Pillar 3 (What else should be done to help students “stay on the path?”)	
Focus Group: Pillar 4 (Perceptions of support services that “ensure learning”)	
Focus Group: Summary & Conclusions	
Section II: Sorting Task Analysis, Results, & Conclusions.	31
Sorting Task	31
Sorting task: Results	
Sorting task: Summary & Conclusions	

Section III: Online Survey Analyses, Results, & Conclusions . 35

Online Survey 35

- Online Survey: Recruitment methods & Demographics*
- Online Survey: Analyses & Results²*
- Online Survey: Pillar 1 (Clarifying the path: Entry information)*
- Online Survey: Pillar 2 (Entering the path: Selecting a degree/major)*
- Online Survey: Pillar 2 (Entering the path: Obstacles)*
- Online Survey: Pillar 3 (Staying on the path: Obstacles)*
- Online Survey: Pillar 4 (Ensuring learning: Assessment & next steps)*
- Online Survey: Summaries, conclusions, & recommendations²*
- Summary: Pillar 1 (Clarifying the path: Entry information)*
- Summary: Pillar 2 (Entering the path: Selecting a degree/major & obstacles)*
- Summary: Pillar 3 (Staying on the path: Obstacles)*
- Summary: Pillar 4 (Ensuring learning: Assessment & next steps)*

**Section IV: Overall Conclusions & Recommendations
(Focus groups & online survey) 63**

- Conclusions: Pillar 1 (Clarifying the path: Entry information)*
- Conclusions: Pillar 2 (Entering the path: Selecting a degree/major)*
- Conclusions: Pillar 3 (Staying on the path)*
- Conclusions: Pillar 4 (Ensuring learning: Assessment & next steps)*
- Conclusions: Overarching issues and concerns across the educational journey*
- Vision for Success: Systemic challenges*
- Vision for Success: Overarching goals*
- Vision for Success: Core commitments*
- Illustrative example: Linking to the individual phone interview results*
- Phone interviews: Barriers and obstacles for failing to enroll*
- Phone interviews: Recommendations for change (Links to Guided Pathways
pillars & Vision for Success goals)*
- Concluding Comments*

Section V: Supporting Material (Footnotes & Apendices) . . 74

Footnotes 74

- Appendix A*
- Appendix B*
- Appendix C*
- Appendix D*
- Appendix E*
- Appendix F*
- Appendix G*
- Appendix H*
- Appendix I*
- Appendix J*
- Appendix K*
- Appendix L*
- Appendix M*
- Appendix N*
- Appendix O*
- Appendix P*
- Appendix Q*



Executive Summary & Research Brief

Introduction

College of the Desert sought to gather student input to assess the extent to which current support services were accessible and effective in helping students progress toward degree completion and/or transfer to a four year university. Using the Guided Pathways framework, degree progress was operationalized as an “educational journey” and parsed into four distinct stages (or “pillars” as outlined by Guided Pathways) that demarcate critical milestones of progress, including:

- A. **Clarifying the path** (information and support needed to apply and to enroll);
- B. **Entering the path** (information and support needed to select a degree and/or a major);
- C. **Staying on the path** (information and support needed to move toward completion); and
- D. **Ensuring learning** (information and support needed to assess the extent to which students have acquired the knowledge and skills necessary for their “next steps,” typically transfer and/or job/career placement).

The parsing of progress (i.e., the educational journey) into distinct stages served to structure the discussions with students and facilitated examination into how specific support services are linked to each stage of the educational journey.

As a result, the main component of this research effort was to gather student perceptions, opinions, and experiences with support services via focus groups and an online survey to provide insights into what should or could be done to create, enhance, and/or change support services to promote student success at each stage of the educational journey. Two additional and related components of this research effort included gathering information about “meta-majors” by asking students in the focus groups to sort a list of majors into similar piles to understand how to group them for presentation (see “*College of the Desert: Identifying Meta-Majors*”) and interviewing individuals who applied but failed to enroll to understand the reasons (e.g., barriers and obstacles) why they did not enroll (see “*College of the Desert: Failure to Enroll Report*”).

Goals & Possible Outcomes

Several goals influenced the design of the project, including gaining an understanding of how students perceive and experience the educational journey at College of the Desert and examining the extent to which students perceive current support services as effective, helpful, and valuable. As a result, the findings from this project are intended to generate insights that will:

- A. Assist the college in assessing its progress toward achieving measurable outcomes regarding student support services along the four stages (pillars) of the educational journey as defined by Guided Pathways (also taking into account, to some extent, the broader issues outlined in the Visions for Success initiative such as its goals and core commitments); and
- B. Provide clarity to the college to develop, enhance, and/or transform its current student support services to meet the needs of its students more effectively; and
- C. Inform the college on how students envision “meta-majors” and how best to organize them.

In addition to the above three goals, additional outcomes from this project are likely to include insights into how to:

- A. Position Guided Pathways as an effective way to design support services that promote student progress and success;
- B. Promote student support services that are being developed, enhanced, and implemented across the college’s campuses; and
- C. Inform students and the local community that the college is committed to helping its students succeed by acquiring the knowledge and skills needed to be successful in their personal and professional lives.

Contents of the Main Report and the Executive Summary and Research Brief

The Main Report stemming from this research contains the results from the focus groups and the online survey in which students were asked to discuss or report their perceptions, opinions, and experiences with support services that aim to help them through the stages of their educational journey. Based on the results, conclusions and recommendations are advanced to help the college move forward toward meeting student needs and demand, and to show how these efforts link to the goals and core commitments outlined by the Vision for Success initiative. The Main Report also contains extensive supporting materials that provide details from the online survey regarding student perceptions, opinions, and experiences with the college's support services across the stages of the educational journey. Note: The Main Report is still in process, but is expected to be completed in early 2019.

In addition, the Main Report presents results from a sorting task performed by the focus group participants that show how the college's majors can be grouped into "meta-majors." These results are not presented in this document, but in addition to being included in the Main Report they are also presented in a separate document entitled "College of the Desert: Identifying Meta-Majors" (expected to be completed in early 2019). Finally, a fourth component of this project involved interviewing students over the phone to uncover the reasons why they applied but did not enroll. The results of this research are not included in the Main Report or in this document, but are presented in a separate document entitled "College of the Desert: Failure to Enroll Report" (expected to be completed in early 2019).

For this Executive Summary and Research Brief, the methods, findings, and conclusions from the focus groups and the online survey are condensed into critical "takeaway" points to provide an overview of the contents of the Main Report.

Brief Overview of Focus Group and Online Survey Methodologies

Protocols and question sequences for focus groups and an online survey were developed by Interact Communications and College of the Desert administrators, faculty and staff to gather student perceptions, opinions, and experiences with support services that align with the four stages of the Guided Pathways process.

Focus Group: Methods & Demographics

Recruitment for the focus groups was conducted by Interact Communications and consisted of multiple emails and calls to current students asking them to participate in one of four 60-90 minute on-campus discussions, with the promise of refreshments and a \$20 gift card for participation. Approximately 113 students responded to the emailed requests. These 113 students (who met the college's stated criteria for inclusion) were sent follow-up emails and were called to confirm attendance, with 66 confirming prior to the focus group. All of those who confirmed attendance were called a second time to verify attendance. Of the 66 who confirmed, 25 actually showed for one of the four focus group sessions. Of those who participated in the focus group discussions, most reported that they identified with Hispanic/Latino/Spanish origins (n=18; 72%), followed by White (n=6; 24%), and one student reported that she was African American/Black (n=1; 4%). There were 17 females (68%) and 8 males (32%) across the four groups. Three of the focus groups were held at the main College of the Desert campus, with groups held in both the daytime and early evening, consisting of 19 students. One of the focus groups was held at the Indio campus and consisted of six students.

Students were primed for the discussion by asking them to think about the barriers and obstacles that they experienced as they entered college and during their educational journey. The fact that Guided Pathways compartmentalizes the educational journey into four distinct stages provided an understandable platform to help students discuss the complexities of being a community college student and moving through distinct stages of the educational journey. Discussion of specific types of support services was promoted during the focus groups to examine the extent to which students were aware of and/or had direct experience with each type of support service.

Each focus group was audio recorded and transcribed into written format by a professional transcription service. The written transcripts were submitted to content analytic procedures performed by a professional researcher with several decades of experience analyzing focus group transcripts. Prior to analysis, the transcripts were segmented into the sections outlined by the four stages of Guided Pathways. Then, each transcript was carefully read and coded for themes and illustrative examples, which can be examined in the appendices presented in the *Main Report*.

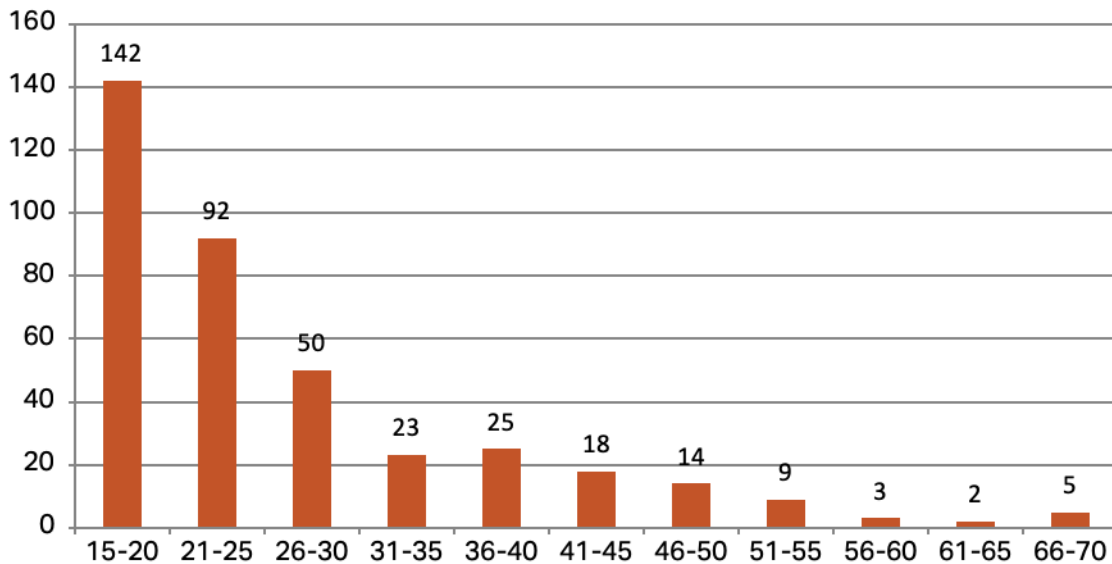
Analysis of student perceptions, opinions, and experiences with the college’s support services at each stage of the educational journey was conducted to understand the extent to which students were generally aware of existing support services, the extent to which support services were useful, and the extent to which support services needed to be revised and/or enhanced to meet student needs. The findings were aggregated across transcripts to glean overall patterns and to draw general conclusions (see the *Main Report* for additional details).

Online Survey: Methods & Demographics

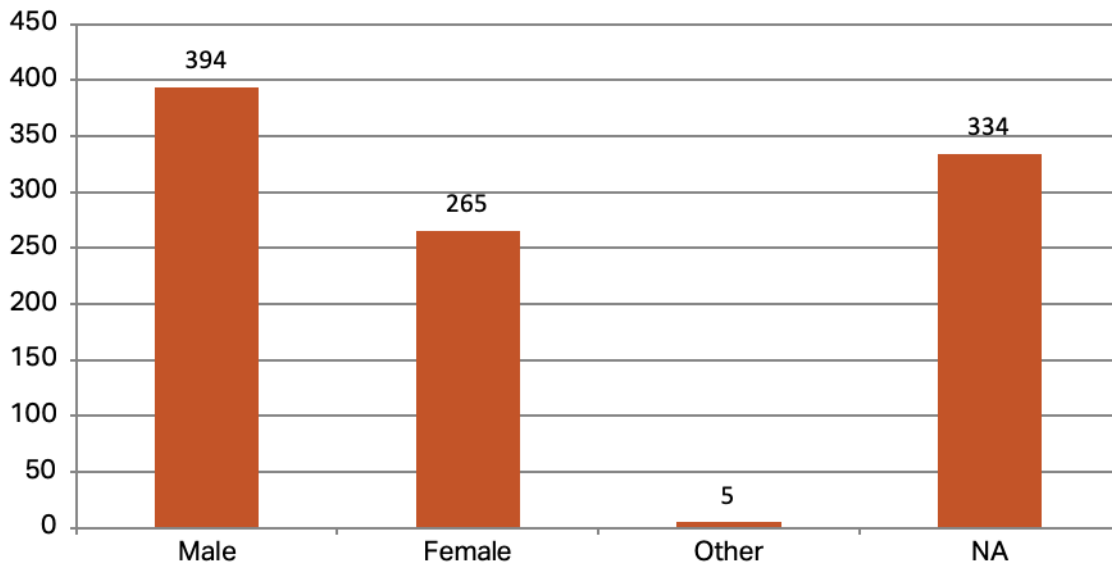
Recruitment of students for the online survey was conducted by Interact Communications and college staff. Interact sent out several emails inviting students to participate in the survey, with the possibility of receiving a \$100 gift card as an incentive (based on a random drawing of those who participated). In addition, college staff placed the link to the survey on the student portal to increase awareness and access to the survey.

As a result of the recruitment efforts, a broad set of students completed the online survey (n=998). The content and format of the survey paralleled the approach and question sequence used in the focus groups. The average age of the online participants was 27 (range 15-67), with 39% (n=394) reporting that they were male and 27% (n=265) reporting that they were female (Note: Percentages may not total 100% due to missing data). Most of the students indicated that they identified with Hispanic/Latino/Spanish origin (n=255; 25%), followed by White (n=89; 9%), Asian/Pacific Islander (n=18; 2%), and African American/Black (n=11; 1%).

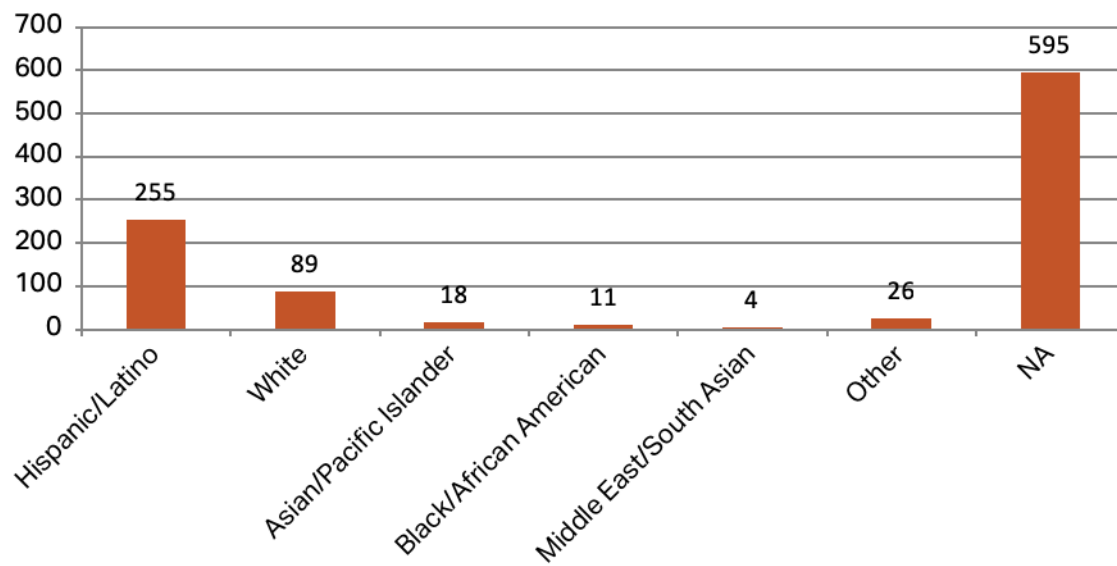
Age ranges



Gender frequencies

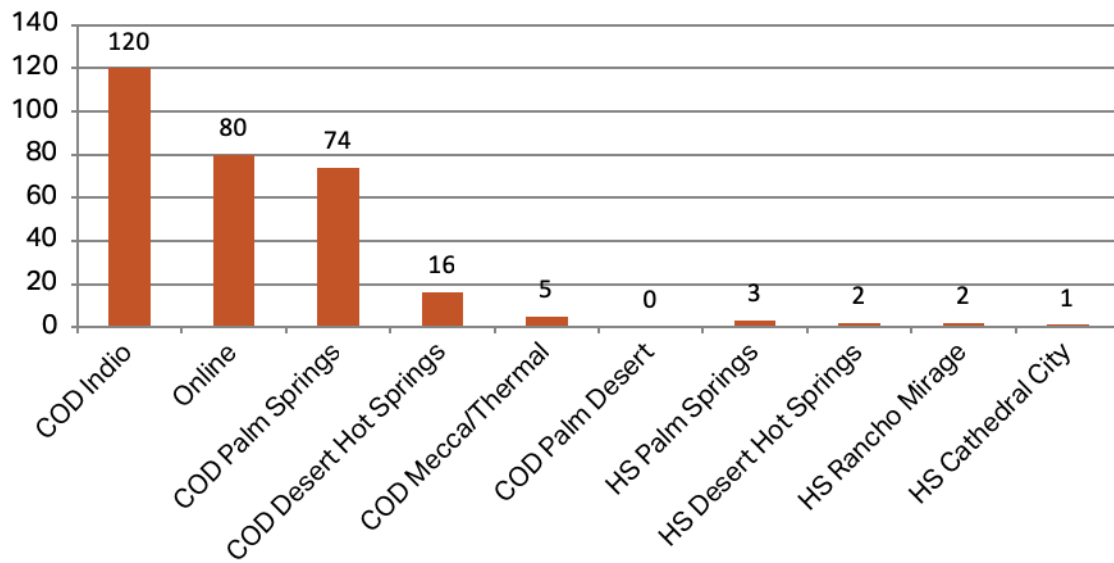


Ethnicity frequencies

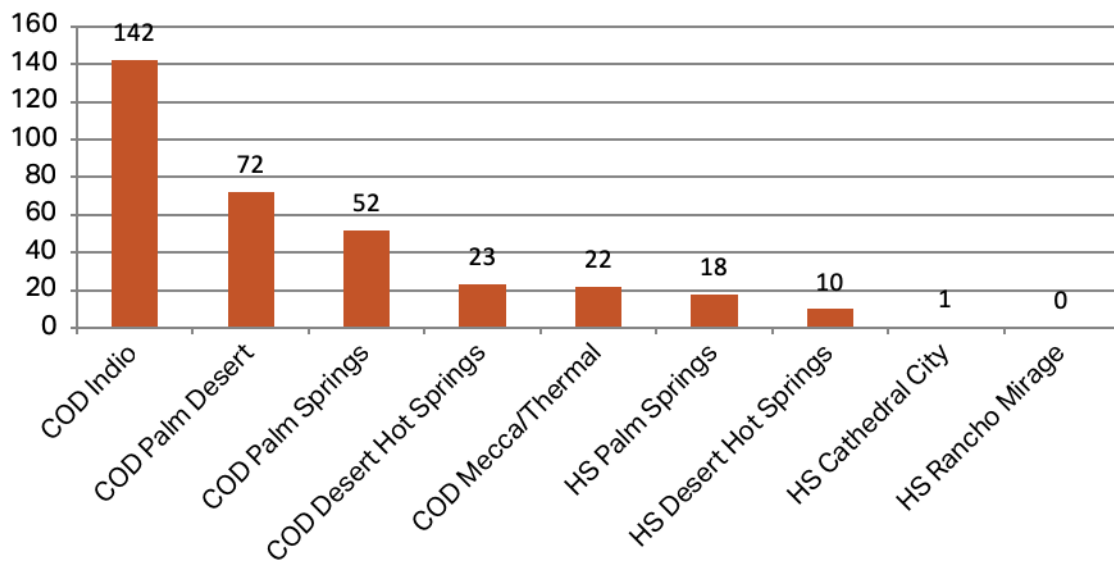


Students reported that they took classes at the following campuses:

Where take most classes?



Where have taken a class?



Similar to the focus groups, students were primed prior to answering the main questions of the online survey by asking them to think about the barriers and obstacles they experienced as they entered college and during their educational journey.

Analysis of the online data followed two separate approaches. The quantitative data were analyzed using standard statistical procedures, typically using SPSS analysis routines. The qualitative data were analyzed using similar content analytic procedures as used for the focus group data. Prior to analysis, the qualitative data needed to be standardized. Each phrase generated by the students was segmented into meaningful and non-redundant sentences and/or statements, copy-edited, and then analyzed by the same researcher who analyzed the focus group data. These standardized phrases compose many of the appendices found in the Main Report.

Given that a large and diverse set of students completed the online survey, the results are nuanced and complex. To streamline the presentation of these data, when the qualitative results are presented, only “conceptual” categories are discussed. To examine the depth and breadth of the qualitative results, readers are encouraged to consult the appendices contained in the Main Report (e.g., B through Q), where detailed and organized data tables present actual and illustrative examples of student responses.

Summary of the Findings

In this section, a brief of the main findings and conclusions across the focus groups and the online survey are presented to provide an overview of the depth, breadth, scope, and potential reach of this project.

General Overview

In general, as the focus groups progressed and as students moved through the online survey, many voiced concerns about how hard it was to get into college and to stay in college, listing significant barriers and obstacles that they had to overcome and manage before and during their educational journey (e.g., financial problems, scheduling problems, transportation problems, child care problems, personal problems, and course access and completion problems). Students articulated that these “real-world” barriers and obstacles are very difficult to navigate and to manage, and that they need substantial assistance and support from the college, the community, their family, and their friends to help solve, manage, and/or reduce barriers in order to succeed. Students also made it clear that the barriers and obstacles are ever-present and that they cause financial, social, and psychological stress, which, at times, is difficult to handle. Thus, the need for on-campus support services is warranted, sought out, and expected by students.

Despite the significant barriers and obstacles that students encounter, the majority (as reflected in the online survey and to some extent in the focus group discussions) report that they received *substantial and effective assistance and guidance* from various staff at College of the Desert, when assistance was sought. Students specifically mentioned the counselors, instructors, professors, and program staff (many by name) as being particularly helpful in bringing them along their educational journey. So, for the majority, the existing counseling, advising, and guidance procedures and processes are working *as intended, as designed, and are effective* (these findings are detailed in depth in the Main Report).

That said, as students worked their way through the focus group discussions and the online survey, specific issues and concerns surfaced. It is within these sections of the focus groups and the online survey where important insights are found regarding what may need to be addressed and/or changed to meet the demands of students who may need additional and/or specialized counseling, assistance, and/or guidance. This issue becomes especially important given the fact that many students reported in the online survey (and to some extent in the focus groups) that they do not rely on college support services and “prefer” or “choose” (for a variety of reasons) to manage the impediments that they encounter on their own, which in some cases leads to significant delays in degree progress and/or dropping out of college (see “Pillar 3: Staying on the Path” of the *Main Report* for details). Thus, these results are of special significance and are highlighted, unpacked, and examined in the following sections of this report.

Specific Findings

Next, specific findings from the focus groups and the online survey are presented, organized along the four stages (“pillars”) that comprise the Guided Pathways framework. Readers are encouraged to read the Main Report for additional details and to consult its appendices for extensive illustrative examples. A note of caution: presentation of the qualitative results across the focus groups and the online survey is without ascription of importance tied to any of the categories that compose the typologies. The categories of each typology are listed “as is” to give the readers a broad sense of the depth and breadth of student responses, without imposing an order or significance to each. Some of the categories are composed of dozens of student responses, while some are composed of just a few. The reader is encouraged to examine the appendices in the Main Report to come to a judgment of significance and/or importance for each category.

Pillar 1: Clarifying the path (application and enrollment assistance)

In this section, students were asked to recall their perceptions and experiences as they sought information about the college. Most students reported in the online survey that they found the college’s website helpful (89%) and valuable (95%) and these sentiments were generally mirrored in the focus groups. In addition, most students (89%) reported in the online survey that they also found the college’s printed schedule/catalog useful to find information about the college and course schedules and these sentiments were generally mirrored by the focus group participants. In fact, the following results illustrate the extent to which students found the website and printed catalog of value:

Focus group results
Website benefits <ul style="list-style-type: none">-Students liked the convenience of 24/7 access to college information, specifically highlighting the Web-Advisor, online course catalog, and other functions embedded in the website as useful and valuable.-Students mentioned that the college website is a comprehensive resource that they can rely on for information and guidance.
Course catalog benefits <ul style="list-style-type: none">-Students appreciated the course catalog and relied on it to find information about courses.-Students found the printed catalog in particular useful because they did not need to be online to access course information, highlighting the course summary information as especially valuable.
Online survey results
Helpful aspects of the website <ul style="list-style-type: none">-Easy to use and saves time-Provides answers to questions, clarifies issues and concerns, and reduces uncertainty-Provides access to essential services-Serves as a central hub for campus events and activities
Useful aspects of the printed schedule/catalogue <ul style="list-style-type: none">-Easy to use, convenient, saves time, and well organized-Use as a planning tool/workbook to organize and schedule classes-Tactile preference (like books)-Informative and comprehensive resource for courses and campus events-Use as a common and shared resource

These results show that these communication assets are working as intended for the majority of students who participated in this research.

However, as the students elaborated on these communication assets during the focus group discussions and in the online survey and recalled their specific experiences more clearly, they reported that they had issues and concerns. These included how the college communicates with students in general and how the college sets up the website and printed schedule/catalogue specifically, that, if addressed, may make communicating with students at this stage of the educational journey more effective:

Focus group results
Website limitations -Students expressed concerns that the website may not be up to date regarding degree requirements, specifically stating that they thought that some of the information was incorrect.
Course catalogue limitations -Students stated that they were concerned by the potential that the information contained in the course catalogue may not be up to date and/or accurate at the levels that they expected (or wanted and needed) to make informed decisions about classes. For example, extensive discussion surrounding use of the term “staff” in the catalogue to designate teaching assignments suggested that students did not appreciate or desire use of this term. The students expressed concern over seeing the term “staff” because they had no way of knowing how difficult the class may be or what to expect without knowledge of who was teaching the class.
Online results
Unhelpful aspects of the website -Not easy or clear to use -Not comprehensive -Not up to date
Not useful aspects of the printed schedule/catalogue -Not up to date -Confusing -Inconvenient, redundant, or not needed -Not known about

These results suggest that as the students recalled the specifics of their experiences with these aspects of the college, certain issues and concerns that they hold came to surface. The results presented above are generalized to streamline the contents of this report. Detailed information about these issues can be found in the appendices of the Main Report.

Across the focus groups and the online survey, students reported that they held the following issues and concerns relevant to clarifying the path, and that addressing these issues and concerns would help them to make progress toward degree completion:

A. Be proactive, engaged, and timely when communicating with students

1. Implication/recommendation: Implement more and regular notifications to students about events, courses, degree/major requirements, and transfer information.
2. Implication/recommendation: Implement a campus-wide effort to promote use of Canvas among part-time instructors and full-time faculty.

3. Implication/recommendation: Encourage instructors and professors to respond to student messages (typically via email) in a timely manner.

B. Ensure that communication (specifically public information) is accurate, clear, complete, and comprehensive

1. Website: The students reported that the website was working well. However, a few concerns were reported, including perceptions that some sections are not comprehensive and incomplete.
 - a. Implication/recommendation: Identify the sections of the website that students find not comprehensive and incomplete and redesign them using student input.
2. Printed schedule/catalogue: The students reported that they valued the printed schedule/catalogue. However, a few concerns were reported, including perceptions that certain sections are difficult to understand, confusing, and/or not clear.
 - a. Implication/recommendation: Identify the sections of the printed schedule/catalogue that students find difficult and confusing and redesign them with student input.

Keeping in mind that the students who participated in the focus groups and the online survey were currently enrolled at College of the Desert and were asked to recall their experiences during the application and enrollment stages and likely held differing views of what constituted “clarifying the path” (despite the fact that they were given a definition to use to respond to this set of questions), it is likely that some of their responses are conflated with later stages of the educational journey. Nonetheless, the results provide clarity in terms of what specific aspects of student support offerings could be targeted for change, as listed above.

Pillar 2: Entering the path (degree and/or major selection assistance)

In this section, students were asked to recall their perceptions and experiences as they decided which degree and/or major to select. Given that all of the students that participated in this research were currently enrolled, their perceptions and experiences were top of mind and current.

Slightly more than half (52%) of the students who responded to the online survey reported that they had sought and received assistance from college staff in selecting a degree and/or a major and that they found that assistance to be valuable, relevant, and up to date, suggesting that the counseling and guidance services work well for many students at this stage of the educational journey. However, nearly half (48%) of the students who responded to the online survey (and several from the focus groups) reported that the college did not help them select a degree and/or a major and one-third (33%) reported experiencing impediments that made selecting a degree and/or a major difficult. These results were generally mirrored during the focus group discussions. The following results illustrate the types of impediments that students recalled in the focus groups and in the online survey (see the Main Report for more detail):

<p>Focus group results</p> <p>Counseling, advising, and staff issues</p> <p>Several issues and concerns surfaced during the focus group discussions that illustrated frustration over how students are advised by counseling staff:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Some students stated that they receive inconsistent and, at times, incorrect and/or out of date information from counseling staff. -Some students expressed concerns over information that they have actually received that was not correct and they were not certain who to talk to help them proceed (e.g., about courses, majors, degree requirements, and transfer procedures). -Some students stated that they are often indecisive and somewhat confused at this point in their journey (e.g., not certain about majors and which classes to take), so they must rely on counseling staff to help them, making accurate and consistent information important, highlighting the need to trust counseling staff, and making access to counseling staff critical. -Some students expressed concerns over temporary instructors and their potential to be less engaged, not willing to help them, and being inconsistent when designing courses and setting course requirements (e.g., some may not teach necessary skills needed for upcoming courses).
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<p>Online results</p> <p><i>Personal and psychological issues and/or life circumstances</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Difficulty choosing a major or career due to indecision -Lack understanding and/or skills to meet course requirements/expectations -Lack of finances/financial difficulties -Life circumstances made it hard to complete course/major requirements <p><i>Advice and guidance issues</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Difficulty meeting with and/or receiving assistance from a counselor -Received incorrect, misleading, or discouraging information from a counselor and/or a staff member <p><i>Course enrollment and major requirement issues</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Courses not offered or not able to get into required courses -Excessive and/or difficult requirements/prerequisites for major -Not clear on course and/or major requirements

Thus, for a significant number of students, additional and specialized assistance may be needed to help them select a degree and/or major.

Students who participated in the focus groups and the online survey reported that they held the following issues and concerns relevant to entering the path, and that addressing these issues and concerns would help them to make progress toward degree completion:

A. Show that college staff is proactive and engaged

1. Implication/recommendation: Establish an outreach program that brings counselors to the classrooms to answer student questions and set up appointments with counselors.
2. Implication/recommendation: Establish dates for students to visit counselors on a regular basis.

B. Provide ongoing, regular training and evaluation for staff

1. Implication/recommendation: Assess course requirements across semesters and years to ensure that they are meeting minimum standards and teaching students necessary skills to prepare them for the next steps in their programs.
2. Implication/recommendation: Establish additional counseling staff training to enhance “on the ground” strategies to streamline the workload and to help students who experience difficulties in selecting a degree and/or a major.
3. Implication/recommendation: Provide ongoing training for counselors so that they are up to date on course, major, degree, and transfer information.

C. Ensure that communication (specifically course information) is accurate, clear, complete, and comprehensive

1. Implication/recommendation: Establish a communication program that informs students of the general nature and parameters of each class that outlines:
 - a. what is typically taught in that class
 - b. what to expect from each class in terms of workload
 - c. how the class fits into a degree program and/or major

D. Develop and/or promote assistance programs that help students select a degree and/or major

1. Implication/recommendation: Identify and promote existing programs, communication channels, and processes that help students select a degree and/or a major.
2. Implication/recommendation: Develop and promote new programs, communication channels, and processes that help students who have difficulties selecting a degree and/or a major to select a degree and/or a major.

Pillar 3: Staying on the path (degree and/or program completion assistance)

In this section, students were asked to recall their perceptions and experiences as they made progress toward degree completion, specifically discussing the impediments that they have encountered that threatened their ability to stay in college. Given that all of the students who participated in this research were currently enrolled, their perceptions and experiences were top of mind and current.

The majority of students (76%) responding to the online survey reported that they found College of the Desert counseling and assistance to be effective in helping them stay on the path, suggesting that existing student support services work well and that these services perform vital functions for students at this stage of their educational journey (these findings were not mirrored in the focus groups as strongly). However, for a significant number of students, additional assistance is needed, which was detailed by the students in the focus groups and in the online survey. The following results illustrate the impediments that students encounter at this stage of the educational journey:

<p>Focus group results</p> <p><i>Counseling/advising staff and program limitations</i></p> <p>-Students made note of the fact that the counseling office is “overloaded” and under-staffed. They stated that the counseling staff is overwhelmed, too busy, and difficult to see (wait times are too long).</p> <p>-Students stated that the counseling staff sometimes gives them incorrect information regarding degree completion and/or transfer procedures and next steps, which affected their degree progress (Note: discussion did not reveal the extent to which these issues are true and/or valid, but students were clear and articulate about these issues during the focus groups).</p> <p>-Students made it clear that they receive inconsistent information, stating that they get different advice from different counselors. Students discussed the need for the counseling center to offer evening office hours so working adults could access these services.</p> <p>-Students recommended that the college needs to develop and offer online support services. Students stated that this type of option would be valuable for “quick questions.”</p>

Online results

Assistance is not working

- Assistance is not available, difficult, and/or inaccessible
- Assistance is not effective and/or confusing
- Staff is not able to solve issues
- Inadequate resources
- No assistance has been offered, provided, and/or sought

Students who participated in the focus groups and online survey reported that they held the following issues and concerns relevant to staying on the path, and that addressing these issues and concerns would help them to make progress toward degree completion:

A. Develop and offer additional support services with flexible, accessible options

1. Implication/recommendation: Develop and offer online support services.
2. Implication/recommendation: Counseling staff need to document degree and major requirements/changes and make them easily accessible for students for reference and advising.
3. Implication/recommendation: Ensure that adequate counseling staff is available to meet student demand.
4. Implication/recommendation: Add counseling staff to address student-specific special needs.

B. Promote support services more frequently and broadly

1. Background: Many students (67%) reported in the online survey that they have not received assistance from the college to help them stay in college, stating that they relied on themselves to solve their difficulties. This suggests that many students perceive that they are on their own to deal with the impediments that threaten their ability to stay in college.
2. Background research (part 1): Comparison of the “entering and selecting a degree/major” stage to the “staying on the path” stage shows that significantly more students experience obstacles at the “staying on the path” stage than during the “entering and selecting a degree/major” stage (see the Main Report for details). This result reveals that the educational journey gets more difficult as students move closer to degree completion, eventually forcing them to rely more heavily on support services or, if they find the support services lacking, tough it out on their own, making them vulnerable to delay and/or dropping out.
2. Background research (part 2): Comparison of the “entering and selecting a degree/major” stage to the “staying on the path” stage also shows that students tend to receive less help from college support services in the “staying on the path” stage compared to the “entering and selecting a degree/major” stage (see the Main Report for details). This result reveals that the educational journey gets less supportive as students move closer to degree completion, suggesting that vulnerable students will rely less on support services to manage the impediments and threats that they encounter at this stage of their educational journey.
3. Implication/recommendation: Promote a student culture that seeks out support and assistance and believes that seeking out and receiving support and assistance are acceptable and, to some extent, expected behaviors.

Overall, these results suggest that access to and availability of counseling, and increased efforts to reach out to students, may be needed to address the difficulties that students experience at this stage in their educational journey. In addition, changes within the student population that make seeking assistance acceptable may be needed to solve and/or reduce the difficulties that students experience at this stage in their educational journey, especially in light of the findings that as students move through the stages of their educational journey they encounter more challenges and impediments and receive less support and assistance (for a variety of reasons).

Pillar 4: Ensuring learning (assessment & next steps assistance)

In this section, students were asked to recall their perceptions and experiences as they move toward degree completion and/or “next steps,” specifically addressing the issues and concerns that they have, or may have, as they prepare to take those next steps. Given that all of the students who participated in this research were currently enrolled, with many progressing toward and/or thinking about their next steps, their perceptions and experiences were top of mind and current.

The majority of the students (83%) responding to the online survey reported that they were prepared for the next steps in their educational journeys, recounting that they are confident that they have acquired the knowledge and skills necessary for transfer and/or a job, have received effective support and guidance, and have developed the confidence to “move on” to a four-year university, graduate, or into a job (these findings were generally mirrored in the focus groups). However, for some students, additional assistance is needed. As the focus group discussion progressed and as students responded to the sequence of prompts in the online survey a variety of perceptions and opinions surfaced.

Students who participated in the focus groups and online survey reported that they held the following issues and concerns relevant to ensure learning, and that addressing these issues and concerns would help them to make progress toward degree completion and move to the next phases of their lives:

A. Train counseling staff so that they are up to date and accurate with transfer information

1. Students reported that it is difficult to get accurate and up-to-date information on transfer paths and degree requirements from counselors (see Main Report for additional details).

B. Provide student-centered/student-specific counseling, assistance, and guidance

1. Students reported that counselors seem to have a “standardized script” that students must follow to complete a degree and/or a major across all programs, which suggests that there is a lack of individualized, student-specific counseling. However, for students who feel unprepared, uncertain, and confused, preparation for the next step is difficult. These students reported that they were having difficulty making progress toward their degree.
2. Implication/recommendation: It may be beneficial to re-conceptualize, to some extent, how student support services are delivered at this point in the educational journey and incorporate more specialized wrap-around services (e.g., social services and psychological counseling assistance) to help students who have become sidelined, left behind, and or disenfranchised by their life circumstances and/or by their experiences with the educational process, including their experiences with the current system of support.

Insight into this process is provided by the focus groups and the online survey, in which some students expressed disillusionment and dejection with the current support system, resulting in educational delays, some significantly altering their educational plan when faced with impediments that they were not able to manage (see section “Pillar 4: Ensuring Learning” of the Main Report for details).

Thus, for some students, the current system of support just does not work, suggesting that it may need to be fine-tuned to capture those who fall behind, become disenfranchised, and need specialized support to complete their educational journey. Developing a specialized counseling unit to address the special needs and circumstances of specific students at this stage of their educational journey may be beneficial.

C. A few additional ideas (recommendations) were provided by some of the students across the focus groups and in the online survey:

1. Offer additional hours of on-campus counseling and guidance for working adults
2. Add licensed social services and psychological counselors to the menu of counseling services
3. Start a counseling unit that targets and reaches out to students who have expressed difficulties or have dropped out to help them overcome the impediments that are affecting their degree progress
4. Organize a forum for students, faculty, and staff to share their experiences and concerns about what has worked well, what hasn’t worked well, and what the next steps are for counseling and guidance for this stage of the educational journey

In addition to assistance and support services, students were also asked about aspects of curriculum design as another way to assess if they are prepared for their next steps, specifically along the lines of having the knowledge and skills that may be needed to take the next steps such as transfer or job placement. Students were asked to comment specifically on sequenced courses and General Education (Gen Ed) courses at the college.

In terms of sequenced courses, most students reported in the online survey that sequenced courses were helpful (88%) and valuable (85%); similar sentiments were reported in the focus groups. Overall, students generally see the value in these types of courses in terms of providing a step-by-step process to acquire knowledge about subject-matters, degrees, and majors, and developing an understanding of and/or insights into degree requirements and paths for goal and degree completion (see Main Report for additional details).

The focus group participants reported that sequenced courses were difficult to get into, so they “crashed” them, hoping that a seat would open so they could enroll officially. This issue led to discussions of priority registration in terms of its effect on availability to enroll in sequenced courses and its effect on delaying degree progress. Students also mentioned that due to the requirement of sequenced courses, courses tend to fill up during the day and that more evening and/or online courses need to be offered to accommodate working adults and/or single parents. A few students in the online survey reported that sequenced courses were difficult to complete.

In terms of Gen Ed courses, most students reported in the online survey that the Gen Ed courses were helpful (77%) and valuable (76%), providing basic training, a refresher, and preparation for upcoming courses for those who needed that level of education (the focus group participants made similar comments). Many students in the focus groups and in the online survey stated that if they thought that they did not need basic training, a refresher, or additional preparation, taking Gen Ed courses was not desired. Under these conditions, students perceived the Gen Ed courses as a waste of time and resources, and redundant/not necessary (see Main Report for additional details). Due to the potential burdens that the Gen Ed courses may pose for students, some reported in the online survey that they dropped out of college for a period and/or delayed their progress due, in part, to the Gen Ed requirements. Across the focus groups and in the online survey, some students reported that they think that there are too many Gen Ed requirements and that degree and major programs lack options to avoid Gen Ed courses. In addition, students expressed concern over the fact that due to Gen Ed courses being required, they tend to fill up during the day, making it hard to enroll in them and make degree progress.

These results suggest that the following curriculum issues may need to be considered:

1. Sequenced courses

- a. Implication/recommendation: Sequenced courses are natural paths to understanding and building knowledge and skills. Offering more options for students to enroll such as in the evenings, on the weekends, or offering more sections during the semester may be necessary.

2. Gen Ed courses

- a. Implication/recommendation: Given that many of these courses are required, and in many cases necessary to prepare students for the next levels of a degree and/or major, offering more options for students to enroll such as in the evenings, on the weekends, or offering more sections during the semester and/or online options may be necessary to accommodate working adults and/or single parents.
- b. Implication/recommendation: Additional and/or more extensive/accurate screening and/or prerequisite changes should be considered to help avoid students becoming bored, irritated, and/or dropping out by being required to take Gen Ed courses that they feel are not necessary and/or are not relevant to their degree and/or major.
- c. Implication/recommendation: Remove and/or reduce some of the Gen Ed requirements from the curriculum for certain degree programs.

Deeper Analysis: Overarching Issues and Concerns across the Educational Journey

In addition to the findings and conclusions presented above, a deeper analysis of the data revealed several overarching, fundamental issues and concerns that cut across all of the stages of the educational journey.

As described above, across the focus groups and in the online survey, those who reported that they were not being guided properly by the college counseling staff also reported that they needed more “wrap-around” assistance to help them, including more counseling, guidance, assistance, and to some extent, additional social services such as help with specific life issues and circumstances like psychological counseling and support. These students report that they feel disillusioned and dejected, which causes them to drop out and/or delay their educational journey (these sentiments were generally mirrored during the focus group discussions). Synthesis of these results shows that most of these issues and concerns can be captured by the following list (see Main Report for additional details):

- A. Lack of communication
- B. Lack of coordination
- C. Lack of an interrelated, coherent system of support(s)
- D. Lack of up-to-date information (including receiving inconsistent and incorrect advice and information, especially from counselors)
- E. Lack of informed and available staff (especially counselors)
- F. Lack of (or lack of use of) automated systems that monitor student progress and send out reminders for them to take specific action to stay on track (especially in terms of faculty using Canvas for course management and counselors using technology to schedule appointments with students)
- G. Lack of flexibility in meeting non-traditional students’ needs (e.g., working adults, single parents)

The list of issues and concerns presented above can be further synthesized into three overarching principles that represent core, fundamental issues and concerns that students hold across all four stages of their educational journey, that if addressed, would help to solve many of the issues and concerns listed above:

- A. The inaccessibility and lack of availability of services that make it difficult for students to receive apt, accurate, and timely advice and guidance from support staff (e.g., inconvenient hours, lack of counseling staff);
- B. The lack of communication, training, and coordination of staff that confuses students and causes them to spend more time and money taking classes that may not be relevant; and
- C. The lack of proactive/active engagement of staff that for some students lead to perceptions that the support staff do not care about students and/or do not perceive students as “critical clients” (in the sense of the central tenets of Guided Pathways, the fundamental mission of community colleges, and the core commitments outlined by the Vision for Success initiative) who should be treated with empathy, respect, and patience, and be guided, counseled, and advised with state-of-the-art knowledge and techniques to ensure that they are moving along their educational paths with diligence and confidence.

These three core issues seem to follow students across all stages of the educational journey, presenting impediments (obstacles and barriers) at every stage. Not to say that these are the only impediments that students encounter—there are a host of others (e.g., environmental, personal, and social factors), including regional equity gaps, student-level equity gaps, lack of motivation and interest, life circumstances, and difficult work schedules (to name a few). However, the three core issues listed above are solvable and reside within the executive, administrative, staff, and faculty cultures of the college. Small actions taken to make changes in these three core issues, across time, will add up to culture-level transformations.

Overall Conclusions

Synthesis of the results presented above suggests that the following conclusions can be drawn:

- A. Overall, the results show that for the majority of College of the Desert students, the current system of assistance, support, and guidance is working well (as intended and as designed) across the four stages of the educational journey. Many students expressed appreciation for the counseling staff, the professors/instructors, the program staff, and others who have helped them navigate the barriers and obstacles that impede, or may impede, their degree progress. For these students, the educational journey should end in them being able to move to the next phases of their lives (e.g., transfer or job placement).
- B. However, for a subset of College of the Desert students, the educational journey is less smooth and guided. Many students reported that they experience obstacles and barriers that impede, or may impede, their degree progress, including administrative problems, personal problems, social/family problems, financial problems, etc. For a variety of reasons, for some of these students the extensive support services and programs provided by College of the Desert (and others outside of the college such as family and friends) just do not work or are ineffective. These are the students who need assistance, and these are the students who need to be embraced more fully to help them along their educational journey. Setting in place assistance and support programs that identify and track these students, and that are proactive and engaged, should go a long way in terms of keeping them “on the path” and progressing through their educational journey.
- C. This research also shows that across the stages of the educational journey, specific types of barriers and obstacles surface for students, as listed above and in the Main Report in detail. A set of these barriers and obstacles seem to cut across all of the stages of the educational journey, including inaccessibility and lack of availability of services, lack of communication, training, and coordination of college staff, and lack of proactive/active engagement of college staff. It is difficult to determine the extent to which these issues are valid at College of the Desert, but the triangulation of evidence across the focus groups and online survey suggest that these three issues are real concerns that affect students.
- D. There are many ways to make changes that will help those students who need more assistance and guidance during their educational journey. One way is to offer more student-centered assistance that provides options for the specific issues that specific students may be experiencing. A second way is to be proactive and engaged and reach out to students who have demonstrated problems to keep them on track and moving forward. A third way is to change the life circumstances of these students so that they are less likely to encounter impediments during their educational journey (as outlined in the Vision for Success initiative in terms of regional and student-level equity gaps). What binds these approaches together is the notion that students are “critical clients” (see above) who should be treated with empathy, respect, and patience, and be guided, counseled, and advised with state-of-the-art knowledge and techniques to ensure that they move along their educational paths with diligence and confidence. Thus, adopting this central tenet should prove to be effective to make the fundamental changes that may be needed to assist and guide those students who need assistance and guidance along their educational journeys.

Main Report

Introduction

College of the Desert (COD) sought to gather student input to assess the extent to which support services were accessible and effective in helping students make progress toward degree completion. Using the *Guided Pathways* framework, degree progress was operationalized as an “educational journey” and parsed into four distinct stages (or “pillars” as outlined by *Guided Pathways*) that demarcate critical milestones of progress:

- A. *Clarifying the path*: Information and support needed to apply and to enroll;
- B. *Entering the path*: Information and support needed to select a degree and/or a major;
- C. *Staying on the path*: Information and support needed to move toward completion; and
- D. *Ensuring learning*: Information and support needed to assess the extent to which students have acquired the knowledge and skills necessary for their “next steps,” typically transfer and/or job/career placement.

The parsing of degree progress into distinct stages structured the discussions with students and facilitated examination into how support services are linked to each stage of the educational journey. As a result, student perceptions, opinions, and experiences with support services were collected via focus groups and an online survey to provide insights into what should or could be done to create, enhance, and/or change support services to promote student success and degree completion.

Goals & Possible Outcomes

Several goals influenced the design of this project, including gaining an understanding of how students perceive and experience the educational journey at COD and examining the extent to which students perceive current support services as effective, helpful, and valuable. As a result, the findings from this project are intended to generate insights that will:

- A. Assist the college in assessing its progress toward achieving measurable outcomes regarding student support services along the four stages (“pillars”) of the educational journey as defined by *Guided Pathways* (also taking into account, to some extent, the broader issues outlined in the *Visions for Success* initiative such as its goals and core commitments);
- B. Provide clarity to the college to develop, enhance, and/or transform its current student support services to meet the needs of its students more effectively; and
- C. Inform the college on how students envision “meta-majors” and how best to organize them.

In addition to the above three goals, additional outcomes from this project are likely to include insights into how to:

- A. Position *Guided Pathways* as an effective way to design support services that promote student progress and success;
- B. Promote student support services that are being developed, enhanced, and implemented across the college’s campuses; and
- C. Inform students and the local community that the college is committed to helping its students succeed by acquiring the knowledge and skills needed to be successful in their personal and professional lives.

Report Contents

This report contains five sections that detail the major components and results of this project:

- A. The *first* section analyzes and interprets the results from four targeted focus groups conducted with current COD students. Students in the focus groups were asked to discuss their perceptions, opinions, and experiences with support services that aim to help them through their educational journey;
- B. The *second* section analyzes and interprets results from a card sorting task completed by COD students to identify “meta-majors.” Students were asked to sort a deck of cards with majors printed on them into similar piles to understand how students group majors into their “natural” groupings to facilitate presentation of majors on the COD website;
- C. The *third* section analyzes and interprets the results from a large online survey conducted with current COD students. The online survey paralleled the focus group question sequence, asking students to provide their perceptions, opinions, and experiences with support services that aim to help them through their educational journey;
- D. The *fourth* section presents overall conclusions for the focus groups and online surveys. Based on the results, conclusions and recommendations are advanced to help the college move forward toward meeting student needs and demand, and to show how these efforts link to the goals and core commitments outlined by the Vision for Success initiative; and
- E. The *fifth* section contains supporting materials, including footnotes and extensive appendices, where detailed demographics and typologies can be found that provide in-depth details of the results presented in prior sections.

Section I: Focus Group Analyses, Results, & Conclusions

Overall Methodology

Protocols and question sequences for focus groups and an online survey were developed by Interact Communications and COD staff to gather student perceptions and opinions of, and experiences with, support services that align with the four stages of the *Guided Pathways* process.

Analyses & Results

Focus Group: Recruitment methods

Recruitment for the focus groups consisted of targeting current students and asking them to participate in one of four 60-90 minute on-campus discussions, with the promise of refreshments and a \$20 gift card for participation. Several emails were sent to students to solicit interest. Approximately 113 students responded to the email solicitations. These 113 students (who met the college's stated criteria for inclusion) were sent follow-up emails and were called to confirm focus group attendance, with 66 confirming prior to the focus group. All of those who confirmed attendance were called a second time to verify attendance. Of the 66 who confirmed, 25 actually showed for one of the focus group sessions. Three of the focus groups were held at the main COD campus, with groups held in both the daytime and early evening, and consisted of 19 students. One of the focus groups was held at the Indio campus and consisted of six students. Basic demographics for the focus groups follow:

- A. 18 (72%) students indicated that they were Hispanic/Latino;
- B. 6 (24%) students indicated that they were white;
- C. 1 (4%) student indicated that she was African American/black; and
- D. 17 (68%) were females; 8 (32%) were males.

Focus Group: Analysis & Results^{1,2}

Each focus group was audio recorded and then transcribed into written format by a professional transcription service. The written transcripts were submitted to content analytic procedures performed by a professional researcher with several decades of experience analyzing focus group transcripts.

Prior to analysis, the transcripts were segmented into the sections outlined by the four pillars of *Guided Pathways* (clarifying the path, entering the path, staying on the path, ensuring learning). Then, each transcript was carefully read and coded for themes and illustrative examples. Analysis of student perceptions and opinions of, and experiences with, COD's support services at each stage in the educational journey was conducted to understand the extent to which students were generally aware of existing support services, the extent to which support services were useful, and the extent to which support services needed to be revised and/or enhanced to meet student needs. The findings were aggregated across transcripts to glean overall patterns and to draw general conclusions.

Students were primed for the focus group discussions by asking them to think about the barriers and obstacles that they experienced as they entered college and during their educational journey. The fact that *Guided Pathways* compartmentalizes the educational journey into four distinct stages provided an understandable platform to help students discuss the complexities of being a community college student and moving through the educational journey. Discussion of specific types of support services was promoted during the focus groups to examine the extent to which students were aware of and/or had direct experience with each type of support service.

Overall, as the focus groups progressed, many students voiced concerns about how hard it was to get into college and stay in college, listing significant barriers and obstacles that they had to overcome and manage before and during their educational journey (e.g., financial problems, scheduling problems, transportation problems, child care problems, course access and completion problems). Students articulated clearly that these “real-world” barriers and obstacles are very difficult to navigate and manage, and that they need substantial assistance and support from the college, the community, their family, and their friends to help solve, manage, and/or reduce the barriers and obstacles to succeed. Students also made it clear that the barriers and obstacles are ever-present in their lives and that they cause financial, social, and psychological stress, which, at times, is difficult to handle. Thus, the need for on-campus support services is warranted and sought out (and expected) by students.

Despite the significant barriers and obstacles that students encountered, they reported that they received substantial and effective assistance and guidance from various staff at COD, when assistance was sought. Students specifically mentioned the counselors and program staff as being particularly helpful in bringing them along their educational journey. That said, most of the students stated that they have not heard of Guided Pathways. Of those who have heard of Guided Pathways, none understood clearly how it affected their lives or how it has been implemented on campus to help them. Thus, the linkages between Guided Pathways, support services, student success, and degree completion are largely non-existent in students’ minds.

As students worked their way through the focus group discussions, specific issues and concerns surfaced. It is within these sections of the discussions where important insights are found regarding what may need to be addressed and/or changed to meet the demands of students who may need additional and/or specialized counseling, assistance, and/or guidance. This issue becomes especially important given that some students reported in the focus groups that they do not rely on college support services and “prefer” or “choose” (for a variety of reasons) to manage the impediments that they encounter on their own, which in some cases may lead to significant delays in degree progress. Thus, these results are of special significance and are highlighted, unpacked, and examined.

Discussion of specific types of support services was promoted during the focus groups to examine the extent to which students were aware of and/or had direct experience with each type of support service. Next, specific findings from the focus groups are presented, organized along the four stages that comprise the Guided Pathways framework.

Focus Group: Pillar 1 (Perceptions of support services that “clarify the path”)

In this section, students were asked to recall their perceptions and experiences as they sought information about the college.

In terms of support services that “clarify the path,” analysis of the focus group transcripts showed that students wanted (and expected) the college to help them understand what is expected and required, especially in terms of degree and major options and requirements. Students were especially concerned with the tools and processes provided by the college that function to clarify expectations and requirements, generally noting that they are, at times, helpful and not helpful. The college website and the course catalog were specifically emphasized during the focus groups, allowing students to discuss their benefits and limitations. Several themes emerged:

- A. Website benefits:** Students liked the convenience of 24/7 access to college information, specifically highlighting the Web-Advisor, online course catalogue, and other functions embedded in the web site as useful and valuable. Students also mentioned that the college website is a comprehensive resource that they can rely on for information and guidance;
- B. Website limitations:** Students expressed concerns that the web site may not be up to date regarding degree requirements, specifically stating that they thought that some of the information was incorrect;
- C. Course catalogue benefits:** Students appreciated the course catalogue and relied on it to find information about courses. Students found the printed catalogue in particular useful because they did not need to be online to access course information, highlighting the course summary information as especially valuable;

D. Course catalogue limitations: Students stated that they were concerned by the potential that the information contained in the course catalogue may not be up to date and/or accurate at the levels that they expected (or wanted and needed) to make informed decisions about classes. For example, extensive discussion surrounding use of the term “staff” in the course catalogue to designate teaching assignments suggested that students did not appreciate or desire use of this approach. When selecting specific classes, students seek as much certainty as possible, using the course description/summary and instructor’s name to make conclusions regarding interest and workload, and to help them decide whether or not to take a specific class during a specific term. The students expressed concern over seeing the term “staff” because they had no way of knowing how difficult the class may be or what to expect without knowledge of who was teaching the class; and

E. Additional issues and concerns: Students also discussed the High Tech Center, the EDGE program, DSPS, and the Tutoring Center as valued and trusted sources of information. Special emphasis was made to highlight that fact that these services offer in person, face-to-face counseling and training, which were discussed as necessary options to promote understanding and learning.

Focus Group: Pillar 1 (What else should be done to “clarify the path?”)

In this section, students were asked to provide their opinions on what else the college should be doing to help clarify the path through college.

As the students elaborated on the communication assets during the focus group discussions and recalled their specific experiences more clearly, they reported that they had some issues and concerns, including how the college communicates with students in general and how the college sets up the website and printed catalog specifically. Several themes emerged:

- A. Implement more and regular notifications to students about events, courses, degree/major requirements, and transfer information. Students were very clear that they wanted these notifications to be convenient for them, sent as emails or texts so that they did not have to seek this information out on the college website or other information sources. Students wanted this information sent to their phones and/or personal email accounts because the COD email account is NOT their primary account and they have found that the COD email system is difficult to access and use for various technical reasons, including non-compatibility issues and sending important emails into their COD email spam folder;
- B. Implement a campus-wide effort to promote use of Canvas among part time instructors and full time faculty. Students expressed concern over the lack of consistency in instructors and faculty using Canvas to keep them update on course information and status. They thought that not using Canvas was unacceptable and should be utilized as an effective way to keep in touch and to promote student/faculty dialogue;
- C. Encourage instructors and professors to respond to student messages (typically via email) in a timely manner. Students found the lack of timely response unacceptable and the lack of response suggested to students that the instructors and professors did not care about their progress and/or were unprofessional; and
- D. The above points illustrate that students want the college and its staff to be “pro-active and engaged” to help them through their educational journey.

In light of the above results, it is of note to point out that the students who participated in the focus groups were currently enrolled at COD, were asked to recall their experiences during the application and enrollment stages, and likely held differing views of what constituted “clarifying the path” (despite the fact that they were given a definition to use to respond to this set of questions). This suggests that it is likely that some of their responses are conflated with later stages of the educational journey. Nonetheless, the results provide clarity in terms of what specific aspects of student support offerings could be targeted for change.

Focus Group: Pillar 2 (Perceptions of support services that help students “enter the path”)

In this section, students were asked to recall their perceptions and experiences as they decided which degree and/or major to select. Given that all of the students who participated in the focus groups were currently enrolled, their perceptions and experiences were top of mind and current.

In terms of support services that help students “enter the path,” analysis of the focus group transcripts showed that students wanted (and expected) the college to help them understand how to enroll in college, in courses, in majors, and in degree programs, especially in terms of showing them information about course, degree, and major requirements.

As stated above, students were especially concerned with the tools and processes provided by the college that function to clarify expectations and requirements, generally noting that they are, at times, helpful and not helpful. During the discussion, the college's counseling and advising services and programs were specifically emphasized by the students, allowing them to discuss their benefits and limitations. Several themes emerged:

A. Counseling/advising staff & program benefits: Students stated that they found the college's counseling staff (e.g., advisors, counselors, professors) helpful in guiding them, highlighting that they are critical touchstones and go to people. Students who had direct experience with EOPS or TRIO ACES counselors thought that their assistance was very helpful. Students stated that they found the orientation program helpful to show them what is available and how to access the tools and programs presented during the orientation;

B. Counseling/advising staff program limitations: Several issues and concerns surfaced during the focus group discussions that illustrated frustration over how students are advised by counseling staff. Students stated that they receive inconsistent and, at times, incorrect, and/or out of date information from counseling staff. Students expressed concerns over information that they have actually received that was not correct and they were not certain who to talk to help them proceed (e.g., about courses, majors, degree requirements, and transfer procedures); and

C. Additional issues and concerns: Several additional issues and concerns were discussed that are relevant as students decide how to "enter the path" on their educational journey. These issues and concerns illustrate specific impediments such as barriers and obstacles that students experience at this point in their college experience:

1. Students stated that they are often indecisive and somewhat confused at this point in their journey (e.g., not certain about majors and which classes to take), so they must rely on counseling staff to help them, making accurate and consistent information important, highlighting the need to trust counseling staff, and making access to counseling staff critical;
2. Students expressed concerns over temporary instructors and their potential to be less engaged, not willing to help them, and being inconsistent when designing courses and setting course requirements (e.g., some may not teach necessary skills needed for upcoming courses); and
3. Students expressed concerns over the credentialing (or lack thereof) of instructors, teachers, and professors, stating that they would like the college to certify, evaluate, and monitor all instructors, teachers, and professors on a regular basis for competence and teaching acumen. Currently, students stated that they use "RateMyProfessor.com" or word of mouth to gain information about specific instructors to guide their decisions regarding whether or not to enroll in specific courses.

Focus Group: Pillar 2 (What else should be done to help students "enter the path?")

In this section, students were asked to provide their opinions on what else the college should be doing to help them enter the path to degree completion. Several themes emerged:

- A. Set up and implement an outreach program that brings counselors to the classrooms to answer student questions and set up appointments with counselors. Or, set up established dates for students to visit counselors on a regular basis;
- B. Provide on-going training for counselors so that they are up-to-date on course, major, degree, and transfer information;
- C. Assess course requirements across semesters and years to ensure that they are meeting minimum standards and teaching students necessary skills to prepare them for the next steps in their programs;
- D. Set up and implement a communication program that informs students of the general nature and parameters of each class that outlines what is typically taught in that class, what to expect from each class in terms of workload, and how the class fits into a degree program and/or major; and
- E. Develop a certification program that evaluates teachers, instructors, and professors on an ongoing basis.

Focus Group: Pillar 3 (Perceptions of support services that help students “stay on the path”)

In this section, students were asked to recall their perceptions and experiences as they made progress toward degree completion, specifically discussing the impediments that they have encountered that threatened their ability to stay in college. Given that all of the students who participated in the focus groups were currently enrolled, their perceptions and experiences were top of mind and current.

In terms of support services that help students “stay on the path,” analysis of the focus group transcripts showed that students wanted (and expected) the college to help them understand how to stay on track to degree completion and/or transfer. As stated above, students were especially concerned with the tools and processes provided by the college that function to clarify expectations and requirements, generally noting that they are, at times, helpful and not helpful. Again, in this section of the discussion, students emphasized the college’s counseling and advising services and programs, allowing them to discuss their benefits and limitations. Several themes emerged:

A. Counseling/advising staff & program benefits: Students stated that they found the counseling services “call back” program of value because it helped to alleviate the need to go to the counseling center and wait for an opening; and

B. Counseling/advising staff & program limitations: Students made note of the fact that the counseling office is “over loaded” and under staffed. They stated that the counseling staff is overwhelmed, too busy, and difficult to see (wait times are too long). As above, students also stated that the counseling staff sometimes give them incorrect information regarding degree completion and/or transfer procedures and next steps, which affected their degree progress (Note: discussion did not reveal the extent to which these issues are true and/or valid, but students were clear and articulate about these issues during the focus group). In addition, students made it clear that they receive inconsistent information, stating that they get different advice from different counselors. Students discussed the need for the counseling center to offer evening office hours so working adults could access these services.

Focus Group: Pillar 3 (What else should be done to help students “stay on the path?”)

In this section, students were asked to provide their opinions on what else the college should be doing to help them stay on track to degree completion. Several themes emerged:

- A. The college needs to develop and offer an online support services program using webcams, Facetime, and/or Skype technologies. Students stated that this type of option would be valuable for “quick questions”; and
- B. Counseling staff need to document major and degree requirements/changes and make them readily available to students for reference and advising.

Focus Group: Pillar 4 (Perceptions of support services that “ensure learning”)

In this section, students were asked to recall their perceptions and experiences as they move toward degree completion and/or “next steps,” specifically addressing the issues and concerns that they have, or may have, as they prepare to take those next steps. Given that all of the students who participated in the focus groups were currently enrolled, with many progressing toward and/or thinking about their next steps, their perceptions and experiences were top of mind and current.

In terms of support services that “ensure learning,” analysis of the focus group transcripts showed that students wanted (and expected) the college to verify that they have acquired knowledge and the skills to be successful in their next steps, whether those steps include transfer to a four-year university or to employment. However, students were not certain how to articulate these issues and tended to rely on established assessment procedures such as in-class testing, course grades, and certification processes. It was clear that students were not aware that other types of knowledge and skill assessments could be developed and implemented to certify that their experiences at college have made a difference in their understanding, skills, and competence.

As stated above, students were especially concerned with the tools and processes provided by the college that function to assess the extent to which they have acquired knowledge and skills, generally noting that they are, at times, helpful and not helpful. As above, in this section, students emphasized the college’s counseling and advising services and programs, allowing them to discuss their benefits and limitations. In addition, special emphasis was placed on sequenced and general education courses to assess their relevance and value in terms of providing opportunities for students to acquire the knowledge and skills that promote future success. Several themes emerged:

- A. Prepared for the next step(s):** There were generally mixed responses to this question; some students feel prepared, while others do not. It is difficult to discern what has led students to their conclusions, but hints in the transcripts suggest that students who have done well in their courses and degree programs feel prepared, while those who have struggled and/or languished in college for long periods do not feel prepared;
- B. Counseling/advising staff & program benefits:** No additional information about counseling benefits was provided in this section of the focus group;
- C. Counseling/advising staff & program limitations:** It is hard to get accurate and up-to-date information on transfer paths and degree requirements from counselors; they seem to be misinformed. Counselors seem to have a standardized script that students must take Math 40 and English 1 & 2 for all degree programs, which suggests that there are no individualized counseling paths for students to follow;
- D. Sequenced courses benefits:** Students generally see the value in these courses in terms of providing a step-by-step process to instill knowledge about subject-matters, degrees, and majors. Students had a hard time linking the knowledge acquired in these courses to future success because they tended to think that measures of success and understanding reside in college degrees not at the level of specific courses;
- E. Sequenced courses limitations:** It is difficult to get into these courses, so students “crash” them hoping that a seat will open and they can enroll officially. The issue of priority registration was mentioned in terms of its effect on availability to enroll and delaying degree progress. Due to these courses being required, they tend to fill up during the day, so more evening and/or online courses need to be offered to accommodate working adults and/or single parents;
- F. General Ed courses benefits:** There are valuable for students who need basic training or a refresher course; and
- G. General Ed courses limitations:** Generally students perceived these courses as a waste of time. Due to the burden that they pose for some students, some students drop out of college. Students think that there too many Gen Ed requirements and that majors lack options to avoid Gen Ed courses. Due to these courses being required, they tend to fill up during the day. More evening and/or online courses need to be offered to accommodate working adults and/or single parents.

Focus Group: Summary & Conclusions

Overall, although students were aware of existing support services and appreciated the assistance and guidance that those support services provided, the focus group results show that many of the students held concerns about the lack of coordination, comprehensiveness, and accessibility of the support services. In addition, students expressed concerns about how difficult it has been for them to navigate the administrative/bureaucratic tangles that they encounter as they advance toward degree completion, at all stages of the Guided Pathways process. In general, the following list captures most of the concerns about on-campus support services that students discussed during the focus groups:

- A. Lack of communication;
- B. Lack of coordination;
- C. Lack of an interrelated, coherent system of support(s);
- D. Lack of up-to-date information (including receiving inconsistent and incorrect advice and information, especially from counselors);
- E. Lack of informed and available staff (especially counselors);
- F. Lack of (or lack of use of) automated systems that monitor student progress and send out reminders for them to take specific action to stay on track (especially in terms of faculty using Canvas for course management and counselors using technology to set up appointments with students); and
- G. Lack of flexibility in meeting non-traditional students’ needs (e.g., working adults, single parents).

The above list provides clear guidance in terms of potential next steps and/or recommendations for targeted changes. Synthesis of the above items suggests that they can be conceptualized along three core issues:

- A. **Accessibility and availability** issues that make it difficult for students to receive advice and guidance from support staff (e.g., inconvenient hours, lack of staff);
- B. **Communication, training, and coordination** issues that confuse students and cause them to spend more time and money taking classes that may not be relevant; and
- C. **Lack of pro-active/active engagement** issues that for some students lead to perceptions that the support staff do not care about students and/or do not perceive students as “critical clients” (in the sense of the central tenets of Guided Pathways, the fundamental mission of community colleges and the core commitments outlined by the Vision for Success initiative).

The focus group discussions suggest that these three core issues follow students across all stages of the educational journey, presenting impediments (obstacles and barriers) at every stage. Not to say that these are the only impediments that students encounter—there are a host of others, including regional equity gaps, student-level equity gaps, lack of motivation and interest, life circumstances, and difficult work schedules (to name a few). However, these three core issues reside within college processes and procedures (as defined by the focus group participants) and are, largely, solvable. Small actions taken to make changes in these issues, across time, will add up to major transformations in processes and practices that should affect the experiences of all COD students at every stage of educational journey.

Section II: Sorting Task Analysis, Results, & Conclusions

Sorting Task

At the conclusion of each focus group, students were asked to participate in a sorting task that required them to sort a deck of 69 cards with college majors printed on them (one per card) into “similar piles” to understand how to group majors into “meta-majors” for presentation on the college’s website. The sorted piles for each student were recorded and the aggregated sorting data were submitted to a CLUSTER analysis using SYSTAT (see also the “College of the Desert: Identifying Meta-Majors” report).

Sorting task: Results

Results of the CLUSTER analysis, which reveals distinct groupings of similar items, showed that the students were able to sort the cards into recognizable and coherent sets of majors. The overall results can be organized as follows:

A. Four overarching themes emerged that organized the set of majors into broad conceptual categories:

1. Theme A: Physical Fitness, Training, & Sports Programs
2. Theme B: Applied & Theoretical Programs (Science, Technology, Engineering, Education, & Business)
3. Theme C: Design & Art Programs (Graphic Design, Photography, Music, Radio, Film, Theater, Art)
4. Theme D: Communications & Language Programs (Communication, Journalism, Reading, Languages)

B. Overall, the overarching themes were composed of 17 unique, recognizable, and coherent groupings of majors:

1. Theme A: Physical Fitness, Training, & Sports Programs

a. Grouping 1: Physical & Athletic Studies

- a1. Self Defense (major)
- a2. Fitness (major)
- a3. Athletic Training (major)
- a4. Varsity Sport (major)
- a5. Physical Therapy (major)
- a6. Kinesiology (major)

2. Theme B: Applied & Theoretical Programs

a. Grouping 2: Human & Psychological Studies

- a1. Addiction Studies/Human Services (major)
- a2. Sociology (major)
- a3. Psychology (major)
- a4. Philosophy (major)

- b. Grouping 3: Historical & Global Studies
 - b1. History (major)
 - b2. Global Studies (major)
 - b3. Political Studies (major)
- c. Grouping 4: Justice & Police Sciences
 - c1. Administration of Justice (major)
 - c2. Police Science (major)
- d. Grouping 5: Health Sciences
 - d1. Emergency Medical Technology (major)
 - d2. Nursing (major)
 - d3. Health Sciences (major)
- e. Grouping 6: Education
 - e1. Adult Basic Education (major)
 - e2. Early Childhood Education (major)
- f. Grouping 7: Service Industries
 - f1. Culinary Arts (major)
 - f2. Hospitality (major)
 - f3. Golf Management (major)
- g. Grouping 8: Business & Management
 - g1. Entrepreneurship (major)
 - g2. Business/Management (major)
 - g3. Accounting (major)
 - g4. Economics (major)
- h. Grouping 9: Scientific Studies
 - h1. Math (major)
 - h2. Astronomy (major)
 - h3. Physics (major)
 - h4. Chemistry (major)
 - h5. Biology (major)
 - h6. Anthropology (major)

- i. Grouping 10: Natural Sciences
 - i1. Geology (major)
 - i2. Geography (major)
 - i3. Plant Science (major)
 - i4. Natural Resources (major)
 - i5. Agriculture (major)
- j. Grouping 11: Construction Technologies
 - j1. Engineering, General (major)
 - j2. Real Estate Development (major)
 - j3. Construction Management (major)
 - j4. Construction Technology (major)
 - j5. Architecture/Drafting (major)
- k. Grouping 12: Technical & Mechanical Systems
 - k1. Energy Systems Technology (major)
 - k2. Automotive Technology (major)
 - k3. Air Conditioning, Heating, Refrigeration (major)
 - k4. Fire Technology (major)
- l. Grouping 13: IT & CIS Systems
 - l1. Cyber Security (major)
 - l2. Computer Science (major)
 - l3. Computer Information Systems (major)

3. Theme C: Design & Art Programs

- a. Grouping 14: Design & Art Studies
 - a1. Graphic Design (major)
 - a2. Commercial Photography (major)
 - a3. Digital/Commercial Music (major)
 - a4. Radio Production (major)
 - a5. Film Studies & Production (major)
 - a6. Theater Arts (major)
 - a7. Art (major)
 - a8. Music (major)

4. Theme D: Communications & Language Programs

- a. Grouping 15: Human & Mediated Communication
 - a1. Communication Studies/Speech (major)
 - a2. Mass Communication (major)
 - a3. Journalism (major)
- b. Grouping 16: English
 - b1. Reading (major)
 - b2. English (major)
- c. Grouping 17: Languages Studies
 - c1. French (major)
 - c2. Spanish (major)
 - c3. German (major)
 - c4. Japanese (major)
 - c5. English as a Second Language (major)
 - c6. American Sign Language (major)

Sorting task: Summary & Conclusions

Overall, the sorting of majors into groups showed that four overarching themes organize the 69 majors into 17 distinct groupings. Each grouping is composed of a set of majors that students perceived as similar to each other on a variety of explicit and/or underlying features.

In terms of “meta-majors” the results present two distinct levels, including the “theme” level and the “grouping” level. The “theme” level is akin to a supra category and the “grouping” level is more in-line with the concept of meta-major as conceptualized by Guided Pathways. That said use of the four overarching themes and the 17 groupings as a set may prove to be an effective approach to present major/degree options to students on the COD website.

Section III: Online Survey Analyses, Results, & Conclusions

Online Survey

In addition to targeted focus groups, COD students were invited to complete an online survey that mirrored the question sequence used in the focus groups, with slight modifications as necessary for online presentation.

Online Survey: Recruitment methods & Demographics

Recruitment of COD students for the online survey was conducted by Interact Communications and COD staff. Interact sent out four emails inviting students to participate in the survey, with the possibility of receiving an Amazon gift card as an incentive (based on a random drawing of those who participated). In addition, COD staff placed the link to the survey on the student portal to increase awareness and access to the survey.

As a result of the recruitment efforts, a broad set of students were able to complete the online survey (N=998), which paralleled the question sequence used in the focus groups. The average age of the online participants was 27 (range 15-67), with 39% (n=394) reporting that they were male and 26% (n=265) reporting that they were female. Most of the students indicated that they identified with Hispanic/Latino/Spanish origin (n=255; 25%), followed by white (n=89; 9%). See Appendix A for more details, including results for COD program participation and campus enrollment data reported by the online participants.

Online Survey: Analyses & Results²

Analysis of the data from the online survey followed two separate approaches. The quantitative data were analyzed using standard statistical procedures, typically using SPSS programs. The qualitative data were analyzed using similar content analytic procedures as used for the focus group data. However, prior to analysis, the qualitative data needed to be standardized. Each phrase generated by the students was segmented into meaningful and non-redundant sentences and/or phrases, copy-edited, and then analyzed via content analytic procedures by the same researcher who analyzed the focus group data.

Given that a large and diverse set of students completed the online survey, the results that follow are nuanced and complex. To streamline this section, when the qualitative results are presented, only “conceptual” categories are discussed. To examine the depth and breadth of the qualitative results, readers are encouraged to consult Appendices B through Q, where detailed and organized data tables present illustrative examples for each typology.

As with the focus group results, this section is organized along the four pillars that compose the Guided Pathways process. Similar to the focus groups, students were primed prior to answering the main questions of the online survey by asking them to think about the barriers and obstacles they experienced as they entered college and during their educational journey. In addition, similar to the focus group discussions, as students progressed along the online survey, they recalled specific experiences that illustrated concerns and issues that they held regarding student support services at COD. It is within these sections that significant observations are highlighted, examined, and unpacked in the following sections.

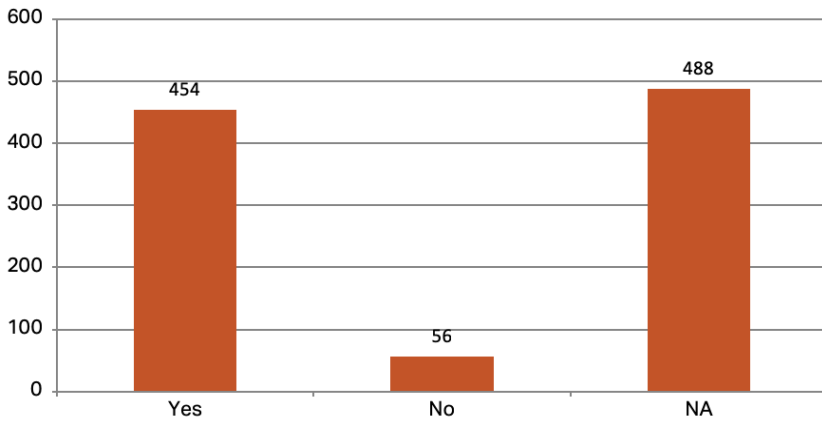
Online Survey: Pillar 1 (Clarifying the path: Entry information)

In this section, students were asked to recall and report their perceptions and experiences as they sought information about the college. Specifically, students were asked to respond to questions about promotional and descriptive information (e.g., website, course catalog) about the college, applying to college, and enrolling in courses.

Overall, most students reported in the online survey that they found the college’s website useful (89%; n=454) and helpful (95%; n=483). In addition, most students (83%; n=417) reported that they also found the college’s printed schedule/catalog useful. The specific questions and their results are presented, in turn, below:

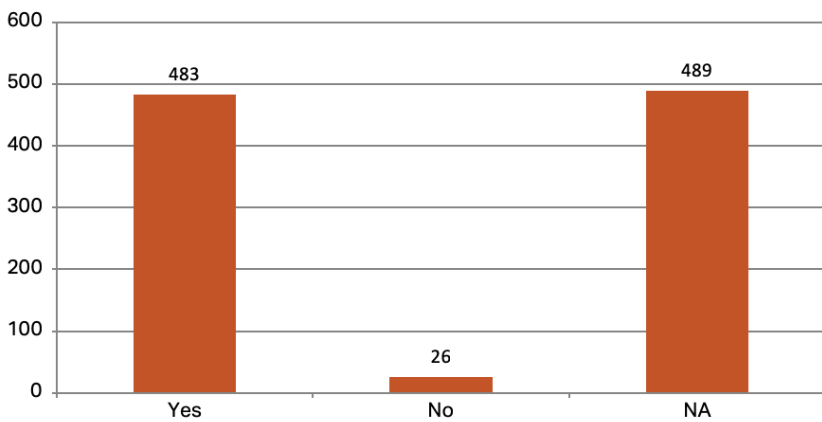
1. Have you been able to find the information that you need on the College of the Desert’s website?

Find info on website?



2. Does the website help you in any way?

Is website helpful?



3. Briefly, please describe how the website is helpful and/or unhelpful?

Overall, students found the college’s website helpful and unhelpful (see Appendix B to view the complete typology):

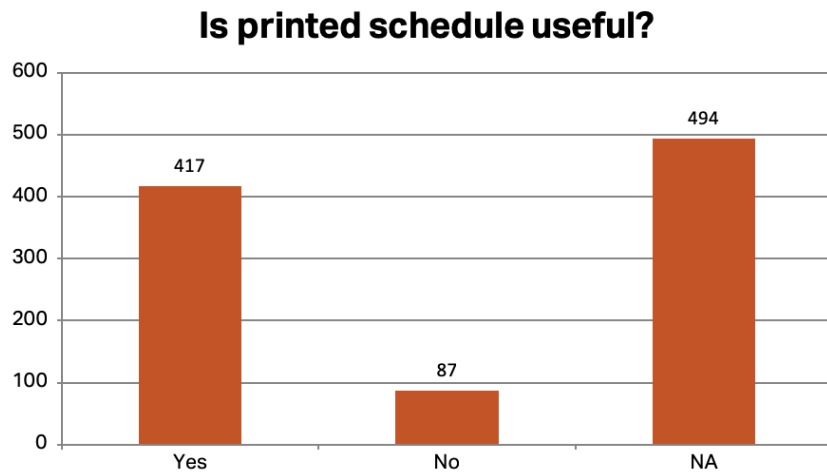
a. Helpful aspects of the website:

- a1. Easy to use and saves time;
- a2. Provides answers to questions, clarifies issues and concerns, and reduces uncertainty;
- a3. Provides access to essential services; and
- a4. Serves as a central hub for campus events and activities.

b. Unhelpful aspects of the website:

- b1. Not easy or clear to use;
- b2. Not comprehensive; and
- b3. Not up to date.

4. Is the College of the Desert's printed schedule/catalog useful?



5. Briefly, please describe how the printed schedule/catalog is useful and/or not useful?

Overall, students found the college's printed schedule/catalogue useful and not useful (see Appendix C to view the complete typology):

- a. Useful aspects of the printed schedule/catalogue
 - a1. Easy to use, convenient, saves time, & well organized
 - a2. Use as a planning tool/workbook to organize & schedule classes
 - a3. Tactile preference
 - a4. Informative and comprehensive resource for courses & campus events
 - a5. Use as a common & shared resource
- b. Not useful aspects of the printed schedule/catalogue
 - b1. Not up to date
 - b2. Confusing
 - b3. Inconvenient, redundant, or not needed
 - b4. Not known

Looking across the results for the website and the printed schedule/catalog, for the majority of students, these two communication assets are working as designed and as intended.

Next, students were asked what the college "should" be doing to help them to be successful. Overall, students thought that the college could do more to help them, especially in terms of making their "college experience and educational journey" easier to manage and navigate, and assisting them to remove or reduce impediments. The depth and breadth of responses illustrate that students thought carefully about this issue (see Appendix D to view the complete typology).

6. In terms of information about college, majors, and degrees, what should the College of the Desert do to help you to be successful?

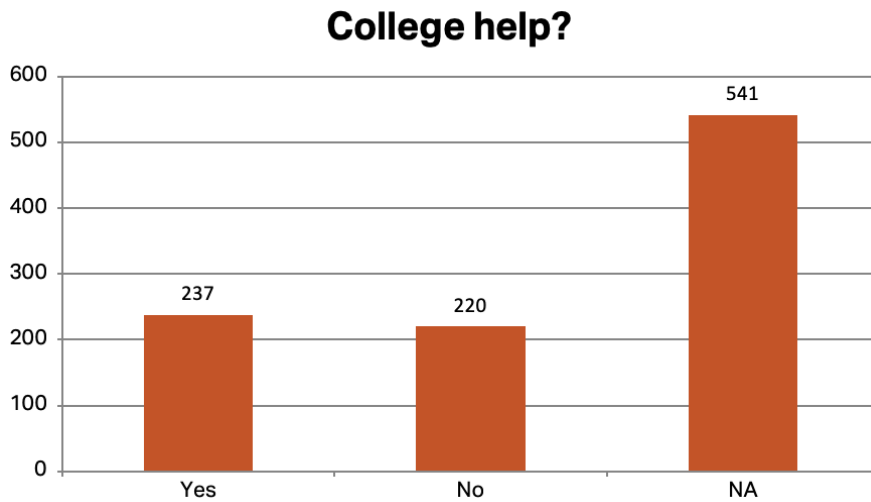
- a. Issues and concerns with academic counselors & staff that should be addressed
 - a1. Lack follow up with students
 - a2. Rude or discourteous interactions
 - a3. Provide incorrect, misleading, inconsistent, and/or incomplete information
 - a4. Not knowledgeable or well trained
 - a5. Not convenient and/or difficult to meet with
 - a6. Lack public credentials
- b. Additional resources, facilities, & opportunities
 - b1. Increase support staff/personnel & availability
 - b2. Add office facilities & equipment for student use
 - b3. Increase course offerings & availability
 - b4. Increase support services & programs
 - b5. Develop and promote social/professional networking programs & opportunities
 - b6. Expand physical facilities
 - b7. Increase support for staff
 - b8. Streamline programs
- c. Implement programs that guide & are actively engaged with students
- d. Clarify and/or enhance requirements, processes, & outcomes
- e. Promote events, opportunities, requirements, & course information so that they are more available

Online Survey: Pillar 2 (Entering the path: Selecting a degree/major)

In this section, students were asked to recall and report their perceptions and experiences as they decided which degree and/or major to select. Specifically, this section of the online survey asked students to respond to questions about degree and major selection decisions and assistance that the college provides to guide degree and major selection decisions. Given that all of the students who participated in the online survey were currently enrolled, their perceptions and experiences were top of mind and current.

Overall, slightly more than half (52%; n=237) of the students who responded to the online survey reported that they had sought and received assistance from college staff in selecting a degree and/or a major and that they found that assistance to be valuable, relevant, and up to date, suggesting that the counseling and guidance services work well for many students at this stage of the educational journey. However, nearly half (48%; n=220) of the students who responded to the online survey reported that the college did not help them select a degree and/or a major, and one-third (33%; n=154) reported experiencing impediments that made selecting a degree and/or a major difficult (see next section). The specific questions and their results are presented, in turn, below:

1. When you decided on your major/degree program, did the college help you?

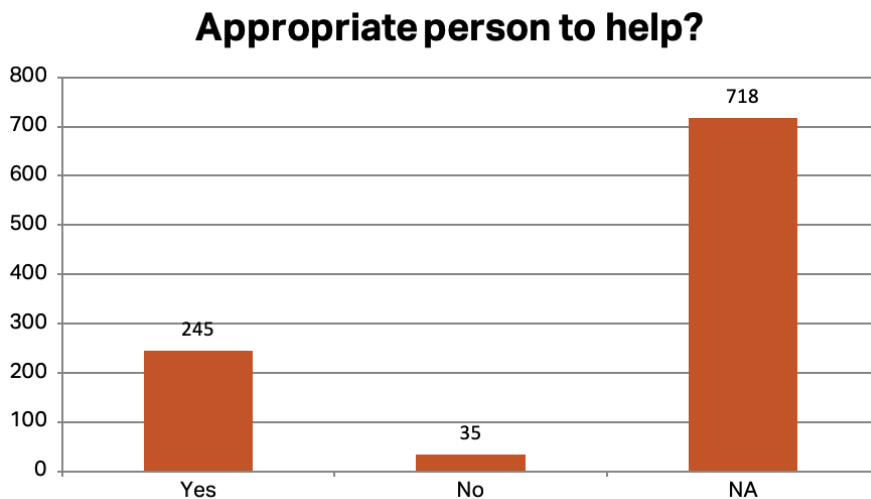


2. If applicable, who at the college helped you?

Overall, students listed a wide variety of people at the college and outside of the college (e.g., family and friends) that they seek out for help, suggesting that the need for assistance is varied and driven by personal preference and/or availability and convenience (see Appendix E to view the complete typology):

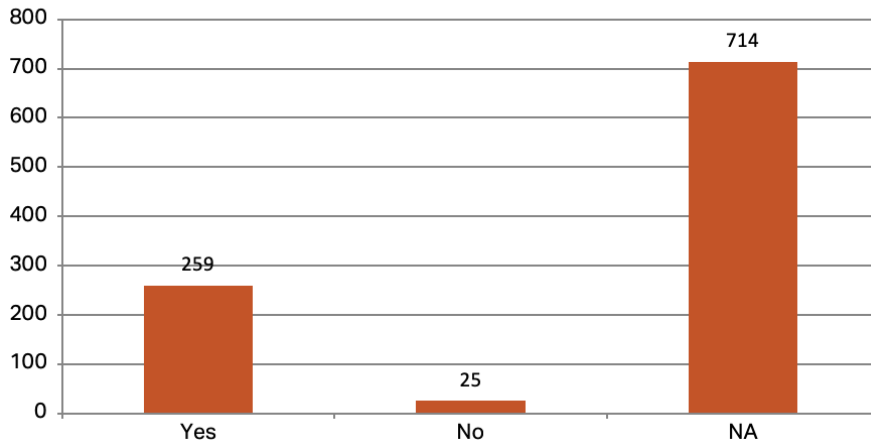
- a. Academic counselors
- b. Named individuals (most likely COD staff)
- c. Professors & instructors
- d. Program staff
- e. Individuals outside COD (family & friends)

3. Was the person who helped you the appropriate person to help you (for example, an official academic advisor, a faculty member in your major/degree program, or knowledgeable about the requirements of the major/degree program)?



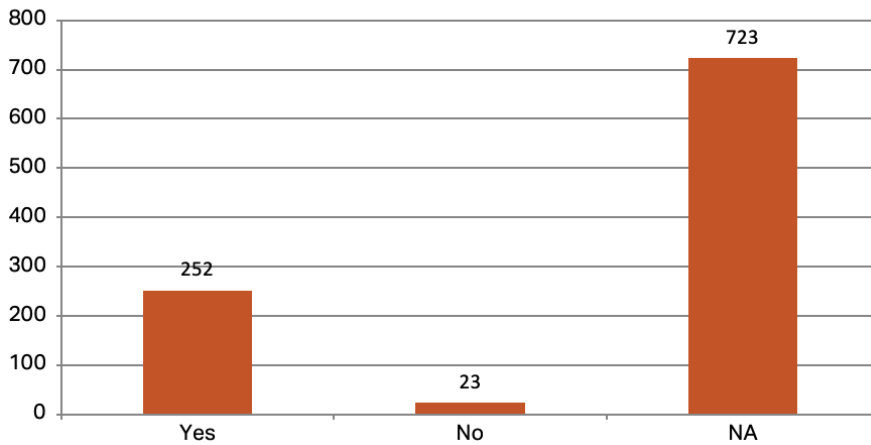
4. If applicable, was the assistance from the person who helped you Valuable?

Assistance valuable?



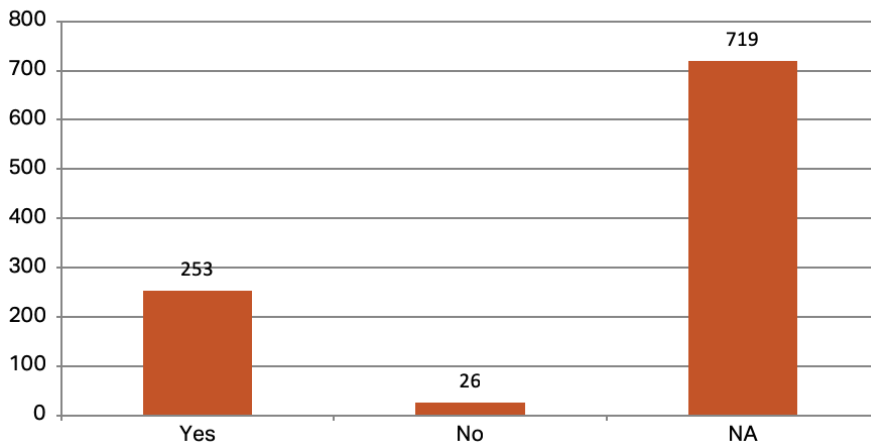
5. If applicable, was the assistance from the person who helped you relevant?

Assistance relevant?



6. If applicable, was the assistance from the person who helped you up to date?

Assistance up to date?

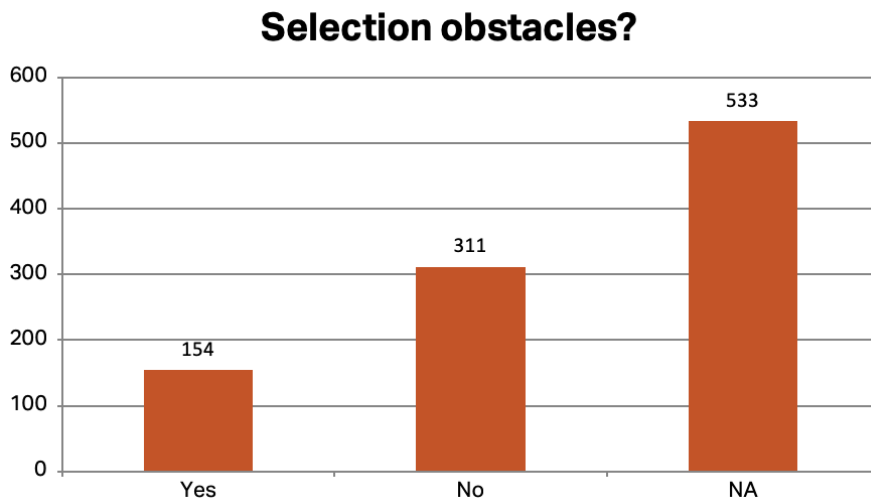


The results presented in this section suggest that, for many students, the current set of support programs (on campus and/or off campus) work to help them to select a degree and/or a major. Interestingly, many students look outside of the college for help from individuals who may or may not have accurate information about degrees and/or majors. That said, many (48%; n=220) students report that they do not seek or have not received guidance from the college to help them select a degree and/or a major, potentially making them vulnerable to delays and/or dropping out.

Online Survey: Pillar 2 (Entering the path: Obstacles)

In this section, students were asked to recall and report on the obstacles that interfered with their decisions to select a degree and/or major. Specifically, this section asked students to respond to questions about degree and major selection obstacles and the assistance that the college provides to help them navigate (manage and reduce) the obstacles. As stated above, one-third (33%; n=154) of the students reported that they have experienced an obstacle that made it difficult for them to select a degree and/or a major for a wide variety of reasons. The specific questions and their results are presented, in turn, below:

1. Did you experience obstacles when you selected a major/degree program at the College of the Desert?



2. If you experienced obstacles when you selected a major/degree program at College of the Desert, please list them.

Overall, students listed a wide variety of impediments (barriers and obstacles) that they must navigate as they select a major and/or degree (see Appendix F to view the complete typology):

- a. Personal/psychological issues and/or life circumstances
 - a1. Difficulty selecting and/or choosing a major or career due to indecision
 - a2. Lack understanding and/or skills to meet course requirements/expectations
 - a3. Lack of finances/financial difficulties
 - a4. Life circumstances made it hard to complete course/major requirements
- b. Advice and guidance issues
 - b1. Difficulty meeting with and/or receiving assistance from a counselor
 - b2. Received incorrect, misleading, or discouraging information from a counselor and/or a staff member

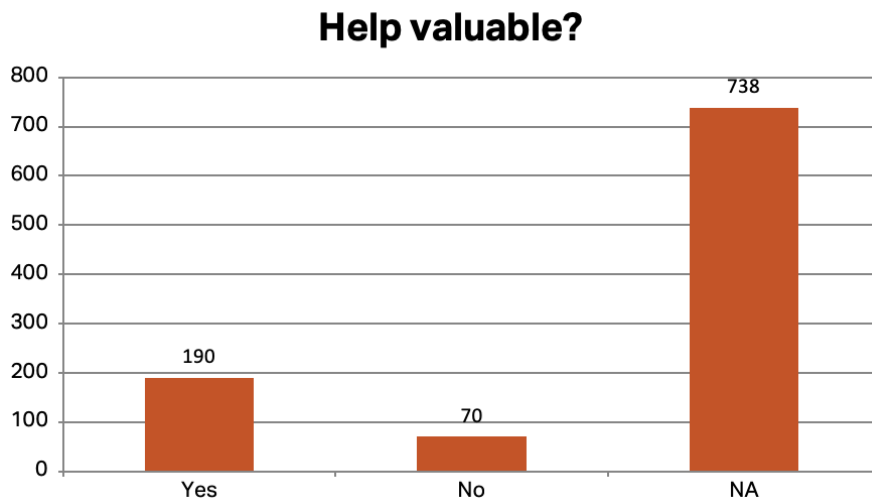
- c. Course enrollment and major requirement issues
 - c1. Courses not offered or not able to get into required courses
 - c2. Excessive and/or difficult requirements/prerequisites for major
 - c3. Not clear on course and/or major requirements

3. If applicable, who helped you?

Students listed a wide variety of people at the college and outside of the college (e.g., family and friends) that they seek out for help (see Appendix G to view the complete typology):

- a. Academic counselors;
- b. Named individuals (most likely COD staff);
- c. Professors & instructors;
- d. Program staff; and
- e. Individuals outside COD (family & friends).

4. If applicable, was the help valuable?



5. In terms of selecting a major/degree program, what should College of the Desert do to help you to be successful?

Similar to the focus group results, students thought that the college could do more to help them, especially in terms of making their “college experience and educational journey” easier to manage and navigate. The depth and breadth of responses to this prompt illustrate that students thought carefully about this issue (see Appendix H to view the complete typology):

- a. Issues and concerns with academic counselors and staff that should be addressed;
- b. Additional resources, facilities, and opportunities;
- c. Implement programs that guide and are actively engaged with students;
- d. Clarify and/or enhance requirements, processes, and outcomes; and
- e. Promote events, opportunities, requirements, and course information so that they are more available.

Overall, many students (33%; n=154) report that selecting a degree and/or a major is difficult, listing a variety of reasons why selection is difficult. Students who experience degree and/or major selection difficulties seek out a wide variety of individuals for help, reporting that that help is generally valuable (73%; n=190). Students also reported that COD should provide additional assistance with this part of the educational journey by addressing issues with academic counselors, adding resources, implementing programs that are more proactive and engaged, clarifying requirements, and promoting events, opportunities, and course information.

It is of note that the list of concerns that the online participants report in this section as issues that the college should address to help them to be successful can be embedded within the three core issues uncovered in the focus group results (see Focus Group: Summary & Conclusions section above), providing additional evidence that these three core issues are fundamental obstacles for students (reproduced below for clarity):

- A. Accessibility and availability issues that make it difficult for students to receive advice and guidance from support staff (e.g., inconvenient hours, lack of staff);
- B. Communication, training, and coordination issues that confuse students and cause them to spend more time and money taking classes that may not be relevant; and
- C. Lack of proactive/active engagement issues that for some students lead to perceptions that the support staff do not care about students and/or do not perceive students as “critical clients” (in the sense of the central tenets of Guided Pathways, the fundamental mission of community colleges, and the core commitments outlined by the Vision for Success initiative).

Online Survey: Pillar 3 (Staying on the path: Obstacles)

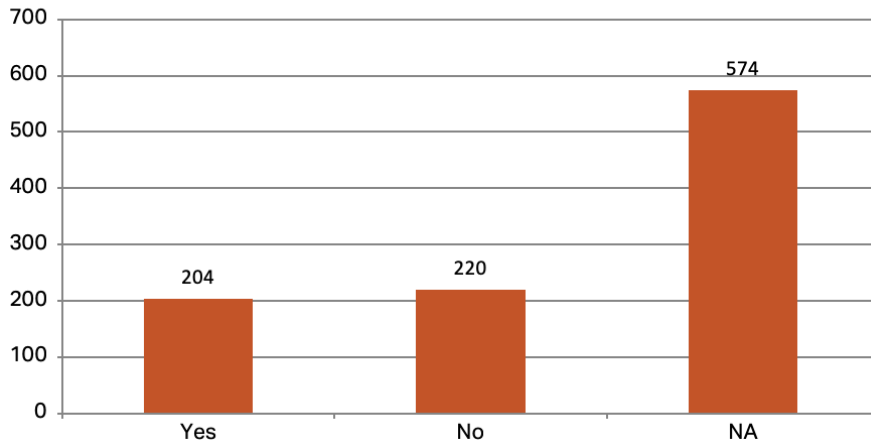
In this section, students were asked to recall and report their perceptions and experiences as they made progress toward degree completion, specifically reporting on the impediments that they have encountered that threatened their ability to stay in college. Given that all of the students who participated in this research were currently enrolled, their perceptions and experiences were top of mind and current.

Specifically, this section of the online survey asked students to respond to questions about staying in college and the obstacles that threaten course, program, and degree completion, including the assistance that the college provides to manage and reduce the obstacles. Many students (48%; n=204) reported that they experience impediments that threaten their ability to stay in college, and a majority (67%; n=235) report that they have not or did not receive assistance from the college. Of those who received assistance from the college, a majority (76%; n=198) reported that they found COD counseling and assistance to be effective in helping them stay on the path, suggesting that existing student support services work well and that these services perform vital functions for students at this stage of their educational journey, for those who seek and/or receive assistance.

However, the following results suggest that for a significant number of students, additional assistance is needed. These results illustrate the impediments that students encounter at this stage of the educational journey. The specific questions and their results are presented, in turn, below:

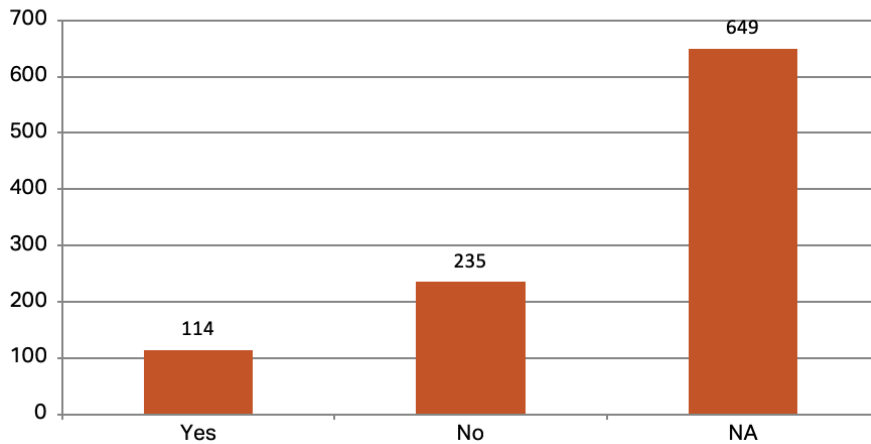
1. Have you faced obstacles that threatened your ability to stay in college and graduate?

Obstacles to staying in college?



2. If you have experienced obstacles that threatened your ability to stay in college and graduate, did the college help you?

College help?



3. Who at the college helped you?

Overall, students listed a wide variety of individuals at the college (and outside of the college) that they seek out to help them stay in college (see Appendix I to view the complete typology):

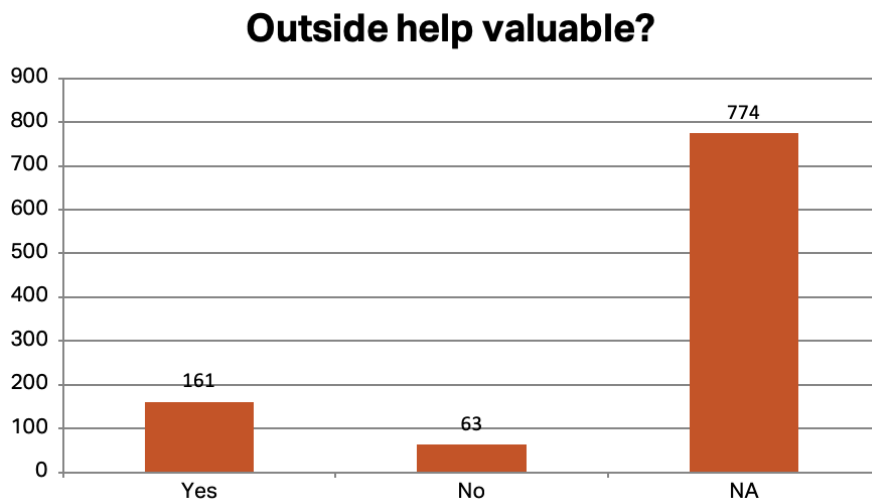
- a. Academic counselors;
- b. Named individuals (most likely COD staff);
- c. Professors & instructors;
- d. Program staff; and
- e. Individuals outside of COD (family & friends).

4. If the college did not help you, who did?

Overall, students listed mostly “themselves” (80 entries) as the primary source to help them stay in college, followed by a wide variety of people outside of COD staff that they also seek out to help them stay in college (see Appendix J to view the complete typology):

- a. Myself
- b. Friends & people I know (non-intimates)
- c. Family members & people I know (intimates)
- d. Non-COD program staff

5. If applicable, was the outside help valuable?



6. If you experienced obstacles that threatened your ability to stay in college and graduate, how did you manage to stay in college despite the obstacles?

Overall, students listed a wide variety of management options and strategies that help them stay in college (see Appendix K to view the complete typology):

- a. Persevered on my own accord for personal and/or other reasons
- b. Received and/or sought help from family & friends
- c. Received and/or sought help from staff, counselors, and/or student support programs
- d. Altered educational plan
- e. Received support from un-named and/or non-specific source(s)

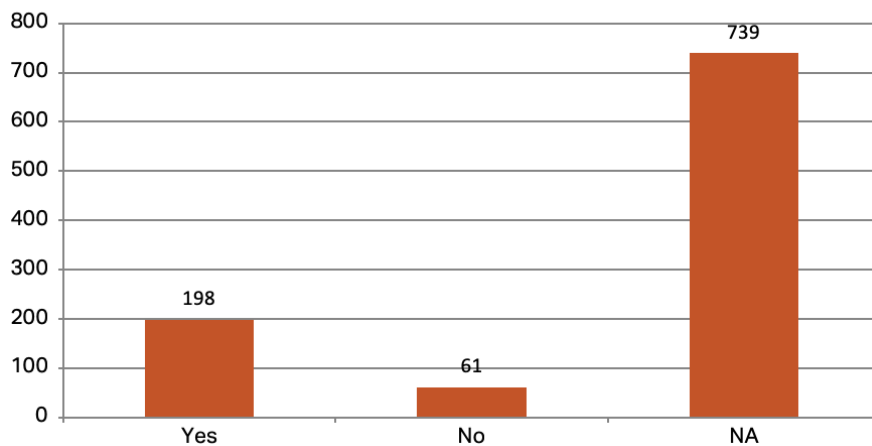
7. Briefly, please describe or list the assistance that the College of the Desert provides that helped you stay on track to graduate?

Overall, students listed a wide variety of COD programs and staff that provide assistance to them as they struggle to stay in college (see Appendix L to view the complete typology):

- a. Personal/official mentoring, advice, & guidance
- b. Programs & services
 - b1. Programs & program staff (26 different listings)
 - b2. Course support (3 different listings)
- c. No assistance sought or none offered

8. Is the assistance working?

College assistance working?



9. Briefly, please describe why the assistance is or is not working?

Overall, students listed mostly “themselves” as the primary source to help them stay in college, followed by a variety of people outside of COD staff (see Appendix M to view the complete typology):

- a. Assistance is working
 - a1. Provides tutoring, assistance, & guidance
 - a2. Facilitates enrollment in required & relevant courses
 - a3. Helps resolve personal and/or academic issues & obstacles
 - a4. Provides clarity, certainty, & confidence
 - a5. Promotes proactive & active involvement in education
- b. Assistance is not working
 - b1. Assistance is not available, difficult, and/or inaccessible
 - b2. Assistance is not effective and/or confusing
 - b3. Staff not able to solve issues

b4. Inadequate resources

b5. No assistance has been offered, provided, and/or sought

10. In terms of help staying in college and on path, what should the College of the Desert do to help you to be successful?

Similar to prior sections that asked students “what else should be done to help you to be successful?,” a similar set of ideas were listed at this stage of the Guided Pathways process (see Pillar 1: Clarifying the path; Pillar 2: Entering the path; see also Appendices D, H, and N to view the complete typology):

- a. Issues and concerns with academic counselors and staff that should be addressed;
- b. Additional resources, facilities, and opportunities;
- c. Implement programs that guide and are actively engaged with students;
- d. Clarify and/or enhance requirements, processes, and outcomes;
- e. Promote events, opportunities, requirements, and course information so they are more available; and
- f. Address and solve “student-specific” idiosyncratic issues and problems.

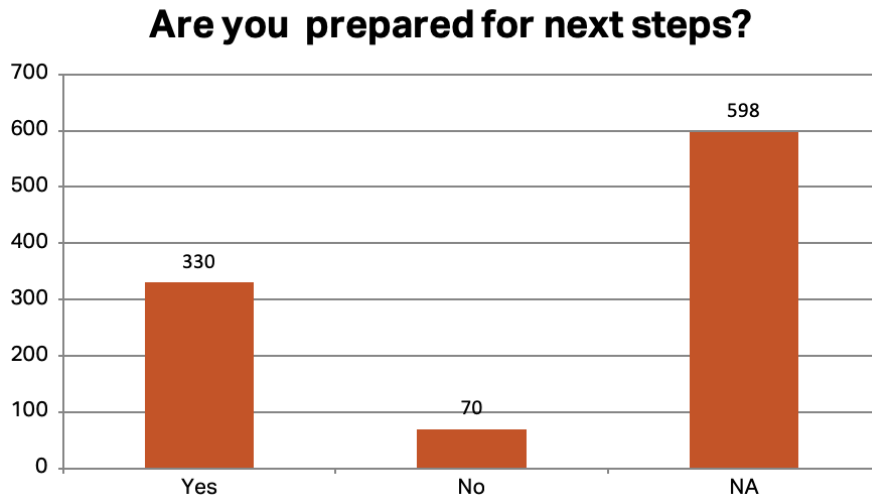
Online Survey: Pillar 4 (Ensuring learning: Assessment & next steps)

In this section, students were asked to recall and report their perceptions and experiences as they move toward degree completion and/or “next steps,” specifically addressing the issues and concerns that they have, or may have, as they prepare to take those next steps. Given that all of the students who participated in this research were currently enrolled, with many progressing toward and/or thinking about their next steps, their perceptions and experiences were top of mind and current.

The majority of the students (83%; n=330) reported that they were prepared for the next steps of their educational journey, recounting that they are confident that they have acquired the knowledge and skills necessary for transfer and/or a job, have received effective support and guidance, and have developed the confidence to “move on” to a four-year university, graduate, or into a job. However, for some students (17%; n=68), additional assistance is needed. As students responded to the sequence of prompts in the online survey, a variety of perceptions and opinions surfaced regarding knowledge, skills, and next steps. Some students reported that they held issues and concerns relevant to acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary to move on, and that addressing these issues and concerns would help them to make progress toward degree completion and move to the next phases of their lives.

Specifically, this section of the online survey asked students to respond to questions about acquiring the knowledge and skills that they may need to be successful in their personal and professional lives or for the “next steps” in their educational journey. The specific questions and their results are presented, in turn, below:

1. Based on your learning experiences at College of the Desert, do you feel prepared for the next steps in your educational journey and/or future career?



2. In terms of your learning experiences at College of the Desert, please describe why (or why not) you feel prepared for the next steps in your educational journey and/or future career.

Overall, students listed a variety of reasons why they feel prepared or not for their next steps (see Appendix O to view the complete typology):

a. Feel prepared:

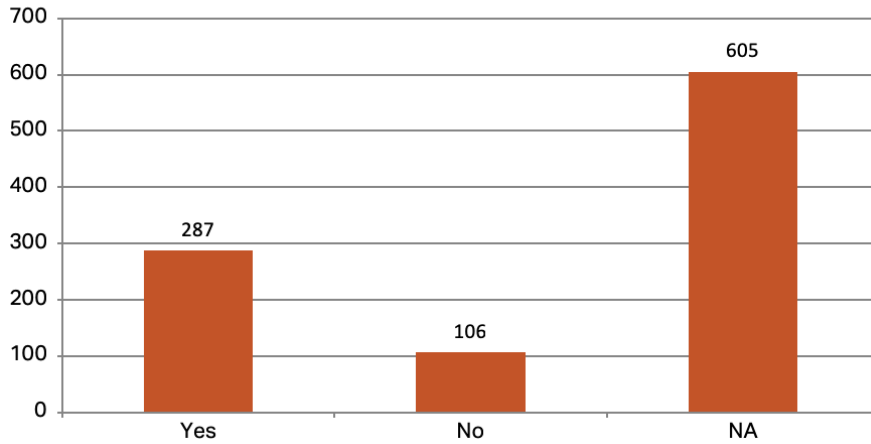
- a1. I am confident am acquiring knowledge, skills, and resources needed for next steps;
- a2. Staff support and support programs have prepared me for next steps;
- a3. Next steps are clear (have a plan, have prepared, have experience, have confidence); and
- a4. I have a positive orientation to the future and/or am looking forward to next steps.

b. Feel unprepared:

- b1. I am not certain I am acquiring knowledge, skills, and resources needed for next steps;
- b2. The next steps are not clear (no plan, no preparation, no experience, lack confidence, confused); and
- b3. Having difficulty completing courses and/or degree.

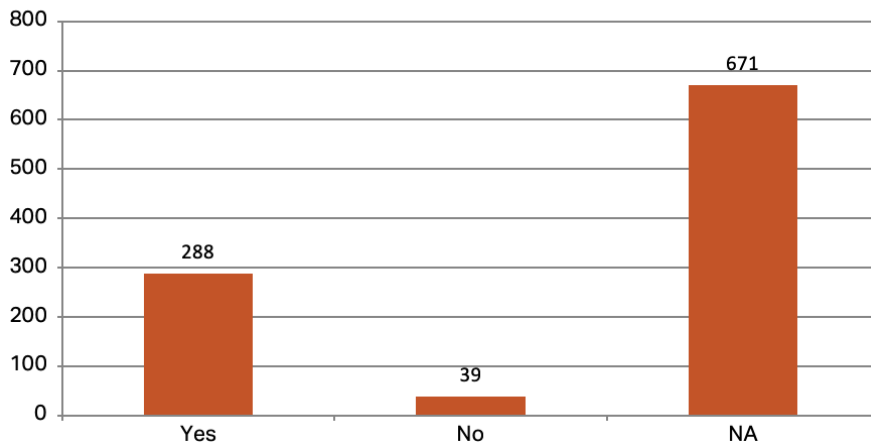
3. Have you enrolled in courses that are designed as a sequence that build on each other?

Enrolled in sequenced courses?



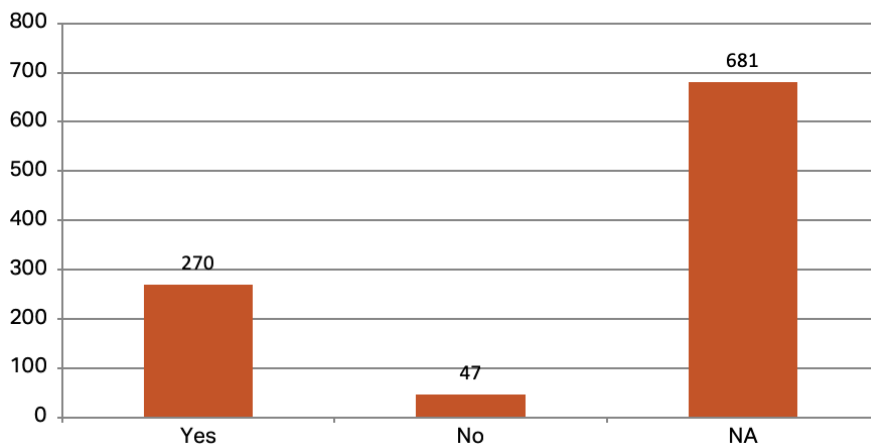
4. Was the sequence design Helpful?

Sequenced courses helpful?



5. Was the sequence design Valuable?

Sequenced courses valuable?

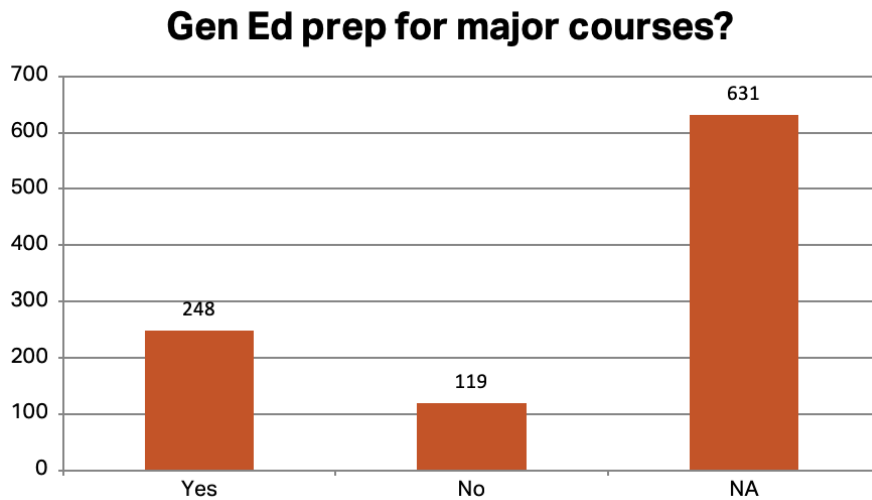


6. Briefly, please describe why (or why not) the sequence design was valuable?

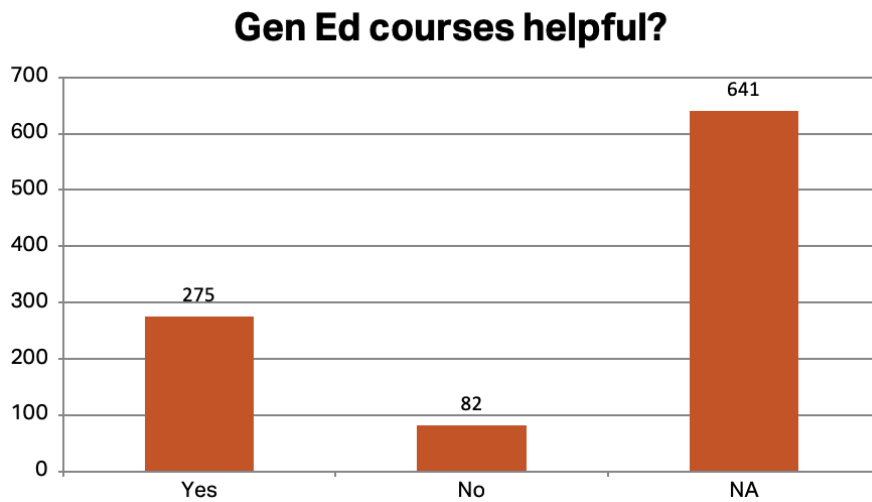
Overall, students listed a variety of reasons why or why not the sequenced courses are valuable (see Appendix P to view the complete typology):

- a. Sequenced courses are valuable
 - a1. Build background knowledge that promotes understanding of subject matter, field, major, degree, & career
 - a2. Develop practical skills & tools, and/or competence & confidence
 - a3. Promote individualized learning & success
 - a4. Develop understanding of and/or insights into degree requirements and reveal paths for goal & degree completion
- b. Sequenced courses are not valuable
 - b1. A scheme to get students to take more classes
 - b2. A waste of time & effort, and/or are difficult to complete

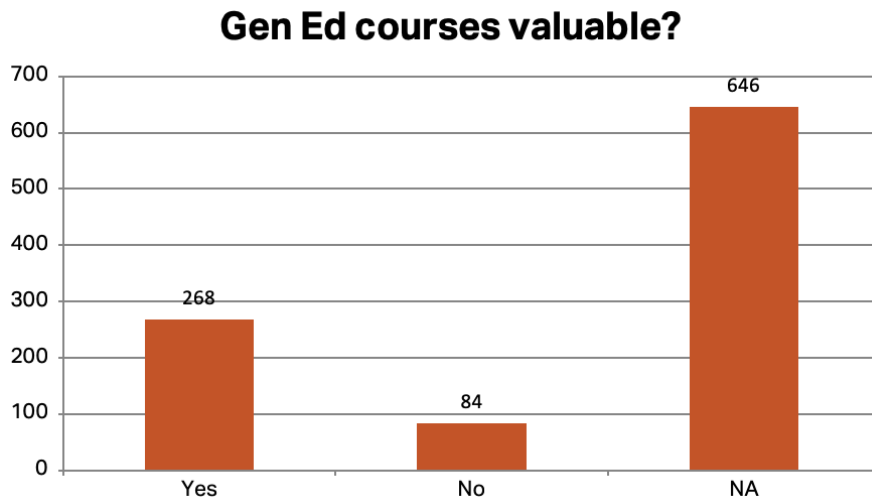
7. Have the General Education (Gen Ed) courses that you took at College of the Desert prepared you for your major-specific courses?



8. Did you find the Gen Ed courses helpful?



9. Did you find the Gen Ed courses Valuable?



10. Briefly, please describe why (or why not) the Gen Ed courses are valuable?

Overall, students listed a variety of reasons why or why not the Gen Ed courses that they take valuable (see Appendix Q to view the complete typology):

- a. Gen Ed courses are valuable
 - a1. Broaden perspectives and/or develop background knowledge, understanding, and skills
 - a2. Prepare for next steps & the future
 - a3. Refresh and prime past knowledge
 - a4. Socialize and prepare students for college

- b. Gen Ed courses are not valuable
 - b1. A waste of resources (time, money, & effort)
 - b2. Redundant, not relevant, and/or not necessary
 - b3. Difficult to enroll in due to high demand and/or are under staffed
 - b4. Not taught well

Online Survey: Summaries, conclusions, & recommendations²

To streamline and promote across section comparisons and insights, the summaries, conclusions, and recommendations for each of the four Pillar sections from the online survey are presented next.

Summary: Pillar 1 (Clarifying the path: Entry information)

A. COD website results

1. 89% (454/510) of those who responded to this prompt reported that they were able to find needed information on the website.
2. 95% (483/509) of those who responded to this prompt reported that the website is helpful.
3. Helpful aspects and features of the website include (see Appendix B for details):
 - a. Easy to use and saves time
 - b. Provides answers to questions, clarifies issues and concerns, and reduces uncertainty
 - c. Provides access to essential services
 - d. Serves as a central hub for campus events and activities
4. Unhelpful aspects and features of the website include:
 - a. Not easy or clear to use
 - b. Not comprehensive
 - c. Not up to date
5. Conclusions & recommendations:
 - a. Based on the above results, the website is performing as intended.
 - b. However, it may be advantageous to assess the extent to which certain sections are comprehensive and complete, and put in place an updating procedure for these sections. Students mentioned the topics of transferring and counseling staff information were incomplete and/or not up to date.

B. COD printed schedule/catalogue results

1. 83% (417/504) of those who responded to this prompt reported that the printed schedule/catalogue is useful
2. Useful aspects and features of the schedule/catalogue include (see Appendix C for details):
 - a. Easy to use, convenient, saves time, & well organized

- b. Use as a planning tool/workbook to organize & schedule classes
 - c. Tactile preference
 - d. Informative and comprehensive resource for courses & campus events
 - e. Use as a common & shared resource
3. Not useful aspects of the printed schedule/catalogue include:
- a. Not up to date
 - b. Confusing
 - c. Inconvenient, redundant, or not needed
 - d. Not known
4. Conclusions & recommendations:
- a. Based on the above results the schedule/catalogue is performing as intended.
 - b. However, it may be advantageous to assess the extent to which certain sections are not up to date and/or confusing, and put in place updating and clarification procedures to the extent that these are possible given that it is a printed book and must adhere to publication and distribution deadlines. Students mentioned the following sections as out of date and/or confusing: distribution timing problematic and too many abbreviations made it difficult to understand.

C. What should COD do to help students to be successful?

- 1. Given the complexity and nuanced nature of these results, only overarching issues are discussed here
- 2. Student responses to this prompt show that they hold complex and comprehensive ideas regarding what can be done (and what should be done and/or changed) to help them to be successful (see Appendix D for details):
 - a. Issues and concerns with academic counselors & staff that should be addressed:
 - a1. Lack of follow up with students
 - a2. Rude or discourteous interactions
 - a3. Provide incorrect, misleading, inconsistent, and/or incomplete information
 - a4. Not knowledgeable or well trained
 - a5. Not convenient and/or difficult to meet with
 - a6. Lack public credentials
 - b. Additional resources, facilities, & opportunities:
 - b1. Increase support staff/personnel & availability
 - b2. Add office facilities & equipment for student use
 - b3. Increase course offerings & availability
 - b4. Increase support services & programs
 - b5. Develop and promote social/professional networking programs & opportunities

- b6. Expand physical facilities
 - b7. Increase support for staff
 - b8. Streamline programs
 - c. Implement programs that guide and are actively engaged with students
 - d. Clarify and/or enhance requirements, processes, and outcomes
 - e. Promote events, opportunities, requirements, & course information so that they are more available
3. Conclusions & recommendations:
- a. Given the complexity of student responses, it is clear that they have opinions and an understanding of what can be done (and/or what should be done) to help them to be successful. In part, the complexity of the results shows the real-world experiences and constant struggles of the students. Given the nature of some of the student responses, it is difficult to know to what extent they are verifiable and whether they are widespread or isolated experiences.
 - b. The results suggest that for a number of students at COD, the culture of academic counseling, lack of resources, perceptions of disengagement, and lack of clarity in requirements, processes, and outcomes are detrimental factors that hinder their course and degree progress. Thus, these aspects of the COD environment may be prime targets for consideration for change.

Summary: Pillar 2 (Entering the path: Selecting a degree/major & obstacles)

A. Did you receive help from COD in selecting a degree/major?

1. 52% (237/457) of those who responded to this prompt reported that the college helped them select a degree/major
2. 48% (220/457) of those who responded to this prompt reported that the college did NOT help them select a degree/major
3. COD assistance was sought from a variety of individuals (see Appendix E for details):
 - a. Academic counselors
 - b. Specific COD staff members
 - c. Professors & instructors
 - d. COD program staff
 - e. Family & friends
4. 88% (245/280) of those who responded to this prompt sought assistance from an appropriate person (someone who was knowledgeable about degree/major requirements)
5. 91% (259/284) of those who responded to this prompt found the assistance that they received to be valuable
6. 92% (252/275) of those who responded to this prompt found the assistance that they received to be relevant
7. 91% (253/279) of those who responded to this prompt found the assistance that they received to be up to date

8. Conclusions & recommendations:

- a. Nearly half (48%; 220/457) of the students who responded to the COD assistance prompt reported that COD did NOT help them select a degree or a major. These results suggest that additional outreach may be necessary to help these students with this critical decision.
- b. Of those who reported that they did seek and receive assistance from COD in selecting a degree or a major (52%; 237/457), the majority reported that the assistance was valuable, relevant, and up to date. These results suggest that the COD staff help students navigate this aspect of their educational journeys by providing cogent, accurate, and relevant information upon which students can make informed decisions. Identification and promotion of these existing communication channels and processes should prove to be effective in attracting those who do not seek out assistance or at least prompt them to consider to seek out assistance from COD staff to help them with degree and major selection decisions.

B. Did you experience obstacles when selecting a degree/major?

1. 67% (311/465) of the students who responded to this prompt reported that they had NOT experienced an obstacle when selecting a degree or a major
2. 33% (154/465) of the students who responded to this prompt reported that they had experienced an obstacle when selecting a degree or a major
3. The types of obstacles that students reported ranged from personal/psychological to counseling to administrative issues (see Appendix F for details):
 - a. Personal/psychological issues and/or life circumstances:
 - a1. Difficulty selecting and/or choosing a major or career due to indecision
 - a2. Lack understanding and/or skills to meet course requirements/expectations
 - a3. Lack of finances/financial difficulties
 - a4. Life circumstances made it hard to complete course/major requirements.
 - b. Advice and guidance issues:
 - b1. Difficulty meeting with and/or receiving assistance from a counselor
 - b2. Received incorrect, misleading, or discouraging information from a counselor and/or a staff member
 - c. Course enrollment and major requirement issues:
 - c1. Courses not offered or not able to get into required courses
 - c2. Excessive and/or difficult requirements/prerequisites for major
 - c3. Not clear on course and/or major requirements
4. A variety of individuals (COD staff and friends & family) were sought out to provide assistance in managing, reducing, and/or removing the obstacles (see Appendix G for details):
 - a. Academic counselors
 - b. Named individuals (most likely COD staff)
 - c. Professors & instructors

- d. Program staff
 - e. Individuals outside COD (family & friends)
5. 73% (190/260) of those responding to this prompt reported that the assistance that they received about the degree/major selection obstacle was valuable
6. Conclusions & recommendations:
- a. The results show that most COD students (67%; 311/465) do NOT experience memorable or significant obstacles as they select a degree and/or a major, suggesting that the existing degree/major selection processes work well for many, but not all students.
 - b. The results also show that many students (33%; 154/465) experience obstacles when selecting a degree and/or a major, due to personal and psychological issues, poor or incorrect guidance, and administrative problems. Addressing the underlying issues that promote indecision and uncertainty among students in selecting a degree and/or a major should prove to be an effective approach to help students move more smoothly along the paths that guide them through their educational journey.
 - c. In addition, the results suggest that additional counseling staff and additional counseling staff training may be effective “on the ground” strategies to make headway in terms of helping the students who experience difficulties in selecting a degree and/or a major. Identifying and helping students at these critical decisional junctures should help to streamline their progress toward degree completion and/or transfer

C. What should COD do to help students to be successful?

1. As listed above (see Pillar 1 summary), a wide variety of cogent issues were listed as potential ways for COD to help students to be successful (see Appendices D & H for details):
 - a. Issues and concerns with academic counselors & staff that should be addressed
 - b. Additional resources, facilities, & opportunities
 - c. Implement programs that guide & are actively engaged with students
 - d. Clarify and/or enhance requirements, processes, & outcomes
 - e. Promote events, opportunities, requirements, & course information so that they are more available
2. Conclusions & recommendations:
 - a. As listed in the summary for Pillar 1, one issue that is made clear by the student responses across these sections is that the counseling staff may benefit from additional training and/or additional staff to manage the workload that presents itself as students seek assistance in selecting a degree and/or a major (and by students seeking assistance to clarify their educational paths/journeys).
 - b. The results suggest that the culture of academic counseling, lack of resources, perceptions of disengagement, and lack of clarity in requirements, processes, and outcomes may be prime targets for consideration for change. In support of this assertion, the typologies list specific individuals (see Appendices E, G, & I) and programs (see Appendix L) at COD that students seek out for these types of assistance. Seeking these individuals and program staff out for additional interviews to collect and organize their approaches and ideas may prove to be of great benefit in developing effective on-campus programs that aim to help students in clarifying and selecting a degree and/or a major.
 - c. Given the complexity of student responses, it is clear that they have extensive understanding of what can be done (and what should be done) to help them to be successful. In part, the complexity shows the extent to which they have thought about these issues and the extent to which their struggles are an important (and ever present) part of their educational journeys.

Summary: Pillar 3 (Staying on the path: Obstacles)

- A. Have you experienced obstacles that threatened your ability to stay in college & graduate?
1. 48% (204/424) of those responding to this prompt reported that they have experienced and/or are currently experiencing an obstacle that threatens their ability to stay in college
 2. 33% (114/349) of those responding to this prompt reported that COD helped them
 3. 67% (235/349) of those responding to this prompt reported that COD did NOT help them.
 4. A variety of individuals at COD were sought out for assistance with obstacles at this point in the educational journey (see Appendix I for details):
 - a. Academic counselors
 - b. Named individuals (most likely COD staff)
 - c. Professors & instructors
 - d. Program staff
 - e. Individuals outside of COD (family & friends)
 5. A variety of individuals outside of COD were sought out for assistance with obstacles, including “self” (see Appendix J for details):
 - a. ”Myself” (80 entries)
 - b. Friends & people I know (non-intimates)
 - c. Family members & people I know (intimates)
 - d. Non-COD program staff
 6. 72% (161/224) of those responding to this prompt reported that the assistance that they received outside of COD was valuable
 7. Conclusions & recommendations:
 - a. Many students (48%; 204/424) reported that they have experienced and/or are experiencing an obstacle that threatens their ability to stay in college, suggesting that support services are an important issue for these students.
 - b. Given that many students (67%; 235/349) reported that they have NOT received assistance from COD to help them stay in college, coupled with the finding that “Myself” was the most frequent listing for outside of COD assistance, suggests strongly that many students perceive that they are on their own to manage, reduce, and/or remove obstacles that threaten their ability to stay in college. These findings point to the need to promote assistance programs more frequently and more broadly. It also suggests that students may become disillusioned, confused, and/or disaffected by prior experiences with COD’s counseling/advice programs due to negative experiences (as listed in Appendices D, H, & N).
 - c. Comparison across the “selecting a degree/major” and “staying on the path” stages shows that significantly MORE students experience obstacles at the “staying on the path” stage than the “selecting a degree/major” stage: [“selection” obstacles=33% (154/405) vs. “stay” obstacles=48% (204/424); Baseline adjusted $X^2(1)=8.96, p < .001$]. This result shows that the educational journey gets MORE difficult as students move closer to degree completion, eventually forcing them to rely more heavily on support services or, if they find the support services lacking, tough it out on their own (see Appendix K), making them vulnerable to delay and/or dropping out.

- d. In addition, comparison of these two stages also shows that students tend to receive LESS help from COD support services in the “staying on the path” stage compared to the “selecting a degree/major” stage: [“select” no help=48% (220/457) vs. “stay” no help=67% (235/340); Baseline adjusted $X^2(1)=14.10$, $p < .001$]. This result shows that the educational journey gets LESS supportive as students move closer to degree completion, suggesting that vulnerable students will rely less on support services and more on themselves to manage the impediments and threats that they encounter at this stage of their educational journey (see Appendix K).
- e. Overall, these results suggest that a culture change in counseling and guidance services may be needed to solve and/or reduce the issues that students experience as they seek guidance and help with the impediments (obstacles & barriers) that threaten their ability to stay in college. See Appendices D, H, and N for specific examples that illustrate areas and services that students listed as prime targets for consideration and change.

B. How did you manage to stay in college despite the obstacles?

1. A variety of approaches to manage, reduce, and/or remove the obstacles were reported (see Appendix K for details), but overall “preserved on my own” was the most frequently reported option:
 - a. Persevered on my own accord for personal and/or other reasons
 - b. Received and/or sought help from family & friends
 - c. Received and/or sought help from staff, counselors, and/or student support programs
 - d. Altered educational plan
 - e. Received support from un-named and/or non-specific source(s)
2. A variety of approaches were listed that were provided by COD to manage, reduce, and/or remove the obstacles (see Appendix L for details):
 - a. Personal/official mentoring, advice, & guidance
 - b. Programs & services:
 - b1. Programs & program staff (26 different listings)
 - b2. Course support (3 different listings)
 - c. No assistance sought or none offered
3. 76% (198/259) of those who responded to this prompt reported that the assistance that they have received from COD is working
4. 24% (69/259) of those who responded to this prompt reported that the assistance that they have received from COD is NOT working
5. Explanations for why (and why not) the COD assistance worked (or is NOT working) was varied (see Appendix M for details):
 - a. Assistance is working:
 - a1. Provides tutoring, assistance, and guidance
 - a2. Facilitates enrollment in required & relevant courses
 - a3. Helps resolve personal and/or academic issues & obstacles
 - a4. Provides clarity, certainty, & confidence
 - a5. Promotes proactive & active involvement in education

- b. Assistance is not working:
 - b1. Assistance is not available, difficult, and/or inaccessible
 - b2. Assistance is not effective and/or confusing
 - b3. Staff not able to solve issues
 - b4. Inadequate resources
 - b5. No assistance has been offered, provided, and/or sought

6. Conclusions & recommendations:

- a. The majority of students (76%; 198/259) responding in this section of the survey found COD assistance to be effective, likely helping to remove obstacles, allowing them to stay in college and progress along their educational journeys. This result suggests that the counseling and guidance services provide by COD staff work well for many students (in fact, the majority).
- b. However, a significant number of students (24%; 69/259) reported that they had not received effective assistance from COD for a variety of reasons, including not available, difficult, confusing, inadequate resources, and not offered or sought (see Appendix M). It is likely that these students try to “persevere on their own” but eventually fail and must “alter their educational plan” and drop out, take fewer classes, and/or go into debt to adjust (as illustrated in Appendix K). Likely outcomes of these actions are to delay degree progress significantly (more than one year), drop out of college completely, make very slow progress toward degree completion, and/or to become disappointed and dejected (Note: Observations gleaned from the focus group transcripts). These assertions suggest that targeting those who “fall through the cracks” should prove to be an effective strategy to help more students make progress toward degree completion (see Appendices D, H, & N).

C. What should COD do to help students to be successful?

- 1. Similar to the responses reported in summaries for Pillars 1 and 2, students reported complex and nuanced ways that COD can help them to be successful (see Appendices D, H, & N for details):
 - a. Issues and concerns with academic counselors and staff that should be addressed
 - b. Additional resources, facilities, & opportunities
 - c. Implement programs that guide & are actively engaged with students
 - d. Clarify and/or enhance requirements, processes, & outcomes
 - e. Promote events, opportunities, requirements, & course information so they are more available
 - f. Address and solve “student-specific” idiosyncratic issues & problems
- 2. Conclusions & recommendations:
 - a. See “*what should COD do to help students to be successful*” conclusions and recommendations for Pillars 1 and 2.
 - b. In this section, students added the notion that they need assistance and guidance solving “student-specific” idiosyncratic issues and problems. This notion was discussed at length during the focus group discussions, where students brought up their specific problems that were difficult to manage and could not be solved by COD staff, for various reasons. This suggests that COD may find it beneficial to set up a specialized programs that aim to tackle, manage, and reduce the seemingly intractable idiosyncratic obstacles that specific students face that make it hard for them stay in college.

Summary: Pillar 4 (Ensuring learning: Assessment & next steps)

A. Are you prepared for the next steps in your educational journey?

1. 83% (330/400) of those who responded to this prompt reported that they felt prepared for the next steps
2. 18% (70/400) of those who responded to this prompt reported that they felt that were NOT prepared for the next steps
3. Reasons for feeling prepared (or not) include (see Appendix O for details):
 - a. Feel prepared:
 - a1. I am confident I am acquiring knowledge, skills, and resources needed for next steps
 - a2. Staff support and support programs have prepared me for next steps
 - a3. Next steps are clear (have a plan, have prepared, have experience, have confidence)
 - a4. I have a positive orientation to the future and/or am looking forward to next steps
 - b. Feel unprepared:
 - b1. I am not certain I am acquiring knowledge, skills, & resources needed for next steps
 - b2. Next steps are not clear (no plan, no preparation, no experience, lack confidence, confused)
 - b3. Having difficulty completing courses and/or degree
4. Conclusions & recommendations:
 - a. Background: These results show that most students (83%; 330/400) feel that they are ready to take the “next steps” in their educational journey, which may include transfer to a four-year university and/or starting their career. Reasons given for feeling prepared include knowledge and skills acquired at COD, staff support and guidance, and positive orientation toward next steps. These findings speak to the value and effectiveness of COD’s influence on most students. A long tradition of academic research³ (and common sense) shows that the “college effect” (i.e., how and why a college education affects the lives of students) helps to prepare students for the next phases of their personal and professional lives, demonstrating that the fundamental mission of COD and the tenets of Guided Pathways are being met for these students.
 - b. Background: However, for some students (18%; 70/400), preparation for the next step is not complete or certain. These students reported that they are not prepared, are uncertain, confused, and are having difficulty making progress toward their degree (see Appendix O).
 - c. Recommendation: For various reasons, the existing support services at COD do not work for some students. Given the importance of the results presented above, and in light of the fundamental mission of COD and the tenets of Guided Pathways and the Vision for Success initiative, it may be of benefit to re-conceptualize, to some extent, how student support services are delivered, and incorporate more specialized wrap-around services (social services and psychological counseling assistance) to help the students who have become sidelined, left behind, and or disenfranchised by the educational system and by the current system of support services. Insight into this process was provided by the focus groups, where students expressed disillusionment and dejection with the current support system, resulting in educational delays. In addition, Appendix K shows that students report altering their educational plan (at times significantly) when faced with impediments that they were not able to manage. Thus, for some students, the current system of support just does not work, suggesting that it may need to be adjusted to capture those who fall behind, become disenfranchised, and need specialized support.

c. Additional recommendations provided by students include:

- c1. Offer additional hours of on-campus counseling and guidance for working adults, starting at 6pm;
- c2. Add licensed social services and psychological counselors to the menu of counseling services;
- c3. Start a specialized counseling unit that targets and reaches out to students who have expressed difficulties, have dropped out, or who have applied but not enrolled to offer assistance to help them overcome the impediments that are affecting their degree progress; and
- c4. Organize a forum for students, faculty, and staff to share their experiences and concerns about what has worked well, not well, and what are the next steps for counseling and guidance on the COD campuses.

B. Sequenced courses

1. 73% (287/393) of those responding to this prompt reported that they have enrolled in a “sequenced courses” (a series of courses that build upon each other)
2. 88% (288/327) of those responding to this prompt reported that they thought that the sequenced courses were helpful
3. 85% (270/317) of those responding to this prompt reported that they thought that the sequenced courses were valuable
4. Reasons why the sequenced courses were perceived as valuable (or not) include (see Appendix P for details):
 - a. Sequenced courses are valuable:
 - a1. Build background knowledge that promotes understanding of subject matter, field, major, degree, & career
 - a2. Develop practical skills & tools, and/or competence & confidence
 - a3. Promote individualized learning & success
 - a4. Develop understanding of and/or insights into degree requirements and reveal paths for goal & degree completion
 - b. Sequenced courses are not valuable:
 - b1. A scheme to get students to take more classes
 - b2. A waste of time & effort, and/or are difficult to complete
5. Conclusions & recommendations:
 - a. Background: Most students reported that sequenced courses were helpful (88%; 288/327) and valuable (85%; 270/317) for a variety of reasons. Of those who reported that sequenced courses were not helpful or valuable, several stated that they were a waste of time and effort. Clearly, the majority of students find sequenced courses helpful and valuable, suggesting that their inclusion in degree/major programs is warranted and desired as educational mechanisms that promote and ensure learning.
 - b. Recommendation: Offer more options for sequenced courses so more students are able to enroll in them and move forward toward degree completion.

C. General Education (Gen Ed) courses

1. 68% (248/367) of those responding to this prompt reported that they thought that the Gen Ed courses prepared them for their major-specific courses
2. 77% (275/357) of those responding to this prompt reported that they thought that the Gen Ed courses were helpful
3. 76% (268/352) of those responding to this prompt reported that they thought that the Gen Ed courses were valuable
4. Reasons why the Gen Ed courses were seen as valuable (or not) include (see Appendix Q for details):
 - a. Gen Ed courses are valuable:
 - a1. Broaden perspectives and/or develop background knowledge, understanding, & skills
 - a2. Prepare for next steps & the future
 - a3. Refresh and prime past knowledge
 - a4. Socialize and prepare students for college
 - b. Gen Ed courses are not valuable:
 - b1. A waste of resources (time, money, & effort)
 - b2. Redundant, not relevant, and/or not necessary
 - b3. Difficult to enroll in due to high demand and/or are under staffed
 - b4. Not taught well
5. Conclusions & recommendations:
 - a. Background: Most students found the Gen Ed courses helpful (77%; 275/357) and valuable (76%; 268/352) to prepare them for “next steps.” Of those who reported that the Gen Ed courses were not helpful or valuable, they reported that these courses were a waste of resources and/or redundant/not necessary.
 - b. Recommendation: These results suggest that additional screening and/or prerequisite changes should be considered to help avoid students becoming bored, irritated, or dropping out because they are required to take courses that they believe are not necessary and/or are not relevant to their degree and/or major (see Vision for Success document for illustrative examples and additional details).⁵

Section IV: Overall Conclusions & Recommendations (Focus groups & online survey)

In this section, overall conclusions and recommendations from the focus groups and the online survey (including a brief report on the individual phone interviews that were conducted as part of this project) are presented, synthesized, and advanced. In addition, the conclusions are linked to the fundamental guiding principles that form the “framework for change” of the Vision for Success initiative to contextualize both the conclusions and recommendations. In addition, in this section, emphasis is placed on overarching issues and concerns to avoid listing details that can be found in prior sections.

To promote consistency, this section is organized along the four pillars outlined by the Guided Pathways framework, followed by sections that link to the Vision for Success initiative and to a separate project that involved individual interviews to provide a broader context and validation for the focus group and online survey results presented above. The section closes with a brief “Next steps” section that lists potential ways to use the results generated by the focus groups and online survey.

Conclusions: Pillar 1 (Clarifying the path: Entry information)

As students sought information about COD and its programs, the majority reported that they found the college’s website helpful (89%) and valuable (95%). In addition, most students (89%) reported that they also found the college’s printed schedule/catalogue useful to find information about the college. These results are very encouraging and show that the existing communication assets of the college are working as intended. However, as students discussed these communication assets in detail they reported that they had a few issues and concerns regarding how the college approaches communicating with students in general and how the college sets up the website and printed schedule/catalogue specifically, that, if addressed, may make communicating with students more effective. Thus, students who participated in the focus groups and online survey reported that they held the following issues and concerns relevant to clarifying the path, and that addressing these issues and concerns would help them make progress toward degree completion:

A. Be proactive, engaged, and timely when communicating with students

1. Recommendation: Implement more and regular notifications to students about events, courses, degree/major requirements, and transfer information.
2. Recommendation: Implement a campus-wide effort to promote use of Canvas among part-time instructors and full-time faculty.
3. Recommendation: Encourage instructors and professors to respond to student messages (typically via email) in a timely manner.

B. Ensure that communication (specifically public information) is accurate, clear, complete, and comprehensive

1. Recommendation (Website): The students reported that the website was working well. However, a few concerns were reported, including perceptions that some sections are not comprehensive or complete. Thus, identify the sections that students find problematic and redesign those sections with student input.
2. Recommendation (Printed schedule/catalog): The students reported that they valued the printed schedule/catalog. However, a few concerns were reported, including perceptions that some sections are difficult to understand, confusing, and/or not clear. Thus, identify the sections that students find problematic and re-design those sections with student input.

Conclusions: Pillar 2 (Entering the path: Selecting a degree/major)

Slightly more than half (52%) of the students who responded to the online survey reported that they had sought and received assistance from COD staff in selecting a degree and/or a major and that they found that assistance to be valuable, relevant, and up-to-date, suggesting that the counseling and guidance services work well for many students at this stage of their educational journeys. However, nearly half (48%) of the students who responded to the online survey reported that COD did NOT help them select a degree and/or a major and a third (33%) reported experiencing impediments that made selecting a degree and/or a major difficult. Thus, for a significant number of students additional assistance is needed. Students who participated in the focus groups and online survey reported that they held the following issues and concerns relevant to entering the path, and that addressing these issues and concerns would help them make progress toward degree completion:

A. Show that the college staff is proactive and engaged

1. Recommendation: Set up and implement an outreach program that brings counselors to the classrooms to answer student questions and set up appointments with students.
2. Recommendation: Set up and implement established dates for students to visit counselors on a regular basis.

B. Provide ongoing, regular training and evaluation for staff

1. Recommendation: Assess course requirements across semesters and years to ensure that staff are meeting minimum standards and teaching students necessary skills to prepare them for the next steps in their programs.
2. Recommendation: Establish additional counseling staff training to enhance “on-the-ground” strategies to streamline the workload and to help students who experience difficulties in selecting a degree and/or a major.
3. Recommendation: Provide ongoing training for counselors so that they are up to date on course, major, degree, and transfer information.

C. Ensure that communication (specifically course information) is accurate, clear, complete, and comprehensive

1. Recommendation: Establish a communication program that informs students of the general nature and parameters of each class that outlines:
 - a. what is typically taught in that class
 - b. what to expect from each class in terms of workload
 - c. how the class fits into a degree program and/or major

D. Develop and/or promote assistance programs that help students select a degree and/or major

1. Identify and promote existing programs, communication channels, and processes that help students select a degree and/or a major.
2. Develop and promote new programs, communication channels, and processes that help students who have difficulties selecting a degree and/or a major to select a degree and/or a major.

Conclusions: Pillar 3 (Staying on the path)

The majority of students (76%) responding to the online survey reported that they found COD counseling and assistance to be effective in helping them stay on the path, suggesting that these services work well for many students at this stage of their educational journeys. However, for a significant number of students, additional assistance is needed. Students who participated in the focus groups and online survey reported that they held the following issues and concerns relevant to staying on the path, and that addressing these issues and concerns would help them make progress toward degree completion:

A. Develop and offer additional support services with flexible, accessible options

1. Recommendation: Develop and offer online support services.
2. Recommendation: Counseling staff need to document degree and major requirements/changes and make them easily accessible for students for reference and advising.
3. Recommendation: Ensure that adequate counseling staff is available to meet student demand.
4. Recommendation: Add counseling staff to address student-specific special needs.

B. Promote student services more frequently and broadly, and promote a student culture that accepts and is willing to seek out support and assistance

1. Recommendation: Given that many students (67%; n=235) reported in the online survey that they have NOT received assistance from COD to help them stay in college, stating that they relied on themselves to solve their educational difficulties, many students perceive that they are on their own to deal with the impediments that threaten their ability to stay in college. These findings point to the need to promote assistance programs more frequently and more broadly, and suggest that a fundamental change in the student culture may be needed to make seeking help acceptable and expected.
2. Background analysis: Comparison of the Selecting a degree/major stage to the Staying on the path stage shows that significantly MORE students experience obstacles at the Staying on the path stage than during the Selecting a degree/major stage. This result reveals that the educational journey gets MORE difficult as students move closer to degree completion, eventually forcing them to rely more heavily on support services or, if they find the support services lacking, tough it out on their own, making them vulnerable to delay and/or dropping out. In addition, comparison of the Selecting a degree/major stage to the Staying on the path stage shows that students tend to receive LESS help from COD support services in the Staying on the path stage compared to the Selecting a degree/major stage. This result reveals that the educational journey gets LESS supportive as students move closer to degree completion, suggesting that vulnerable students will rely less on support services and more on themselves to manage the impediments and threats that they encounter at this stage of their educational journey.
3. Recommendation: Overall, these results suggest that changes in the approaches to how counseling is delivered and changes within the student population may be needed to solve and/or reduce the difficulties that students experience at this stage in their educational journey. It may be beneficial to promote a student culture that seeks out support and assistance and embraces the belief that seeking out and receiving support and assistance are acceptable and, to some extent, expected behaviors.

Conclusions: Pillar 4 (Ensuring learning: Assessment & next steps)

The majority of students (83%) responding to the online survey reported that they were prepared for the next steps in their educational journeys, recounting that they are confident that they have acquired the knowledge and skills, received effective support and guidance, and have developed the confidence to move on. However, for some students additional assistance is needed. Students who participated in the focus groups and online survey reported that they held the following issues and concerns relevant to ensuring learning, and that addressing these issues and concerns would help them make progress toward degree completion and moving on to the next phases of their lives:

A. Train counseling staff so that they are up-to-date and accurate with transfer information

1. Recommendation: Students reported that it is difficult to get accurate and up-to-date information on transfer paths and degree requirements from counselors. Thus, establish ongoing training and updating for counseling staff.

B. Provide student-centered/student-specific counseling, assistance, and guidance

1. Background: Students reported that counselors seem to have a “standardized script” that students must follow to complete a degree and/or a major across all programs, which suggests that there are no individualized counseling paths for students to follow. However, for students who feel unprepared, uncertain, and confused, preparation for the next step is difficult. These students reported that they were having difficulty making progress toward their degree.
2. Recommendation: It may be beneficial to reconceptualize, to some extent, how student support services are delivered at this point in the educational journey and incorporate more specialized wrap-around services (social services and psychological counseling assistance) to help students who have become sidelined, left behind, and/or disenfranchised by the educational process and the current system of support services. Insight into this process is provided by the focus groups and the online survey, where students expressed disillusionment and dejection with the current support system, resulting in educational delays, some significantly altering their educational plan when faced with impediments that they were not able to manage (see Pillar 4: Ensuring Learning above). Thus, for some students, the current system of support just does not work, suggesting that it may need to be fine-tuned to capture those who fall behind, become disenfranchised, and need specialized support to complete their educational journey. Developing a specialized counseling unit to address the special needs and circumstances of specific students at this stage of the educational journey may be beneficial.
3. Additional recommendations provided by students:
 - a. Offer additional hours of on-campus counseling and guidance for working adults
 - b. Add licensed social services and psychological counselors to the menu of counseling services
 - c. Start a specialized counseling unit that targets and reaches out to students who have expressed difficulties or have dropped out to help them overcome the impediments that are affecting their degree progress
 - d. Organize a forum for students, faculty, and staff to share their experiences and concerns about what has worked well, not well, and what are the next steps for counseling and guidance for this stage of the educational journey

C. Curriculum design issues to consider

1. Sequenced courses
 - a. Background: Most students reported that sequenced courses were helpful (88%; n=288) and valuable (85%; n=270). Students reported very positive perceptions for the sequenced courses. Students generally see the value in these types of courses in terms of providing a step-by-step process to acquire knowledge about subject-matters, degrees, and majors, and developing an understanding of and/or insights into degree requirements and paths for goal and degree completion.

- b. Background: Some students had a hard time linking the knowledge acquired in these courses to future success because they tended to think that “measures of success and understanding” reside in college degrees not at the level of specific courses.
- c. Background: Students reported that sequenced courses were difficult to get into, so they “crashed” them, hoping that a seat would open so they could enroll officially.
- d. Background: The issue of priority registration was mentioned in terms of its effect on availability to enroll in sequenced courses and its effect on delaying degree progress. Due to these courses being required, they tend to fill up during the day, so more evening and/or online courses need to be offered to accommodate working adults and/or single parents.
- e. Recommendation: Sequence courses are natural paths to understanding and building knowledge and skills. Offering more options for students to enroll such as in the evenings, on the weekends, or offering more sections during the semester may be necessary.

2. General Education courses

- a. Background: Most students reported that the Gen Ed courses were helpful (77%; n=275) and valuable (76%; n=268) and that that they provided basic training, a refresher, and preparation for upcoming courses for those who needed that level of education.
- b. Background: However, generally, students perceived the Gen Ed courses as a waste of time and resources, and redundant/not necessary. Due to the burdens that Gen Ed courses pose, some students may drop out of college.
- c. Background: Some students think that there too many Gen Ed requirements and that degree and major programs lack options to avoid Gen Ed courses.
- d. Recommendation: Due to Gen Ed courses being required, they tend to fill up during the day. Offering more sections, or evening, weekend, and/or online options may be needed to accommodate working adults and/or single parents.
- e. Recommendation: Additional and/or more extensive/accurate screening and/or prerequisite changes should be considered to help avoid students becoming bored, irritated, and/or dropping out by being required to take Gen Ed courses that they feel are not necessary and/or are not relevant to their degree and/or major.
- f. Recommendation: Examination and discussions surrounding removing and/or reducing some of the Gen Ed requirements from certain degree programs may be necessary.

Conclusions: Overarching issues and concerns across the educational journey

Of those who reported that they were not being guided properly by COD counseling staff, many reported that they need more “wrap around” assistance to help them, including more counseling, guidance, assistance, and to some extent, additional social services such as help with specific life issues and circumstance such as psychological counseling and support. These students report that they feel disillusioned and dejected, which causes them to drop out and/or delay their educational journey. As reported at the conclusion of the focus groups section, most of these issues and concerns are captured by the following list, as reported and experienced by students:

- A. Lack of communication
- B. Lack of coordination
- C. Lack of an interrelated, coherent system of support(s)
- D. Lack of up-to-date information (including receiving inconsistent and incorrect advice and information, especially from counselors)

- E. Lack of informed and available staff (especially counselors)
- F. Lack of (or lack of use of) automated systems that monitor student progress and send out reminders for them to take specific action to stay on track (especially in terms of faculty using Canvas for course management and counselors using technology to set up appointments with students)
- G. Lack of flexibility in meeting non-traditional students' needs (e.g., working adults, single parents)

As shown prior, the list of issues and concerns presented above can be synthesized down into three overarching principles that represent core, fundamental issues and concerns that students hold across all four stages of their educational journey:

- A. The **inaccessibility and lack of availability** of services that make it difficult for students to receive apt, accurate, and timely advice and guidance from support staff (e.g., inconvenient hours, lack of counseling staff).
- B. The **lack of communication, training, and coordination** of staff that confuse students, cause them to spend more time and money taking classes that may not be relevant, and lead to perceptions that the staff are incompetent and cannot be trusted.
- C. The **lack of pro-active/active engagement** of staff that lead to perceptions that the support staff do not care about students and/or do not perceive students as “critical clients” (in the sense of the central tenets of Guided Pathways, the fundamental mission of community colleges, and the core commitments outlined by the Vision for Success initiative) who should be treated with empathy, respect, and patience, and guided, counseled, and advised with state-of-the-art knowledge and techniques to ensure that they are moving along their educational paths with diligence and confidence.

The significance of these three core issues resides in the possibility that students may encounter all three across all of the stages of the educational journey; they are, generally, a product of the internal products and processes of the college; and they are solvable. Concerted efforts to address these core issues can move the college closer to addressing student needs and demand.

Linking to the Vision for Success initiative

The *Vision for Success*^{4,6} initiative outlines a comprehensive framework for change (and transformation) that all CCCs and the CCC System are encouraged to follow to meet the fundamental needs of California’s community college students and California’s workforce.⁵ The results of this project speak to the challenges, goals, and core commitments of the *Vision for Success* initiative, which provides a system-level guide to contextualize and guide the development of recommendations and next steps. Next, the challenges, goals, and core commitments of the *Vision for Success* initiative are listed to highlight their breadth and depth, and to show how they are directly related the results and outcomes of this project.

Vision for Success: Systemic challenges

The *Vision for Success* document details the specific challenges that most, if not all, CCCs face:

- A. High non-completion rates (see Challenge #1)
- B. Not enough graduates to meet workforce needs (see Challenge #2)
- C. Degree completion takes too long and is inefficient (see Challenge #3)
- D. “Non-traditional” students experience multiple impediments (see Challenge #4)
- E. System is costly & not enough financial aid for students (see Challenge #5)
- F. Achievement gaps and regional inequities exist (see Challenge #6)

The results produced by the focus groups and the online survey address most directly the “student-centered” challenges listed above (#3, #4, and #5), which serve to validate the students’ perceptions, opinions, and experiences at COD. Thus, the results of this project are most relevant for the degree completion, non-traditional student impediments, and lack of financial aid challenges outlined by the *Vision for Success* initiative. However, the results also speak to the other challenges indirectly because addressing the “student-centered” issues will likely affect the broader challenges (#1, #2, and #6). As a result, the “system” of challenges outlined in the *Vision for Success* document situate student-centered issues at its core.

Students discussed these three “student-centered” issues in depth, at times complaining that each impeded their progress and made it difficult to complete degree requirements. Much of the discussion centered on the lack of counseling, advising and guidance that students needed to help them navigate the impediments (barriers and obstacles) that presented themselves as they moved through the degree/major requirements. Analyses above showed that as students move through the degree completion process (i.e., the educational journey), it becomes MORE difficult (more students experience obstacles) and LESS supportive (fewer students ask for, seek out, and/or receive assistance from COD). These forces likely combine to form the perceptions, opinions, and recounted experiences illustrated in Appendices D, H, and N. The details of student perceptions, opinions, and experiences recounted in these appendices can serve as guiding principles for recommendations and next steps, including addressing the following:

A. Issues and concerns with academic counselors & staff

1. Lack follow-up with students
2. Rude or discourteous interactions
3. Provide incorrect, misleading, inconsistent, and/or incomplete information
4. Not knowledgeable or well trained
5. Not convenient and/or difficult to meet with
6. Lack public credentials

B. Lack of resources, facilities, & opportunities

1. Increase support staff/personnel & availability
2. Add office facilities & equipment for student use
3. Increase course offerings & availability
4. Increase support services & programs
5. Develop and promote social/professional networking programs & opportunities
6. Expand physical facilities
7. Increase support for staff
8. Streamline programs

C. Implement programs that guide & are actively engaged with students

D. Clarify and/or enhance requirements, processes, & outcomes

E. Promote events, opportunities, requirements, & course information so that they are more available

Admittedly, the above list is extensive and presents broad and deep complexities, for a variety of reasons, but it does highlight specific issues to consider in service of making progress on the “student-centered” challenges listed above, which, in turn, should affect the broader challenges, to some extent.

Vision for Success: Overarching goals

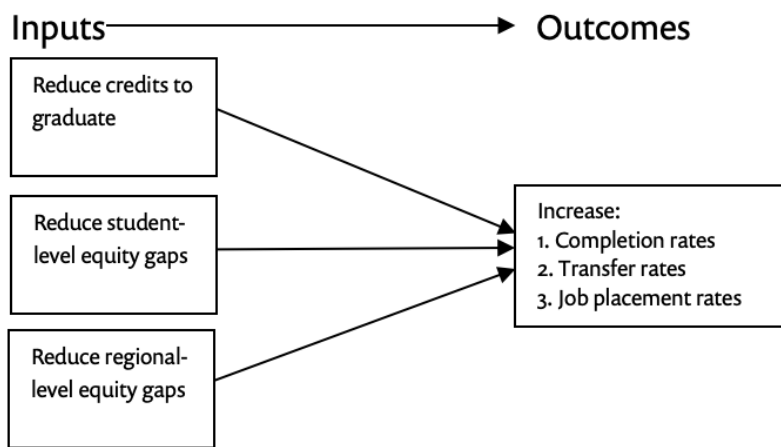
The *Vision for Success* document⁶ also lists the overarching goals embraced by the initiative that serve to guide the actions of the entire System and the CCCs specifically in service of the underlying principles of the Vision for Success initiative:

- A. Increase degree completion rates (see Goal #1)
- B. Increase transfer rates (see Goal #2)
- C. Decrease credits needed to graduate (see Goal #3)

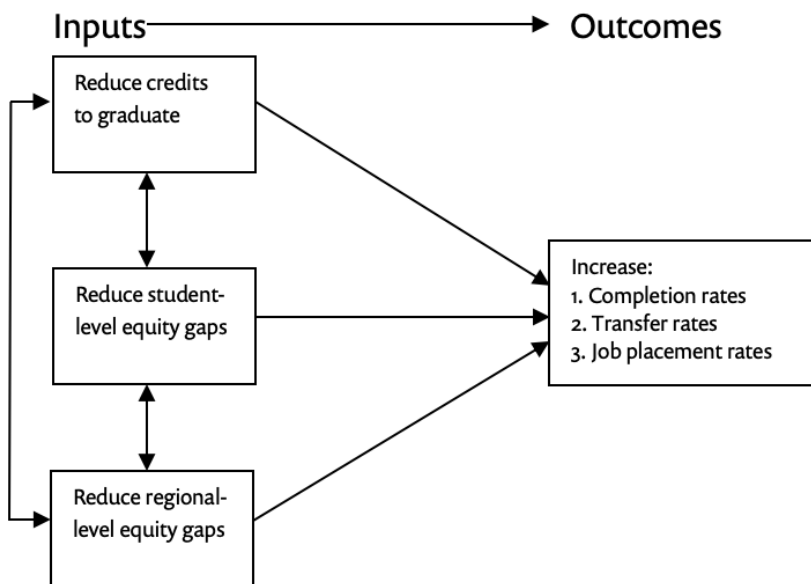
- D. Increase job placement rates (see Goal #4)
- E. Reduce student-level equity and achievement gaps (see Goal #5)
- F. Reduce regional equity gaps (see Goal #6)

Again, as above, the specific goals that are implicated by the focus group and online survey results include those that are most relevant to students and their specific experiences as they move through their educational journeys at COD. Specifically, goals #1, #2, #3, and, to some extent #4 were discussed by the students in the focus groups and online survey. Again, as above, the goals can be conceptualized as an inter-related set (a system), suggesting that if one is altered others will be affected. Focusing efforts on the goals discussed by the students, #1, #2, #3, and #4 suggests that students were most concerned with “outcomes” (#1, #2, and #4), which are likely to require changes in the “inputs” (#3, #5, and #6) first because goals #3, #5, and #6 can be conceptualized as pre-cursors of or causal influences for goals #1, #2, and #4 (which are “outcomes” from the educational journey). The specific approach to change depends on the type or the design of the system that shows how the components are inter-related. Two standard examples follow:

A. Goals Inputs/Outcomes Model #1 (Independent factors)



B. Goals Inputs/Outputs Model #2 (Inter-related factors)



The independent factors model suggests that the outcomes can be altered by independent, separate changes in any of the inputs. Thus, isolated and independent programs that target the inputs and assess the outcomes should demonstrate observable effects on the outcomes. The inter-related factors model suggests that changes in the outcomes are likely to come about when

the “system” of factors that compose the inputs are changed together. Thus, in the inter-related model, to affect change in the outcomes, it is likely that all three of the inputs would need to be targeted for change either simultaneously, as a connected set, or in a staged fashion, one after another in somewhat short order. Most models developed in the Social Sciences assume that input factors are inter-related and connected, and in this case, this assumption makes sense. For example, if the student-level and regional-level gaps are not addressed properly it is less likely that just a reduction in “credits needed to graduate” will hold much sway over increasing completion rates, transfer rates, and/or job placement rates as the two gap factors are powerful forces that will likely overwhelm changes in the credit reduction factor alone.

Vision for Success: Core commitments

Finally, the Vision for Success document lists the core commitments that the initiative seeks to strive toward that serve to inspire the System and the CCCs to achieve the goals of the initiative and to realize their full potential(s):

- A. Focus on students’ end goals
- B. Always design and decide with the student in mind
- C. Pair high expectations with high support
- D. Foster the use of data, inquiry, and evidence
- E. Take ownership of goals and performance
- F. Enable action and thoughtful innovation
- G. Lead the work of partnering across systems

The core commitments are presented here to remind readers that these “higher level aspirations” outlined in the Vision for Success document are often realized by collecting data from students to understand their positions, interpretations, and experiences, and then using the results to design and re-design programs and processes that help students through their educational journeys, as they seek a degree and a better life.

Illustrative example: Linking to the individual phone interview results

The focus group discussion and online survey results presented in this report hold natural linkages to the individual phone interviews that Interact conducted as a separate part of this project. A synopsis of those results is presented next to illustrate and highlight the similarities to the focus group and online survey results, and to show that the three approaches used for this project (focus groups, online survey, individual phone interviews) triangulate and validate findings across the three data collection efforts.⁶ In addition, key aspects of the phone interview results are relevant to the four stages of the educational journey as identified by Guided Pathways and show where impediments exist for these students.

Phone interviews: Barriers and obstacles for failing to enroll

Students who were interviewed by phone reported several reasons why they failed to enroll at COD:

- A. Financial or income problems; needed to work instead (potential clarifying the path issue)
- B. Life circumstances or personal issues (potential clarifying the path issue)
- C. Attending or transferring to a different institution (potential clarifying or entering the path issues)
- D. Scheduling or timing issues; lack of available classes (clarifying and entering the path issues)
- E. Problems with application or registration processes (clarifying and entering the path issues)
- F. Changed mind, chose not to return, or procrastination (potential clarifying the path issue)
- G. Issues with transferability of credits (clarifying the path issue)
- H. Ineffective counseling (clarifying and entering the path issue)
- I. Too hard to park (potential entering the path issue)

Phone interviews: Recommendations for change (Links to Guided Pathways pillars & Vision for Success goals)

Many of the students who were interviewed by phone indicated that COD should work on several things to improve their service to prospective students who did not make it through the enrollment process. These students recommended improving the following five processes. Each of the processes listed below is linked to the specific Guided Pathways stage(s)/pillar(s) and to the goal(s) outlined by the Vision for Success initiative that are most likely met by these types of changes to illustrate how action taken to help students enroll is likely related to the Guided Pathways framework and to the *Vision for Success* initiative.

Issues and/or concerns	Guided Pathways Pillar	Vision for Success Goal
Unclear application, enrollment, and registration processes	Clarifying the path	Input: 5,6 Output: 1,2,4
Lack of availability of classes/programs and flexible scheduling	Entering the path	Input: 5,6 Output: 1,2,4
Ineffective counseling, customer service, and financial aid assistance	Clarifying & entering the path	Input: 5,6 Output: 1,2,4
Lack of follow-up communications	Clarifying & entering the path	Input: 5,6 Output: 1,2,4
Website issues (confusing, complicated, hard to navigate, not user friendly)	Clarifying & entering the path	Input: 5,6 Output: 1,2,4

As the table above shows, many of the same issues and concerns surface in the phone interviews as surfaced in the focus groups and online survey. These commonalities show that regardless of how the students were asked, their overall responses are basically the same, which provides a high degree of confidence in the overall results presented in this report and the phone interview report. That said the phone interview results show that students failed to enroll based largely on two fundamental concerns:

- A. The path to enrollment at COD was not clear (e.g., personal issues, college administrative and process issues, and communication issues);
- B. How to enter the path was not easy, convenient, or accessible (e.g., lack of availability of classes, lack of follow up communications, and/or difficulties encountered when using website).

These results provide additional evidence and verification for the utility of using the Guided Pathways framework to understand where impediments (barriers and obstacles) reside during students' educational journeys. In addition, the results speak to the issues presented above regarding the "Inputs/Outcomes Models," suggesting that assistance for students who have applied but have not enrolled will likely need to be systemic, which is one of the fundamental tenets embraced by the Vision for Success initiative. That is, addressing one impediment will likely not be sufficient to motivate the "applied but failed to enroll" students to enroll and attend classes. However, addressing the set of factors that stop these students from enrolling will likely be more effective to motivate them to enroll because the set of impediments has likely formed a "perceptual system" that affects these students' perceptions, opinions, and willingness and/or ability to enroll. Thus, targeting sets of impediments holds more potential to motivate enrollment because it alters the set of impediments in significant ways by removing "real-world" and "perceptual" barriers and obstacles that may help to open options, present opportunities, and spark hope in potential students.

In addition, as the above table illustrates, taking action to address the impediments that students encounter during the "enrollment stage" (i.e., clarifying the path), will likely affect multiple Vision for Success goals, including completion rates, transfer rates, job placement rates, student-level equity and achievement gaps, and regional equity gaps, because, as the Vision for Success initiative suggests and the Inputs/Outcomes Model #2 illustrates, these issues are connected and work as a system. Thus, helping more students get into the community college system should result in higher outcomes (completion rates, transfer rates, and job placement rates), assuming that these students are properly guided through the educational journey along the way.

Concluding Comments

Synthesis of the results presented throughout this document suggests that the following overarching conclusions can be drawn:

- A. Overall, the results show that for the majority of COD students, the current system of assistance, support, and guidance is working well (as intended and as designed) across the four stages of the educational journey. Many students expressed appreciation for the counseling staff, the professors/instructors, the program staff, and others who have helped them navigate the barriers and obstacles that impede, or may impede, their degree progress. For these students, the educational journey should end in them being able to move to the next phases of their lives (e.g., transfer or job placement).
- B. However, for a smaller subset of the COD students, the educational journey is less smooth and guided. Many students reported that they experience obstacles and barriers that impede, or may impede, their degree progress, including administrative problems, personal problems, social/family problems, financial problems, etc. For a variety of reasons, for some of these students, the extensive support services and programs provided by COD (and support provided by outside of the college sources such as family and friends) just do not work or are ineffective. These are the students who need assistance and these are the students who need to be embraced more fully to help them along their educational journey. Setting in place assistance and support programs that identify and track these students, and that are proactive and engaged, should go a long way in terms of keeping them “on the path” and progressing through their educational journey.
- C. This research also shows that across the stages of the educational journey, specific types of barriers and obstacles surface for students, as listed above in detail. A set of these barriers and obstacles seem to cut across all of the stages of the educational journey, including inaccessibility and lack of availability of services; lack of communication, training, and coordination of college staff; and lack of proactive/active engagement of college staff. It is difficult to determine the extent to which these issues are valid and widespread at COD, but the triangulation of evidence across the focus groups and online survey suggest that these three issues are real concerns that affect students.
- D. There are many ways to make changes that will help students who need more assistance and guidance during their educational journey. One way is to offer more student-centered assistance that provides options for the specific issues that specific students may be experiencing. A second way is to be proactive and engaged and reach out to students who have demonstrated problems to keep them on track and moving forward. A third way is to change the life circumstances of these students so that they are less likely to encounter impediments during their educational journey (as outlined in the Vision for Success initiative in terms of regional and student-level equity gaps).
- E. What binds together the three approaches listed above is the notion that students are “critical clients” who should be treated with empathy, respect, and patience, and guided, counseled, and advised with state-of-the-art knowledge and techniques to ensure that they move along their educational paths with diligence and confidence. Thus, adopting this central tenet should prove to be effective to make the fundamental changes that may be needed to assist and guide the students who need additional assistance and guidance to make progress along their educational journeys.

Section V: Supporting Material (Footnotes & Appendices)

Footnotes

¹Despite lower-than-expected student turnout for the focus groups, the focus group results are paralleled, expanded upon, nuanced, and validated by the online survey results. Comparisons across the two data collection methods reveals substantial similarities, which help to validate both approaches and their results, and suggests that the “student experience” is commonly understood and described in similar ways across a wide variety of students, regardless of the measurement approach used to gather the information.

²A note of caution: Presentation of the qualitative results across the focus groups and the online survey is without ascription of importance tied to any of the categories that compose the typologies. The categories of each typology are listed “as is” to give the readers a broad sense of the depth and breadth of student responses, without imposing an order or significance to each. Some of the categories are composed of dozens of student responses, while some are composed of just a few. The reader is encouraged to examine the appendices to come to a judgment of significance and/or importance for each category.

³Discussion of the use of the term “staff” in the course catalog led to discussion of another practice that students expressed concern over. The practice of “bumping” instructors out of specific classes and replacing them with other instructors without informing students was not appreciated by the students because they perceived this practice as somewhat disingenuous, due in part to the fact that the college does not give them prior knowledge regarding the change of instructors, and the perception that the change is likely to alter the nature of the course.

⁴ See the following research articles:

Brint, S., & Clotfelter, C.T. (2016). U.S. Higher Education Effectiveness. RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences, 2(1), 2-37.

Dougherty, K.J., Jones, S.M., Lahr, H., Natow, R.S., Pheatt, L., & Reddy, V. (2016). Looking Inside the Black Box of Performance Funding for Higher Education: Policy Instruments, Organizational Obstacles, and Intended and Unintended Impacts. RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences, 2(1), 147-173.

Han, S. & Buchmann, C. (2016). Aligning Science Achievement and STEM Expectations for College Success: A Comparative Study of Curricular Standardization. RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences, 2(1), 192-211.

Reimer, L.C., Schenke, K., Nguyen, T., O’Dowd, D.K., Domina, T., & Warschauer, M. (2016). Evaluating Promising Practices in Undergraduate STEM Lecture Courses. RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences, 2(1) 212-233.

Rosenbaum, J.E., Ahearn, C.E., Rosenbaum, J.E., & Becker, K.I. (2016). Beyond Earnings and Social Reproduction: Can College Lead to Good Jobs Without Reproducing Social Inequalities? RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences, 2(1), 90-110.

⁵<https://vision.foundationccc.org/>; <http://californiacommunitycolleges.cccco.edu/portals/o/reports/vision-for-success.pdf>

⁶Following are the fundamental challenges, goals, and commitments outlined in the *Vision for Success* document:

Challenges

1. Most students who enter a community college never complete a degree or certificate or transfer to a 4-year university.
2. Researchers project that California’s public higher education system is not producing nearly enough educated graduates to meet future workforce needs.
3. CCC students who do reach a defined educational goal such as a degree or transfer take a long time to do so, often accumulating many excess course credits along the way.
4. Older and working CCC students are often left behind in the system, lacking services and financial aid that suit their needs.

5. CCCs are more expensive than they appear—both to students and taxpayers— because of slow time-to-completion and a lack of financial aid to cover students’ living expenses.
6. Serious and stubborn achievement gaps persist across the CCCs and high-need regions of the state are not served equitably.

Goals

The success of California’s broader system of higher education and workforce development stands or falls with the CCCs. To meet California’s needs, the CCC system should strive to achieve the following goals by 2022:

1. Increase by at least 20 percent the number of CCC students annually who acquire associates degrees, credentials, certificates, or specific skill sets that prepare them for an in-demand job.
2. Increase by 35 percent the number of CCC students transferring annually to a UC or CSU.
3. Decrease the average number of units accumulated by CCC students earning associate’s degrees, from approximately 87 total units (the most recent system-wide average) to 79 total units—the average among the quintile of colleges showing the strongest performance on this measure.
4. Increase the percent of exiting CTE students who report being employed in their field of study, from the most recent statewide average of 60 percent to an improved rate of 69 percent—the average among the quintile of colleges showing the strongest performance on this measure.
5. Reduce equity gaps across all of the above measures through faster improvements among traditionally underrepresented student groups, with the goal of cutting achievement gaps by 40 percent within 5 years and fully closing those achievement gaps within 10 years.
6. Reduce regional achievement gaps across all of the above measures through faster improvements among colleges located in regions with the lowest educational attainment of adults, with the ultimate goal of fully closing regional achievement gaps within 10 years.

Core commitments for CCCs and the CCC System

Below are seven core commitments the community college system can make to achieve these ambitious goals and realize its full potential to meet the future workforce needs of California:

- 1. Focus relentlessly on students’ end goals.** Getting students to their individual educational goals, whether a degree, certificate, transfer, or specific skill set, should be the explicit focus of the CCCs. More than just offering courses, colleges need to be offering pathways to specific outcomes and providing supports for students to stay on those paths until completion.
- 2. Always design and decide with the student in mind.** Colleges need to make it easy for all students, including working adults, to access the courses and services they need. Students should not bear the burden of misaligned policies between education systems.
- 3. Pair high expectations with high support.** Students should be encouraged to go “all in” on their education, with support to meet their personal and academic challenges. Assessment and placement practices must be reformed so that students are placed at the highest appropriate course level, with ample supports to help them succeed.
- 4. Foster the use of data, inquiry, and evidence.** Data analysis should be a regular practice used for improving services at all levels, not a compliance activity. Decisions should be based on evidence, not anecdotes or hunches.
- 5. Take ownership of goals and performance.** The CCC system should be rigorously transparent about its performance, own its challenges, and adopt a solution-oriented mindset to those things it can control. Goals should be used to motivate and provide direction, not punish.

6. Enable action and thoughtful innovation. Moving the needle on student outcomes will require calculated risk, careful monitoring, and acceptance that failures will sometimes happen. Innovation should be thoughtful and aligned with goals; results should be tracked early and often.

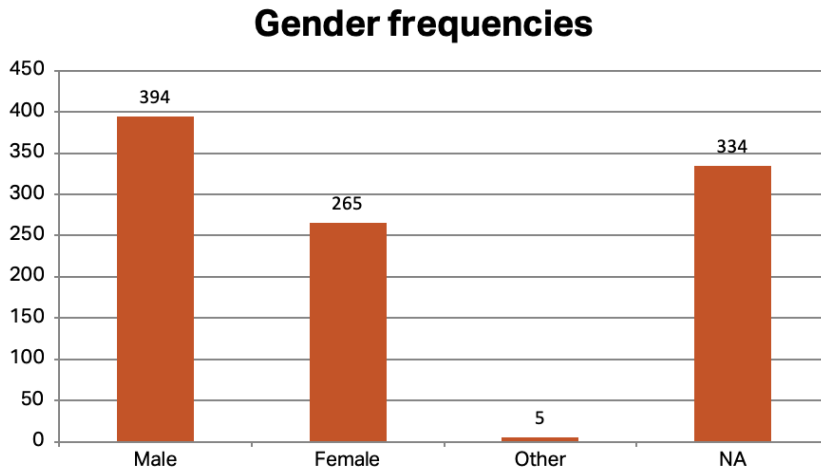
7. Lead the work of partnering across systems. Education leaders across the education systems and workforce development systems need to meet much more frequently, in more depth, and with more personnel dedicated to the task. By working together these systems can strengthen pathways for students and improve results.

⁷List compiled from phone interview report. (see *College of the Desert: Failure to Enroll* report).

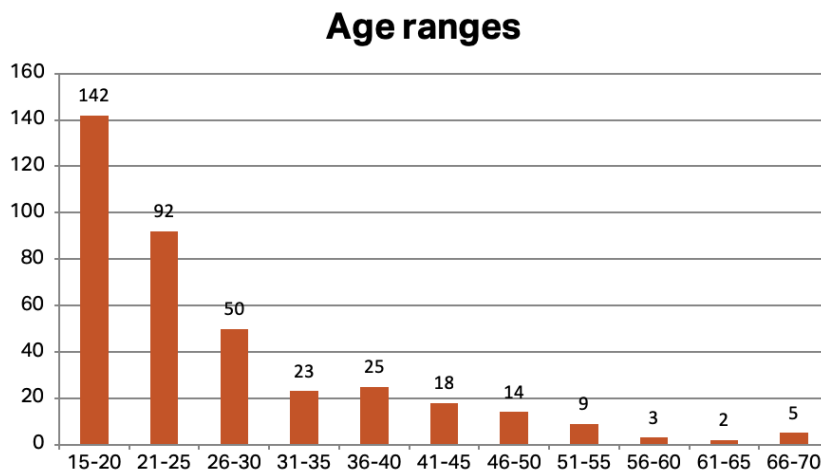
Appendix A

Demographics for online survey participants

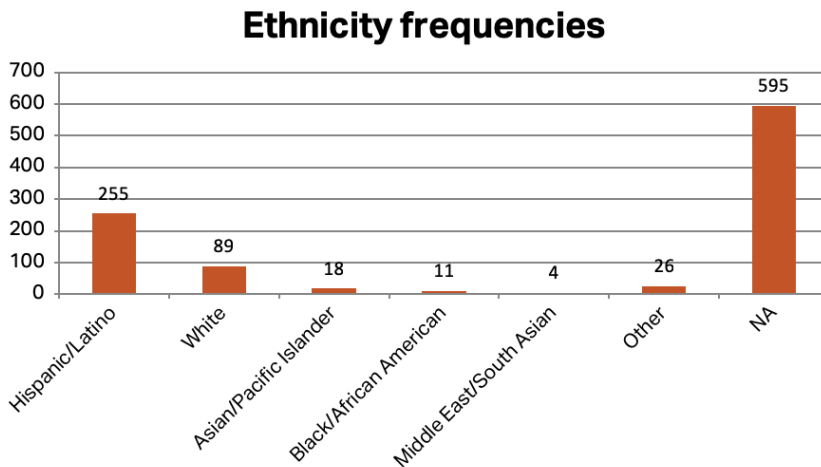
1. What is your gender?



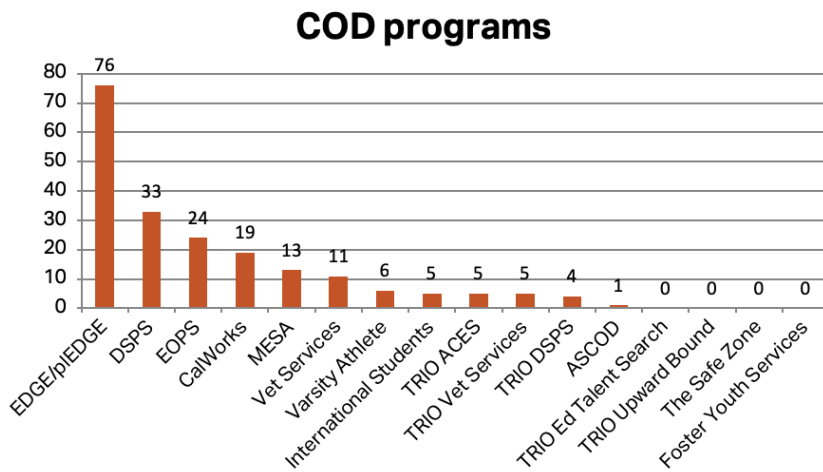
2. What is your age?



3. With which ethnicity/race category do you identify yourself?

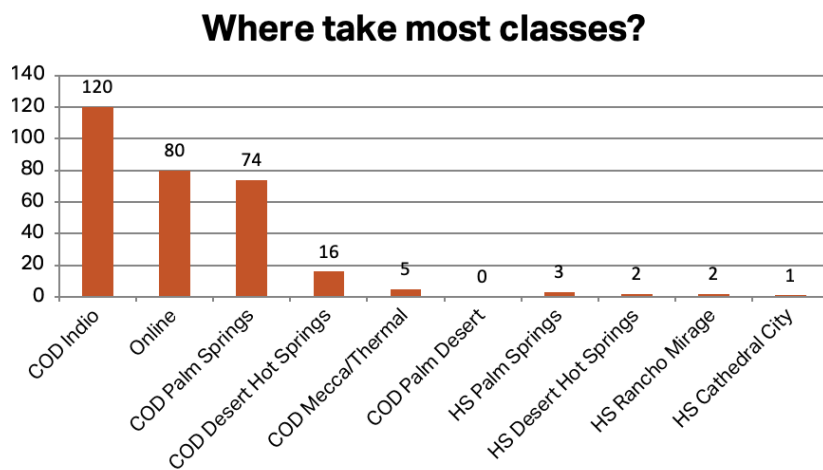


4. Programs in which COD students participate and/or are involved

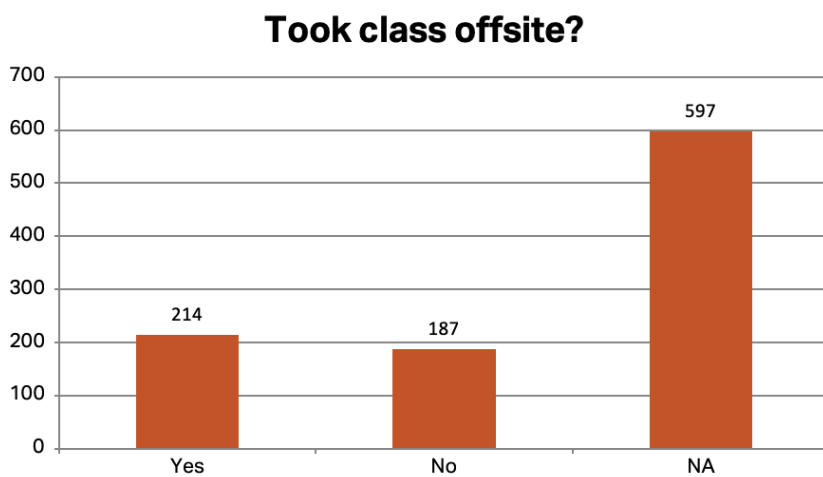


5. Campus locations at which COD students take courses

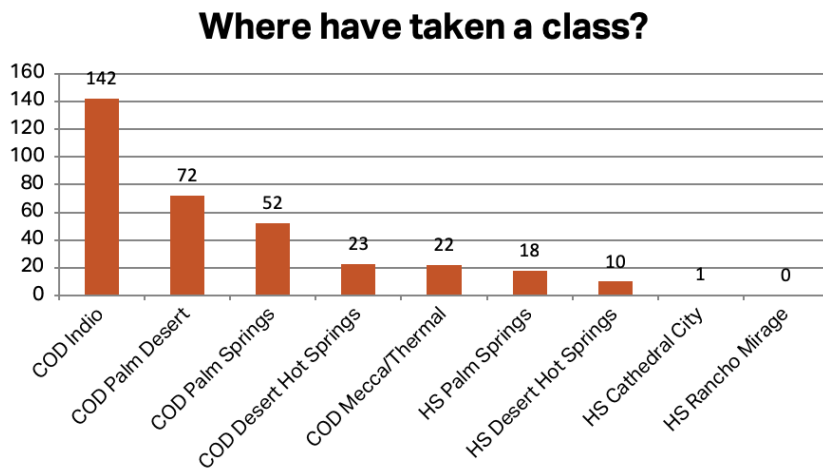
a. Where do you take the majority of your classes?



b. Have you ever taken a class at an offsite location (not the Palm Desert Campus)?



c. Where have you taken a class at an offsite location?



Appendix B

Clarifying the path: How is the COD website helpful/not helpful?

How is COD's website helpful?

Theme A: Easy to use & saves time

-Easy to navigate and well organized.
-Clear info (can find important dates, schedules, and general info about attending & requirements).
-Easy to find the necessary information I am usually looking for by typing it into the search bar or simply scrolling through various options.
-Aside from leading me to Canvas and Web Advisor, I am able to access information that I would need without the hassle of going to the COD-PD campus.

Theme B: Provides answers to questions, clarifies issues and concerns, and reduces uncertainty

-Provides direct access to college & enrollment information.
-Clarifies and answers questions that I have about college.
-Has a lot of the general information that a student needs and is pretty simple to use and understand, even after school hours students can go online and look up any type of information they may need or have questions about.
-Is helpful because it provides information that is beneficial to both new and currently enrolled students. You can find information such as phone numbers and emails to contact all staff members as well as information regarding class requirements for specific career paths.
-Makes it easy for new students to enroll and takes them step-by-step to complete all enrollment requirements
-Assists current students by providing everything from information on classes, staff, registration dates, and information about the campuses in general.
-The student information section is on point. Gives students everything they need and points us in the right direction.
-Helps me stay informed about things like dates for EOPS and when financial aid is going to be available.
-Is self-explanatory, all the information needed is there. I was having difficulty understanding how to apply to graduate and went directly to the site. In the search bar section I typed in "apply to graduate" and information was given on where to find the application.
-It gives me information on the career path that I want to take and it lets me know when I should start applying for the program and also for school sessions or events happening on campus.
-The annual catalog provides insight on what options are available and this is easily accessible on the website.
-Is instrumental in getting assignments done more efficiently, which helps to ease stress and confusion.
-Is the directory to an answer you may be looking for, the website may not have it but it will show you where to get it.
-I often go on the website to open the campus map. It is also helpful that the website has a "search" page which presents many links that include the key words you type in.

Theme C: Provides access to essential services

-Can use EBSCO Host.
-Has helped me with finding my classroom locations and locating the transfer center.
-Shows me which classes are full.
-Offers many ways to utilize classes and is user friendly (for example, Canvas is a wonderful way to assist students with due dates, assignments, grades, etc.).
-Easy way to pay fees and access the library services.
-I can easily sign up for classes, view degree progress and look for classes.
-Has helped me with plenty of research papers and essays.
-It provides the 24/7 library access, which I have used and they respond quickly. The catalog is usually on there and easy to find, everything is pretty simple and self-explanatory.
-Has links to the semester course booklets, the library database, the IGETC & the qualifications needed for my degree and contacts for the counselors.
-There are many resourceful links that aid in research, writing, library, etc.
-Most important priority for students is financial aid and scholarships. The site provides the schedule for all workshops and in-depth detail of how to apply for it.

Theme D: Serves as a central hub for campus events and activities

-Provides information on about almost everything you need to know from campus life to finding your major and to successfully graduate and/or transfer.
-It helps keep me informed on important dates and events.
-Provides everything you are looking for. It provides information from registration dates, disbursement dates, information about sports, and insight about the college.

How is COD's website unhelpful?

Theme A: Not easy or clear to use

-The website can be hard to navigate sometimes.
-Veteran Information is hard to find.

Theme B: Not comprehensive

-Unhelpful in providing information on selecting the right classes and questions about transferring out.
-Unhelpful because sometimes what I am looking for isn't there and I don't know where to ask about it (for example there isn't a display list with all scholarships available. It is very broad and non-detailed about financial aid issues). It's discouraging to ask at the office because usually the people are just clueless or rude.
-Doesn't give the phone numbers to direct staff and if you can get them you tend to sit on hold or be passed off to someone else.
-Unhelpful b/c I cannot find a counselors email when I have a certain question and I don't have the time or patience to wait and see a counselor in person.
-The time that I found it unhelpful was when I was looking for what the grade "W" meant and how it would impact dropping a class with a "W". I had to search elsewhere to find that information.

Theme C: Not up to date

-The only unhelpful thing is not having walk-in counseling hours updated since the hours have changed.
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Appendix C

Clarifying the path: How is the catalog useful/not useful?

How is printed schedule/catalogue useful?

Theme A: Easy to use, convenient, saves time, and well organized

-Easy to find the classes I need.
-Available without needing access to internet or PC.
-The catalog is organized in a manner that is easy to navigate.
-It's laid out perfectly.
-I love that I can look at it anytime, especially between classes.
-When it comes time to deciding on a schedule I find the printed version to be much easier to navigate than say the course schedule online. Being able to physically flip back and forth to compare classes is much easier than having to go back and search for other sections online.
-I tend to keep a copy of the COD printed catalog in my backpack. I find it useful for when I am on campus and need to reference information such as a course number or other relevant campus information.
-It is easier to use the printed catalog than my computer if I am walking or rushing, and sometimes my cell phone does not stay on the COD wifi.
-Looking for classes in the catalog first makes registering for class much easier.
-The online version of the catalog is extremely overwhelming to look at on the computer. Having the physical copy makes locating classes much easier.
-It's helpful to have a paper copy of the schedule so that I can refer to it when I don't have Internet access.
-The printed schedule is simple to use because it gives you the classes you are taking, as well as the catalogs, they're organized into the category of your career, which is easier to understand and use rather than searching around for them and not knowing which is which.
-It allows me to highlight classes without having to go into the Web advisor.

Theme B: Use as a planning tool/workbook to organize and schedule classes

-Can highlight and bookmark classes for easy reference.
-Allows students to explore the courses offered and plan for future semesters.
-I personally prefer the printed catalog over the online catalog. I highlight, fold pages, and make multiple class schedules just in case some of the classes I initially want are full.
-I found it useful when trying to plan ahead for the next year. I like to be able to see what times and dates the classes will start/end.
-It shows what classes are available so I can create, organize, and begin schedule organization for the next school semester.
-It helps us find what classes we are interested in, it gives us a list. I circle or highlight the ones I want. I keep the book in my purse or backpack until I am ready to register, then I get my book and register on line.
-I like being able to sit down with the catalog in front of me and circle all the classes I would like to take. It makes registering for classes and planning my schedule much easier.
-Helps me become more organized and when and where I should choose my classes. Plus I'm able to pick classes that work with my schedule.
-I generally use it more than the online catalog because I can mark the pages and flip back and forth if one class is full. It helps you see everything all at once not just looking it up by section.

Theme C: Tactile preference

-I need the physical book/resource to understand.
-Of course they are bad for the environment, but I just love having a hard copy it gets me all excited to finish my goals.
-I love the printed catalog since I am a very visual person I like to have it printed in my hand to review.
-I know many people who prefer an actual book versus the internet.
-It's useful because I cannot be in front of a computer screen for too long.
-It is helpful because I like having something in my hands that helps me know where things are, it helps with my anxiety.
-The online version the catalog is extremely overwhelming to look at on the computer. Having the physical copy makes locating classes much easier.

Theme D: Informative and comprehensive resource for courses and campus events

-Tells me when classes start, holidays, and when finals are held.
-I can check all important dates, see all classes for the next semester, and see when my finals are held.
-Comprehensive source of information.
-It is useful because it lets me know when certain sessions start so that I could prepare myself and register on time.
-It gives a great description of the classes, schedules, and locations.
-You can see the classes all at once and compare certain classes and times, as opposed to scrolling through different pages on the website.
-It keeps you updated with courses, the campus, and important dates you need to keep in mind that happen on the campus.
-The printed schedule is useful because there are specific dates for events, in regards to sport events, schools events, as well as knowing the days that we have off from school.
-The printed schedule/catalog is very useful because the courses that I need to take that weren't listed to my transferrable courses or the blue sheet for CSU can be seen on it and I can easily find it.
-Shows a comprehensive list of available classes, easily thumbed-through, rather than clicking different online web pages.
-Sometimes I am too busy working and I do not remember all of things, but the schedule/catalog helps me to remember.
-I don't have to be asking around, everything is on there.
-I use it as a resource to improve my scheduling options.
-It assists me by letting me know when registration days are.

Theme E: Use as a common & shared resource

-Is helpful because sometimes you share it with another person.
-I can take it with me and highlight important info while passing it on to others.

How is printed schedule/catalogue not useful?

Theme A: Not up to date

-I find it not useful because the classes in the printed catalog were not up to date.
-Came out too late.

Theme B: Confusing

-It's not useful and simply too confusing.
-When trying to find something in the printed schedule and catalog, I don't know how to find anything and I get lost.
-The font is too small and too many abbreviations.

Theme C: Inconvenient, redundant, or not needed

-It's not useful because I can just look it up online.
-Not useful because I do everything online, including viewing the new catalog.
-Up-to-date online schedule is much more convenient.
-I go to the website all the time, don't need the printed schedule.
-I'm not as inclined to reference the printed catalog because internet access is easier.
-I don't use the printed schedule, I search for classes online.
-Online is easier to search for courses to add and register.
-Most of the time students find classes online, so the print isn't necessary.
-It's there as a resource, but I have primarily looked online or talked to a counselor.
-I never use it but that may be because I'm not sure how to use it. I find looking for classes online on the COD website more efficient but once again that may be because I was taught to do everything over the website.
-I primarily do everything online and use the PDF version or online and rarely utilize the printed catalog.

Theme D: Not known

-It's not useful to me because I have never heard of it.
-I have not seen the schedule/catalog.
-I'm not sure what that is.

Appendix D

Clarifying the path: What should COD do to help you to be successful?

Theme A: Issues and concerns with academic counselors & staff that should be addressed

Lack follow up with students

-COD counselors should follow up with each and every student repeatedly throughout the semester to see how we're doing and what pathways we can take to help us academically with our classes. Cal State San Bernardino was very excellent with this and helped me out tremendously.

Rude or discourteous interactions

-If students should have to wait a long time they (counselors) should not be grumpy or a grouch because it makes me want to drop all my classes and leave after I wait 2 hours to see one and they are nothing but rude to me.

-Maybe have nicer counselors. I've had bad experiences in the past. They've been so mean and it's as if they don't care if you succeed.

-More engaging, kinder, and sympathetic counselors.

-I went to see a counselor regarding my schedule and the front desk turned me away and told me it was too late to see a counselor. What?? I don't know who it was, it was a girl and a man but I'm pretty sure that we are allowed to see counselors at any time we need or they are available.

Provide incorrect, misleading, inconsistent, and/or incomplete information

-The counselors only want to get rid of us and give us incomplete information.

-Need counselors that do not contradict each other. Need consistency.

-Have better counselors. There are some great ones but there are more counselors that give you the wrong information. I took unnecessary classes because my counselor advised me with the wrong classes that I needed to complete.

-There are a few counselors that do not provide fair information. Throughout my experience I have noticed that some classmates have been provided with greater information than others. For instance, there is this program known as Edge that would help a student skip unnecessary classes if they do well during those three weeks. I was provided with this information by my counselor my second year to help me out with my math courses. However, a classmate who I mentioned this great opportunity to did not know this and it was their third year attending college at COD. It was disappointing to know that a few others reacted the same way. Counselors may be able to help a lot more if they are willing to provide important information to all their students.

-When I have gone to meet with a counselor about my major and my classes I have felt like they have done a very poor job of explaining to me what I need to do. They have always been rushed because there are so many students they need to meet with, so I never feel like I get all of my questions answered.

-The counselors steered me in the wrong direction several times, recommended classes I didn't need.

-Counselors shouldn't tell you to just take whatever classes you want. They should tell the student to start with the prerequisites first, then choose a major but without wasting your time and money in classes that end up being useless towards your educational goal. Everyone is so worried about just getting students in and out of college that they forget there are other factors in one's life that need to be taken care of.

Not knowledgeable or well trained

- Need counselors that are specific to one's major.
- Counselors need to know more about the courses and degrees offered.
- Certain things regarding majors, registration, and complaints are unclear because it's difficult to find somebody who actually knows the processes required.
- Have counselors trained. It is asked that we see a counselor so often, for what? If they do not tell you the information you need. If I do not know what question to ask, they cannot help me.
- The counselors should be more informed about the majors that the students are going for. I am majoring in mortuary science and I finally came across one counselor who actually called the college that I am transferring to and she made sure that she was giving me the correct information.
- I would say they could improve if they had their counselors more educated about the next steps of getting a bachelors degree. They seem uncertain on how to advance after an AA, or they are just opposing when you go to different counselors, when the information should be the same.
- The counselors were not knowledgeable about what I needed to get to college. I needed more information about the different majors which were offered so I could make an informed choice.

Not convenient and/or difficult to meet with

- I believe that the counselors at COD are highly skilled individuals who have been of immense help in navigating my college journey. However, I also dread going to them, simply because of the extreme wait times. I feel that an online appointment booking system would be greatly beneficial, as I would not need to wait for (sometimes hours) in order to have a simple question resolved.
- There shouldn't be such a long wait to see them (counselors) because it interferes with classes.

Lack public credentials

- We don't know any of the counselors! We walk in their office not knowing their names, their faces, what their strengths are, and what they are best suited to help us with! It would be less intimidating if we had at least an idea of who we are talking to about our classes and schedules.

Theme B: Additional resources, facilities, & opportunities

Increase support staff/personnel & availability

- Add tutors.
- Have more access to counselors.
- Have more counselors available.
- Provide more counselors in the evening.
- Have more professors that are more easily reachable.
- During our peak times of registering, hire extra people or aids to instruct people obtaining their dreams.

Add office facilities & equipment for student use

- Add free printing for students.
- Add more internet access.
- Need a library with computer access that is open 24/7.
- Having more computers or stations for laptops so we can have a platform to register.

Increase course offerings & availability

- Offer more schedules at night.
- Have more classes and availability.
- Open more Nursing classes. Those who want a medical career should be able to take the courses needed in order to be successful.
- Offer more classes.
- Provide more classes at different times. It is stressful to see that most business classes are offered at night. Having at least one class of each in the morning would be helpful for those that need it.
- Add more classes in Desert Hot Springs area or open up an actual college at Desert Hot Springs.
- Offer more classes at Indio and Mecca.
- Add more MATH 14 classes.
- Provide more online courses.
- More classes in different times. It's hard for me since I have two kids and a job to keep. Sometimes the Math class doesn't have enough hours to choose from.
- More resources for computer courses, compared to other schools it lacks in this area.

Increase support services & programs

- Allow students who are almost done to register for classes early even if we did 1/3 of our classes elsewhere.
- Have Comp TIA preparatory classes available every semester.
- They should have a day where you come to get on track with your degree program with fellow graduates for support.
- Make sure that everyone either attends or watches the orientation video that describes the college steps, what major, degree, certificate programs are available. For instance, there can be different videos for each degree/certificate program and in what order the classes need to be taken. It is easier than going in to see a counselor.
- Provide more online assistance.
- Provide more assistance for those who are full-time employees seeking to complete AA/BA and certificate programs.
- Offer tutoring during the weekends.
- Provide us with more help to transfer.
- Have tutoring help available for working students who cannot be on campus during the day or early evenings. On several occasions, I had requested to see if there was any tutoring available in the evenings for economics classes, and was told there was nothing available.

Develop and promote social/professional networking programs and opportunities

- Make career help a mandatory class.
- Have more programs that can help students be part of the college.
- Students may benefit from guest speakers in the various fields of interest to gain an inside perspective and advice on how to go about their educational plan.
- Offer more guest speakers, workshops, and clubs.
- Have an inspirational speaker come to the college and help motivate and push students to believe in themselves and their dreams. I think a push for students to do well in school and not give up will help me and my fellow classmates to be successful.
- Help students find a job after completing a program such as the Nursing Assistant Program.
- Offer job fair on campus.
- I think the school can provide more workshops for the school or internships that involve your major or field trips to see more about the field you want to study in.
- As a working professional, I don't see workshops or events geared toward the actual interview. I have interviewed hundreds of times and I have never seen this college offer specific courses on understanding the importance and art of the interview. Maybe having a company like Interview Lab host a seminar that's specific to industries would help me as a student.
- It would be amazing if field trips to universities we wanted to go to were provided. If all the students at COD who want to go to (for example, Cal Poly SLO) were provided a field trip that could be funded by alumni, parents, etc. that would be great. We would have the opportunity to see counselors that know what we should take to increase our chances of acceptance and we would get a firmer idea of how that college functions, rather than from their website (if a student has never before visited in person.)

Expand physical facilities

- Expand the college campuses.
- Better parking structure.

Increase support for staff

-Pay the teachers more, especially the engaging and inspiring ones. I was in class a few weeks back and some higher up came in and told the teacher to leave so we can all do an evaluation on her. I was very glad to have a chance to say what I felt needed to be said because some teachers here are absolute angels. Pay them more they are good at what they do!

Streamline programs

-Reduce prerequisite courses.

Theme C: Implement programs that guide & are actively engaged with students

-Call in students who are not doing so good. Sometimes students are scared and I think that stops them from seeking help.

-Encourage people to see counselors.

-Programs that help me stay motivated to be in college.

-Work with someone that is about to complete their degree and help them with what they need to know to submit.

-It would be much more helpful if counselors played a more active role with the students.

-I believe it should be a requirement to see counselors at least 2 times throughout the semester to follow up on classes needed to complete degree.

-Give me more tips/suggestions on what to do when and where. Asking me more questions on what I want/should do. Being an unguided person, I can easily get mentally lost on doing even the most of basic things.

-I personally believe counselors should reach out to each student to make sure they are on the right track at least once a year- if not once a semester. Some students never even think about going to a counselor or may not have the time and therefore; counselors reaching out to us would help many of us remain on track.

Theme D: Clarify and/or enhance requirements, processes, and outcomes

-Focus on helping those who are undecided with a program that goes over options and/or narrowing down what choices would be good for students.
-Give you more explanation of what classes you should take according your major.
-It would make it easier to give one catalog of information about transferring to a university, such as if a student wants to transfer to UCLA and also wants to graduate from COD, there should be a form that shows everything that is needed for that student either their specific major, instead of the student having to go back and forth from three different forms picking and choosing classes they need.
-Give us more information about what we can do with the available majors, and give the complete information too.
-Maybe give you a list of classes you need to take for that one major as students can easily get confused and take classes they don't need for their major.
-Maybe more information about what is actually needed for certification process once we finish core classes.
-It would be helpful if COD simply got rid of class listings if they are not available in a particular semester. I would have liked to take Abnormal Psychology during Spring 2019, but I was disappointed to find that it was not an option for any semester.
-Show in a better way, the level of difficulty in some classes.
-Make separate web pages or lists of requirements for whatever class you want to major in. I get sick to my stomach trying to navigate this website.
-Offer better access to find ways to communicate to universities.
-I wish there was a better transfer guarantee program.
-Clearer IGETSE.
-I am a transfer student, and I would like something that shows what classes I have already taken and whether or not they apply to my current degree path.
-The nursing path is EXTREMELY confusing. As someone who already has a 4-yr degree, I found it very confusing that I couldn't select a pre-nursing option for my major and get accurate info about what I have outstanding. I kept getting info related to an HS major. The regular counselors were telling me to just ignore things, but that's not helpful for ensuring a clear path forward.
-It would be nice to see and access what classes I already have towards my major and what is left in a big picture format. In other words, something I could check off and see practically what exactly is transferable and what is left. A personalized checklist instead of looking class by class, hoping that what you have taken is accepted and that you're taking the right things.

Theme E: Promote events, opportunities, requirements, & course information so that they are more available

-Have the information more available, sometimes there are events or other opportunities that are missed because not many people know about them.
-Announce more about entrepreneurial events or classes.
-Give out handouts about scholarships.
-Have a check list of courses embedded into Web Advisor for your specific pathway.
-They could also make the aptitude/career test publicly advertised. It would be helpful to have an idea of what things students should choose if they don't know what path to follow starting school.
-Text alerts about registration and upcoming academic events would be useful.
-I have found it difficult to find out where to go to for help when I need it, instead of being able to find out where to go online, I have had to go talk with people in different buildings to tell me where to go to find the right people to set up an appointment.

Appendix E

Entering the path: Who at COD helped you?

Theme A: Academic counselors

A counselor
The Counseling Center
Academic advisors
The Nursing counselor
All the counselors at the Indio office
A counselor at the Palm Desert office
Counselor Phillip
Counselor Mrs. Warner (Indio)
Counselor Mrs. King
Counselor Maria Herrera
Counselor Lisa McFadden
Counselor Elisse King
Counselor Angel
Counselor Dr. Daut
Counselor Sinora
Counselor Jeffery Acidera
Counselor Veronica Daut
Counselor Christopher Williams
Counselor Angel (Athletic counselor)

Theme B: Named individuals (most likely COD staff)

Senorina Saldivar
Scott Cooper
Philip Salas
Mariana Zepeda
Donna Greene
Scott Pilgram
Torina Craig
Fred Sangorgino
Ana Stockwell (Nursing)
Mr. Reyes
Jenna Huntzinger
Christine Schaefer
Frank Ramirez
Tim Bruneau
Eliu Benavides
Mrs. Avalos
Phillip Salas
Mario Jasso
Mr. Jared (Indio)
Mrs. Anderson
Mr. Varga
Christine Schaffer
Mr. Agustin
Khan Huang

Theme C: Professors & instructors

My instructor
Teachers
All my professors
Business instructors
My Graphic Design teacher
Professors in the Automotive program
Dr. Barrows
Professor Cage Jones
Professor Linda Emmerson
Professor Kurt Leuschner
Professor Alexa Sawa
Professor John (Accounting)

Theme D: Program staff

The Tutoring Center
Trio counselor
Veterans Office
Veterans Services
Sandra Hauff from the Veterans Resource Center
Donni and Sandi from the VA office
Donnie Prince Veteran Advisor
CalWorks
Frank from the Career Center
The Career Solution Workshop
Career Services center
DSPS staff
DSPS counselor Kimberly Brooks
DSPS counselor Adam Ulhorn
The whole DSPS department
EOPS office staff
Maria Herrera, the EOPS counselor
ACES program staff
Adell from the Aces Program
Felix the Head of CIS
The EDGE program
EDGE and a COD counselor
My ESL counselor, Mariana
Dr. Anthony Fesmire at orientation for Music majors
Sandra Huff & Deanna in the book store
The lady that oversees the book store buying back program
The lady in the front desk in the Indio campus

Theme E: Individuals outside COD

Friend
My friend
I actually got help from a friend
My uncle

Appendix F

Entering the path: Selection obstacles

Personal/psychological issues and/or life circumstances: Themes A, B, C, & D

Theme A: Difficulty selecting and/or choosing a major or career due to indecision and/or uncertainty

-Choosing which one that will help me to earn a good paid career, and I must enjoy it.
-There are more options for certificates and other degrees that are not known to most people.
-I was not sure what to major in; I was a little confused I guess COD could be helpful in that way.
-Sometimes I would change major because I didn't know if that was what I really wanted.
-Personal uncertainty about whether or not the major would align with my inner motivations.
-So many majors not sure which is the right one.
-Lack of self-guidance/confidence.
-No real goal(s) in life.
-Inability to fully describe what I want(ed) to do.
-I was extremely overwhelmed with the limited options offered at the college. I also didn't know what I wanted to do so I just chose something. It wasn't until I started taking the GE classes when I realized what I wanted to do.
-Overall, I just decided on my degree with the support of my family members, but as soon as I began taking the required classes for this major I figured it was not meant for me. I had to figure this out on my own. The only assistance I got was from a counselor who helped me plan for the course. It was a bit of a challenge trying to identify what major would benefit me in the long run.
-Not knowing what to do.
-Mostly me still not knowing what I wanted to do.
-I am indecisive.
-I became indecisive because there were different majors I was interested in.
-Because I am not completely positive that's the career path I want to follow but once you choose you're kind of stuck.
-I am currently settled on the associates in math and certificate in music technology. However, I am very passionate about music and I don't know if I want to pursue a major in it. The career outlook is terrifying about pursuing a major in music. I think a lot of students are faced with the problem of deciding to major in something they're passionate about or something that's more practical. At the same time, I feel like I would also be wasting my math skills if I major in music. I keep having second thoughts and I am having trouble coming to a consensus.
-I actually did because I was undecided since I was between Civil Engineering and Construction Management. But at the end I decided to go for Construction Management.
-My lack of knowledge about the careers, which were going to be needed more in coming years, what I could do with different majors was unknown to me.
-Me being indecisive was the only struggle because I wasn't sure what I wanted.
-The only obstacle I faced was not knowing what I wanted to major in.
-When choosing a major I was not completely decided so I did change it the next semester this is mostly due to indecisiveness.
-Just wasn't sure what to study.
-When I first selected a major at COD I wanted to study for business administration. Then later realized it wasn't my thing, I was not too excited as I thought I would be. So then I decided to change it for Administration of Justice.
-I was not sure what I wanted to do as a career so I picked what I thought I wanted to do.
-It's hard choosing what you will be doing for the rest of your life and very confusing.
-I had a hard time trying to find a major that I liked because I did not want to commit to a whole semester of classes that may not be fit for me.

-I decided that I should study Computer Science as an alternative to what I really want to major in which is programming. Unfortunately COD does not provide programming courses so I picked Computer Science instead, which I may possibly change when I attend a four year university.
-I just hesitated a lot during the process. More programs to help facilitate through that process would be helpful.

Theme B: Lack understanding and/or skills to meet course requirements/expectations

-I had trouble passing my math classes.
-Math. I'm majoring in music with terrible knowledge of math. Having that as a requirement was an obstacle.

Theme C: Lack of finances/financial difficulties

-I would of done this much sooner if more funding was available!
-Financial situation.
-Lack money.
-Lack of money.
-Financial difficulties.
-Buying the books with money from out of pocket.

Theme D: Life circumstances made it hard to complete course/major requirements

-I'm a single mother, work full-time. Hard for me to write 10 page research paper.
-Family difficulties.
-Having kids.
-Having a job.
-Waiting so long to go back to school.
-Just being able to find classes that worked with my schedule and part of my degree is a little difficult when selecting class offerings.
-Finding classes that fit my schedule was relatively hard.
-An obstacle that I faced was a job because it did not let me go to class in time.
-I live far away so I didn't have much of a variety of majors to choose because I want to be near my neighborhood.
-Finding available classes that fit my work schedule.
-Transportation to PD was difficult on the bus. It was before the new bus routes and the sublime student program.
-Problems with transportation and housing.
-Working, studying, and passing my classes issues.
-Personal, family, and mental health issues.

Advice and guidance issues: Themes E & F

Theme E: Difficulty meeting with and/or receiving assistance from a counselor

-Not able to find a counselor to help me.
-I would of like that they offer a student plan. I didn't know there was such a thing and when I tried to meet with a counselor I had to wait over 3 hours and no appointment was available.
-Not enough assistance from counselors.
-Long waits to meet with a counselor.
-I had difficulty finding someone who could tell me if any of the classes I took at my old college applied towards my degree. I tried seeing a counselor, but was just given a list of the requirements and not told if I had met any of them.
-No one genuinely cared about my long term goals. Counselors just want to see students move in and out.
-I was not able to talk to a counselor or make an appointment with a counselor when I first started because they were always booked. By the time I would come out of work all the appointments were already taken.
-It is hard to see the counselors, so I feel I don't have guidance for planning for the future.
-No one was there to educate me on what I should be doing. I ended up wasting my time taking pointless classes unrelated to my major.
-I still do not know if the major I selected is the right one, and the people I have gone to try to figure it out have pointed me elsewhere.
-I was not able to select a major not knowing what I was able to do being a felon. No one was able to give me answers.
-No one to guide me.
-I didn't really know exactly what I wanted to take and I wasn't allowed to see a counselor. That really upset me.

Theme F: Received incorrect, misleading, or discouraging information from a counselor and/or a staff member

-The counselor gave me the wrong courses to take even though I was specific in terms of which college I wanted to attend.
-Was given wrong schedule of classes to take from one particular counselor, so it set me back in my career plans by an entire year.
-When I first applied to COD the counselor confused me a lot and put me into many classes that I didn't need.
-Over a decade ago I had taken courses and experienced some extenuating circumstances that eventually led to me putting my education on hold. Therefore, when register a decade later I noticed courses that should have been dropped but were not. She indicated "well, that was over 10 years ago and there is no proof" it was such a turn off that I postponed my education again then registered the following year and have been taking courses since then.
-A clear example was a counselor trying to get me to change my schedule to fit the path of a major I have nothing to do with because she didn't believe a film program existed. Even though I showed her I am enrolled in the program and it is my major.
-I went in for nutrition and dietetics and the counselors told me to get a degree in health science which I learned now that I should not have done. So, in a way, the counselor made it worse. I should have done my major in dietetics for AS-T.
-Some counselors weren't knowledgeable about my degree.
-They couldn't tell me anything specific about my major or that they had no on-going classes for it.
-I was initially interested in the LVN program. However I decided to try for the RN. Maybe my counselor should have given me the option of taking classes that would be useful for both LVN and RN, or at least have mentioned that there were classes that were good for both programs. It will push me back a bit.
-A professor told me about a new degree, Global Studies, and when I asked the counselor about it, he told me there wasn't such as degree. So not only was he not informed about the major, he didn't know it was a major!
-I'm from out of the local area. I am going to apply to Cal State San Bernardino. The counselor knew my goal, I had to find out I had to change my major to apply and now I've wasted two years taking classes I didn't have to.
-Transfer credits from another school where I was studying the same major had no transfer value for me at COD even after meeting with a counselor.
-The counselors never mentioned to me that there are actual nursing counselors and I saw four different counselors. They all gave me different obstacles I had to get done for my career and some were not required.
-Counselors were not useful in regards to what classes to take. I had two counselors tell me to take any classes I wanted.

Course enrollment and major requirement issues: Themes G, H, & I

Theme G: Courses not offered or not able to get into required courses

-They don't offer all the classes I need to take for my major.
-My math classes were always full and it was a long process to get to college algebra and it slowed everything down.
-Majority of classes listed as necessary to complete my major were not offered despite being listed in the COD booklets.
-Priority registration problems.
-I selected a major in Health Science as a Registered Nurse. The impaction in the ADN nursing program at COD makes it almost impossible to gain entry to the program unless you hold a bachelors degree. I strongly feel that far too many points are given to students with degrees, and it limits new students' abilities to enter the program.
-Courses full or not offered every year.
-Limited major programs/classes for that major.
-Registration priority problems.
-I'm 42 years old and starting a new career after being laid off. I already have a degree. While I don't think I should be top priority for registration, it's frustrating that I hear about 18 yr old first semester students having top priority that are not disabled/military or any other special class warranting higher priority. It's also frustrating that students with higher priority snag in-demand classes (A&P I & II, micro, etc) then later drop the class, but still have high priority for snagging the class again. I need to get moving on this new path, but now I'm concerned I won't be able to get my last two requirements for nursing school completed next semester which will delay me an entire year due to the timing of the application process and the courses not being offered during the summer.
-No online math courses.
-There seems to be a HUGE problem with not enough math classes though. I had to wait 3 semesters before I could register in time to get on a waitlist for one class, and now am trying to get a winter math class in, but 4 days before I can register they are all waitlisted full. ONLY 3 STATISTICS classes for the winter? IF THEY ARE ALL FULL IN ONE DAY OF REGISTRATION YOU NEED MORE CLASSES. Seriously. EVERYONE needs at least one or two math classes but it seems they are not staffed accordingly.
-Major did not exist at the college.
-Class availability.
-Yes, because COD doesn't have classes for the major I want to take, but that didn't stop me from going.
-Being able to get into the classes.
-When it came to my degree, the only problem I really faced was due to science classes being filled up.
-Low priority led to a risk of not getting all the classes I needed (I was wait listed for a few and crashed one other) for both IGETC and major requirements.
-I had trouble finding a math class to get into.
-COD does not offer what I need which is a Mortuary Program, I decided to take my prerequisites and continue with my education at Cypress Community College in Anaheim.
-My only obstacle was that two of the classes I need to finish my major weren't offered this semester. So I am taking one class this semester and three, hopefully, to finish next semester as long as they are offered.
-Not enough teachers teaching a class.
-Certain classes are available only in the fall.

Theme H: Excessive and/or difficult requirements/prerequisites for major

-My math requirements seemed excessive.
-Math options and scheduling. Pre-requisites have been the reason why I had to wait to take a single math course I needed for my degree. In addition, since the law has passed, I no longer need a remedial math course. Although, it won't take effect until Spring 2019. I could've graduated this Fall instead of Spring 2019. I think COD should allow online math courses like many other community colleges do. Because math is 4 days a week, it is hard to make a schedule with something that won't conflict.
-I want to major in two subjects, however, there is no real way to select the two majors and make them equally possible.
-The nursing program is just so long of a process.
-I have to do two years of prerequisites at a two year college just to apply for the nursing program.
-I love business as a major but the math courses were hard to get into. So I have to complete math 54 to move on.
-I had trouble validating my math and science classes from my high school in Mexico to COD.

Theme I: Not clear on course and/or major requirements

-I had classes keep popping up that I didn't know I needed.
-COD is not well informed about Mortuary Science.
-I didn't know exactly what the class would include, and thus I find that I wasted my time learning what I learned. I feel that there should be a forum of some kind where you can ask questions such as, "What will I be doing in this class", "What exactly will I be learning", etc.
-When I first started at COD I wanted to go into the nursing program. However, when selecting a major it is unclear if you should pick "Health Sciences" or "Biology" or something else. There should be a major offered titled "Pre-Nursing Program" major. This major should be a list of all of the courses you need prior to applying for the nursing program. It would make things much more clear. Without it all spelled out like that I had to fumble around to figure out what classes I needed to enroll in.
-I didn't know if I should do the Nursing Program in COD and then transfer or I can just transfer right away. I also didn't know what courses I need to take in order to be accepted in the RN program or to transfer in a university as a BSN.
-From what I could see, there were only two art degrees, studio art and digital design and production, so I was a bit forced to choose digital design and production in order to do something that interested me, however the degree can't be transferred and I can't take much Gen Ed with it, so I'm also forced to figure out exactly what college and program I want to go into next in order to modify the degree.
-The Portal and Website requirements do not match up.
-I wasn't aware of the classes I needed for that major (some of these included the classes the University of Choice wanted me to take).
-I was unaware that my major was going to require a transfer but that was due to my high school mis- informing me.

Appendix G

Entering the path: Who helped you?

Theme A: Academic counselors

Advisors
Academic counselors
Counselor from Loma Linda University
Counselor Alicia Keys
Counselor Seniorina Saldivar
Counselor Christine Schaefer
Counselor Veronica Daut
Counselor Mrs. King
Counselor Monica
Counselor Chris

Theme B: Named individuals (most likely COD staff)

Scott Cooper
Tula Marin
Ms. Shafer
Elise King
Maria Herrera
Ana Stockwell
Frank Ramirez
Dr. Augustine
Donnie Prince
Sandra Huff
Phillip Salas
Mr. Jared at the Indio Campus
Mari Abril
Maria Herrera
Mr. Agustin
Maria De Santiago
Ernie Rios
Khan Huang
Jose Simo

Theme C: Professors & instructors

Professor Zepeda
Professor Oden

Theme D: Program staff

Trio counselor
CalWorks
Student Center staff
All the staff in Indio
The College 101 workshop
MESA
Aces Trio
EOPS staff
Bonnie in DSPS
Information center

Theme E: Individuals outside COD

Other students
My fiancé
Parents
A friend
Friends
My sister
A COD student
My uncle
A lady who does tours for high schools
My mother and some friends
My grandpa, grandma, mom and dad

Appendix H

Entering the path: What should COD do to help you to be successful?

Theme A: Issues and concerns with academic counselors and staff that should be addressed

-I feel like most counselors want to trap you into staying longer.
-Provide consistency so counselors are all on the same page.
-Have counselors not rush you through.
-Counselors need to improve.
-It's such a hassle to get an appointment sometimes.
-The college should provide accessible and friendly counselors who are not in a huge rush, who can provide guidance and counseling regarding majors.
-Have counselors or department heads that are knowledgeable and able to actually assist the students.
-Simply be more aware of what type of counselors the college hires.
-I know we are grown-ups, but picking up the phone when we call our counselors would help.
-We need counselors in every campus that actually know what students need to take in order to transfer into a four year university.
-Make sure to keep up to date on the courses needed to get a specific degree.
-If that student is planning on transferring, help the student see if that course is transferrable to the college or university within selected major and provide steps on how to find out and what certain things to look for. Maybe develop a list of questions to ask the other school's counselor depending on the student's situation.
-Have staff be more helpful in guiding students in the path they want and need.
-The counselors should tell students the different careers for their major.
-Access to knowledgeable counselors.
-More counselors or at least better ones. One student had no idea when she was supposed to transfer or apply. Her counselor was of little help.
-I believe if COD has counselors that really want to help you to succeed with classes then they should really listen to students.
-Make all counselors aware of what is required for health sciences degrees.
-The college needs more counselors so students don't have to wait. I realized early on that the wait was too long and the assistance was not knowledgeable or personal to me, so I floundered along on my own and took extra classes I didn't need.
-The college needs more counselors and more specialized advisors who care about and know the individual students.
-Get real counselors that want you to transfer.
-I would need a lot of help in math because a lot of the professors here are really mean.

Theme B: Additional resources, facilities, & opportunities

-Add schedules/courses at night.
-Have more workshops/tutoring.
-Offer access to more financial aid programs.
-GET MORE PROFESSORS.
-Have job fairs or career days to help find a good major.
-The only issue is getting enrolled in the class before the class is full.
-Add more time slots for popular classes and expand the major list.
-Have classes more accessible.
-I would like to see more job trade options become available.
-Provide more information on what kind of jobs each degree could lead to or at least the most popular and easily attainable.
-Make it a requirement for students to attend more than one career workshop.
-Let everyone take the career workshop assessment.
-Offer more classes during the winter or spring.
-Do not close the classes when there are people already signed in for it.
-Offer classes every year. I am waiting for 2 classes to be offered and it is not going to happen until 2020!!!! Why do I have to wait 2 years to get a class!
-Make an online degree program.
-Create a pre-nursing major for folks who already have a degree (or are currently an LVN or CNA) and give them higher priority for nursing school pre-reqs over health science majors.
-Give students in certain programs or on a low budget, free meals.
-Offer more classes.
-Provide more Financial Aid Assistance.
-Have specialized advisers.
-Help students with baby-sitting issues.
-One way COD can help is by giving basic tools for the HVAC class.
-More available classes.
-Math and Practicum for ECE needs night courses.
-Have more available counselors.
-Offer more evening classes.
-Have more counselors.
-Offer more classes/programs/advisers.
-Make more space for students.
-I believe that COD should find more math teachers.
-I think COD should offer more activities, clubs, and visits from professionals in specific fields.
-Give out more scholarships.
-Create more classes.
-Offer more support when registering for classes and what classes should be taken.
-Show us what opportunities we have with the major we choose.
-Create mental health programs.
-Offer more transferable degrees.
-Offer more visual art majors.
-Have more counselors for transferring students.
-Have more science classes when all the science classes get filled up with nursing students.
-Provide more classes for working students.
-Expand the EDGE program.

Theme C: Implement programs that guide & are actively engaged with students

-Have counselors assigned to students.
-Help us to make sure that we are choosing the correct major. The first step should be an appointment with the Career Center.
-Encourage meeting with guidance counselors to make sure the student is on the right track and aware of their options.
-Believe in students and continue encouraging them to pursue a career that fits their lifestyle.
-Have major program meetings to talk about more of our major requirements and other topics.
-It would be nice to have someone who has relevant knowledge in your major guide you along your journey. For instance, I selected a major as a registered nurse. I have been attending COD for 3 years, and have not yet spoken to anyone who has completed the program. Anna Stockwell is in charge of the registered nursing program, but is not a registered nurse herself, and had not completed the program. This makes it difficult to receive relevant and accurate information regarding program expectations.
-Guide me better.
-Giving a push into the field(s) that I want to go into or giving connections into those areas to have an experience in them before actually graduating.
-COD should provide assistance or special attention to students who may seem confused in the major/degree they may not be so sure of. There should be someone to talk with students to provide them with info on their major/degree and the years it takes to complete their courses for transfer.
-Help to decide what major is right for me.
-Create a software program to help students figure out what classes they need and should take and/or provide more counselors.
-Require that everyone see a counselor at least once a year to go over the progress and what classes are needed for their program.
-Have access to an online quiz or program to help guide students towards a major that interests them.
-For students unsure of which direction to take, offer tests to guide them towards a major they'll succeed in and enjoy.
-Do not force students to choose a major right away! Encourage exploration in various subjects that also fulfill IGETC requirements in the first semester so that students feel more prepared to select a major and fulfill those requirements in a timely manner.
-Offer a test to see what field of study students are interested in and list possible majors from the test results.
-COD could make a test, seeing where students' interests are and then showing them majors that correspond to their results.
-They should just do like workshops and then COD staff could help selecting a major.
-Encourage students to see a counselor.
-Meet with program leaders and professors.
-Provide data about success rates, dropout rates, etc.
-Require that all students to take a class where they get a better understanding what they want to do with their life.
-Provide speakers that come to the college to talk about what they do/did for their career. This can help students realize if that's something they would like to do or not.
-They should have a program that lets students experience little glimpses of a major to see if it catches their interest to further pursuing that career.
-Have workshops for picking a major/degree.

Theme D: Clarify and/or enhance requirements, processes, and outcomes

-Make it easier to take certain classes without prerequisites.
-Make requirements CLEAR.
-I want to know the options in my degree/major.
-Explaining to students how the major/degree can benefit them because some don't even know what they are doing.
-Provide more knowledge on the programs and how to get beyond them.
-Classes required for a degree should be made more obvious and public.
-The education path someone needs to complete for their Gen Ed requirements and proceed to working on their degree is extremely vague and I wasn't even sure what reliable options there were for my major.
-Maybe explain more what levels of my degree would qualify for better jobs and to explain how?
-I think that whatever major/degree program that we select, there should be professors or someone that is knowledgeable about that major that can give more insight about that certain major/degree.
-Be more specific about majors.
-Allow me to pick something that I am interested in but also be honest with how much work will be needed to obtain that degree.
-Better mapping of what courses are required to obtain a degree, including all prerequisites.
-Give advice on what classes to take and that will transfer to a university.
-Provide degree information for students.
-I just need some advising because I have no one to talk to about choosing a major. I'm stuck.
-Show us the different jobs one can work in with the different types of majors.
-Help students figure out what degree goes with what job they are looking to get.
-It would help to clearly associate careers with majors so that I could see what kind of work this major would be most useful in.
-Come up with orientations and meetings in which one can attend to gather information about their program.
-Make my major my focus. The Gen Ed courses I don't need distract and take up time that I could be using to take my classes needed for my major.
-Have all plans laid out for students depending on their major/degree.
-Explain to students what major their choosing and what/where they can transfer to if applicable.
-Tell us very clearly what kind of classes we need, so we don't have to waste our time.
-Create a more understandable program to help with financial issues.
-COD should be knowledgeable about the practicalities of a certain career path. They should know the future outlook for career paths and teach adequate skills for that career.
-Give students an idea of what their course work will be and what opportunities their degrees will afford them.
-They should help in letting us know what steps to take to get into a program.
-Tell you straight up what you need to do and what classes to take.

Theme E: Promote events, opportunities, requirements, & course information so that they are more available

-Have information sheets available of all majors or certificates when we walk in to speak to counselors.
-I noticed a thick catalog book at the main campus counselor's office and found that to be very helpful. It gave a list of all available major/degree/certificate programs along with a list of all classes needed and what steps to take. That was very helpful, but I wish I had that information sooner.
-Provide more information, booklets, workshops, instructional articles, or videos.
-Make the aptitude/career test more publicly known to students.
-I believe that there should be workshops or presentations of all majors or degrees.
-There should be workshops or presentations about each major or degree offered.
-Have job/career fairs throughout the school year.
-Have programs and events that encourage students to get involved with their industry.
-Offer information/insight into preliminary job positions in the field or major. Get as close to your field of major as possible without a degree while you study the courses to see if that is actually what you want to do as a career.
-There should be more promotion of programs that are available on campus to help students who may be eligible for these programs.

Appendix I

Staying on the path: Who at COD helped you?

Theme A: Academic counselors

All the guidance counselors
The counselors
Counselor from San Bernardino
Counselor Veronica Daut
Counselor Jose Simo
Counselor Senorena Saldivar

Theme B: Named individuals (most likely COD staff)

Jose Simo
Julie Risiego
Monica Lopez
Carol Lascade
Mariana Zepeda
Jason A
Maria Herrera
Frank Ramirez
Corbyn Voyu
Donnie Prince
Cody McCabe
Gary Williams
Khan Huang
Steve Arbuckle
Mr. Agustin
Ana Stockwell
Bryan Lee

Theme C: Professors & instructors

Teachers
My teachers
Professors
Teachers the TASC lab
Professor Greene
ECE professor Maria Avalos
Maximiliano Hernandez (English Teacher)
Robert Rosteck (Biology Professor)
Professor Maria Elena Diaz
Professor Oden

Theme D: Program staff

The Financial Aid office
Financial Aid, Ms. Stockwell
Financial Aid, Joy
The COD Scholarship Awards and Financial Aid
Student Life Center, Ana
The Career Workforce Center, Lorena Ayeni
DSPS staff, Shirley & Paul
The head gal in the DSPS room
My DSPS counselor
CalWorks department
The Fafsa office
The pLEDGE/EDGE program
The International Club and all of the advisors in that office
Health Services
A nurse
My coach
I really needed help getting to certain classrooms and the security team was kind enough to take me by golf cart. I would not have been able to make it to my classes otherwise.

Theme E: Individuals outside of COD

Fellow Students
Family members
Friends

Appendix J

Staying on the path: Who helped you?

Theme A: Myself

“Self”	(36 entries)
“Myself”	(34 entries)
“Myself”	(9 entries)
“Nada”	(1 entry)

Theme B: Friends & people I know (non-intimates)

My friends
My co-workers
My therapist
My doctor
My high school counselor
A teacher
A colleague
Fellow students
Youth from my church
Other more-experienced students I know through social media

Theme C: Family members & people I know (intimates)

My family
My parents
My father
My mother
My grand parents
My step father
My wife
My husband
My sister
My fiancé
My girlfriend

Theme D: Program staff

My church & God
County staff
Counselors from other campuses
Staff at Crafton Hills College
Staff at Toscana Country Club
My Veterans rep

Appendix K

Staying on the path: How did you manage obstacles?

Theme A: Persevered on my own accord for personal and/or other reasons

-Persistence.
-I do my best.
-I just persevered by myself.
-By learning how to get myself to school.
-Persistence and my own ability to get things done.
-Determination (I want to provide a better life for my two little ones).
-I just don't give up and stay focused.
-Mental resistance to health issues (willfully going to school despite having seizure(s) that same day) and my own will.
-My kids wanting a better future.
-Made time for college.
-My mom worked hard as a single parent. She tried with what we had, so I saw the struggles she went through every day. I want to prove to my kids and other people that if mommy can, so can they.
-Stayed focused and pursued my goals
-I remember what I want to accomplish in life and the future I want and that motivates me to get things done.
-Knowing that next semester I will have higher priority and get into more classes.
-Motivation to stay in school helped.
-I dropped out many times before, figured out that some education is better than none.
-Working more hours.
-Found a place to live and finally bought my car I needed for transportation.
-My future is more important. I will deal with the obstacles every day. Take one day at a time.
-My love for expanding my knowledge and the need to stay current on medical knowledge to help my family.
-I got a job and saved the money so I could pay for the next 2 semesters while my parents got back on their feet.
-I was on probation and I am currently working my way out of so I can stay at COD.
-The determination to finish.
-Precise time management and figuring out a plan to make things work.
-I try to stay focused on the goal, rather than any temporary situations or setbacks that might be discouraging.
-Sticking to it and thinking it'll all pass soon.
-Just sticking to it and retaking classes that I didn't pass.
-My obstacles are financial mostly. I just keep putting one foot in front of the other and hoping it will all work out. So far I have managed but there have been some VERY scary times.
-Had to quit my job in order to take certain classes.
-Adapt to my circumstances. Adapting to new circumstances is not always easy.
-Cause I ain't no quitter.
-My mindset on a more valuable future helped me
-I told myself that having a child wasn't an obstacle and that I could still finish college.
-I managed to stay in college despite these obstacles by lessening my workload and not focus on how long it is going to take me, but to just keep chipping away.
-Got a new job, one that works with my school schedule.
-By stopping working more than 2 jobs.
-I had to refocus and be reminded of my goals.

-Finding a new job.
-Worked harder and stayed focused on my goals.
-Working hard and taking an extra job.
-I reminded myself why I started, what I have accomplished and what I have yet to accomplish. I realized where I was in life and where I did not want to be, which was my motivation to keep going because I had already come so far. I have no choice but to finish and be successful.
-Did better in my classes.
-I only stayed to try and see if I can still produce work that will allow me to pass so that I don't have to be under financial aid restrictions when I apply for next semester.
-I knew that college was something I wanted to do even if my mind tried to convince me to quit. I wanted to set the challenge for myself because I knew that I could accomplish it.
-I persevered and learned to live with my mistakes, such as taking classes I really hadn't needed and took only because of a counselor's ill advice.
-I pushed through and got a job.
-Through self-stubbornness that I wanted to complete what I started many years ago.
-Time management.
-Focusing on my goals.
-I tried to save money along with my family to afford the proper books I needed.
-I worked extra hard more than other students.
-I worked harder and got the money by working 3 jobs and attending classes.
-My future.
-I kept strong, work around work schedule.
-I just kept on thinking that if I dropped out I would end up working in a low paying job probably in the fields.
-I continue to work to overcome my obstacles.
-Just staying focused on my future.
-Decided to keep pushing.
-I just kept going to school and didn't confront the problem.
-I remembered that I can do whatever I propose myself to do.
-My own motivation.
-I just had to manage my time better.
-My ambitions.
-I thought about the future I would have if I continued going to school. I want to live a good life so continuing school would help with that.
-I sucked it up and waited for my depressive episode to go away.
-I pulled myself out of the hole of disparity.
-Perseverance and determination, the only way to get through college.

Theme B: Received and/or sought help from family & friends

-I'm thankful to have an amazing mother who stepped up and helped me.
-I got help from my family.
-Help from family and friends.
-With the help of my family.
-Wife helped with watching kids.
-I work full-time and have two kids at home and two adult children. It is hard to juggle my schedule. Being able to take most of my classes online was very helpful. I am at the end of the path with COD and need to take physical classes (Math and Geology), my family has been a bit more understanding.
-I married and my husband has been a huge support. He supported me by letting me focus on school, while he works.
-Needed to borrow money from family.
-Financial support from family members.
-My fiancé's emotional support.
-My husband and I pushing each other. He is almost done. The closer he gets excites us and motivates me to do more, do better.
-My family was very supportive.
-I was encouraged by my family to continue my education in college.
-I asked my mom for help with decision making with regards to continuing to work full time and being a part time student.
-With motivation I received from my mother.
-Support from family and friends.
-Friends who were also experiencing the same issue. I knew I wasn't alone.
-My grandparents helped me.
-Began a relationship with a partner who offers support.
-I had to rely more on my husband to manage home and kids.
-My parents have been working hard for me to succeed and I wasn't just going to give up.
-My family was able to financially support me during the time needed.
-My family supported me.
-My family.
-My mother.

Theme C: Received and/or sought help from staff, counselors, and/or student support programs

-Sought therapy.
-I went many times to the counseling center, I used the little help in the Career Work Force Center (the results didn't show anything that I didn't know and the suggestions from the counselor there were not very helpful because I was really lost). But I didn't give up.
-With the help of financial aid.
-I was able to get free childcare.
- I received the BOG waiver.
-Financial aid was really helpful. Due to circumstances I am in academic probation and struggling in a class is as much as not allowed because I can lose my financial aid. It is really difficult considering I wouldn't be able to afford it without it.
-With the support Maria Avalos provided.
-Hired a math tutor, watched YouTube videos to learn the material the professors failed to teach, bought books to self learn because the math teachers I have had failed to actually teach resulting in many students including myself having to retake classes.
-Well, I met this man on Grindr who went to COD and later on became a Special Ed teacher. He gave me the run down about the school and told me suck it up and make it work. I literally was on the verge of dropping out but he said that feeling like you don't belong in college and not feeling smart enough was a normal feeling to have.

-Mrs. Herrera helped me manage my schedule and formed my schedule around my personal schedule.
-Supportive teachers.
-Money was a big issue on whether or not I could attend college and stay in college. With the help of the BOG Waiver, FAFSA and the scholarship awards I am able to buy the things I need for school and even save money for future schooling.
-I went to the FAFSA office to speak more over the possibilities this grant would provide me with and my eligibility. I figured this would be fair enough to get myself back into college once I had my classes covered.
-My family struggles financially and I wasn't sure if I was going to be able to start attending college. The pLEDGE/EDGE programs really helped me in getting a start in my education regardless of financial difficulties. I don't think I would be in school right now without it.
-Taking out loans to overcome temporary financial hurdles has enabled me to stay in school when I otherwise would have had to quit for a time.
-Scholarships I received have helped me financially and I'm waiting to find out if I can get my baby into the college child care.
-My counselor helped me with a school schedule that did not overwhelm me.
-A lot of hard work and determination, after talking to a counselor we discussed other classes to take that would help.
-I got an academic probation waived because of my low GPA. And without that being waived I wouldn't have been able to sign up for classes on time.
-I asked for extra time to do the assignments since I was having trouble in my personal life.
-Learning about programs that help with college.
-Leaving my children at the babysitters because there's never room at the child development center.
-Sought help from my veterans, my church, and my friends.
-Financial help through the county.
-Making a life plan with a counselor along with an academic plan. Got a referral to housing resources.
-Worked with instructors.
-It was a money issue. Ana helped with finding me funds.
-So far, so good. I am struggling to pay for books at the same time as I pay for car tags, gas, insurance, etc but the BOG grant helps with tuition and I am grateful.

Theme D: Altered educational plan

-I did not take all the classes I wanted.
-Taking a break then coming back.
-I TOOK A YEAR OFF AND WENT BACK.
-I did leave for a little while then I returned to better myself.
-I had to drop a course.
-I didn't. I returned to college once I managed to clear obstacles.
-I was unable to enroll in many of my required classes, due to impaction. I believe that the college needs to expand in order to meet the demand. I was unable to get into all of the classes I needed, so it ended up taking me several semesters longer than expected. As a result, I am struggling financially.
-To receive grant and scholarships I must be full-time, can't be full-time if all the courses I need to graduate are full by the time I can register.
-I just had to start later than expected.
-Took online classes.
-I just have to slow down the rate at which I am taking courses now that online options aren't readily available.
-I had to take a break from college.
-Scheduling classes differently.

-I took a 7 year gap and came back with a better head on my shoulders.
-Luckily there was a change in prerequisites among math classes and I can now take my degree math without passing math 40.
-Even if only able to take one class, I'll take the one class.
-I re-took courses and have managed to stay in a good path.
-I returned after at least a year off.
-Staying on track and only taking one class a semester so I wouldn't overwhelm myself.
-Less classes.
-I manage to stay in college and work by taking one course at a time.
-Re-enrolled next term.

Theme E: Received support from un-named and/or non-specific source(s)

-Faith.
-Prayer, patience, and passion.
-I prayed. It seemed for a while that it would be better just to work instead of going to school because of the time we put into it and the other things in life we have to take care of and pile it on top each other. School work became harder to keep up with and stress came into play.
-Feelings of inadequacy, financial instability, lack of time management skills, and initial discouragement on the first day. I was given useful advice, positive and uplifting support and skillful guidance to keep me focused on sticking with my decision to keep moving forward.
-I found out I had a slight learning disability and received help.
-Monetary assistance.
-I simply got lucky with people in my life willing to help me out.
-By the grace of God. Like I said the far drive and gas prices have been hard, and when the Financial Aid suspension was placed on me for activity from almost 20 years ago it was very hard especially with me also being the only one working in my home.
-I work through them and did what I needed.
-Having people available to help has been a great asset.
-I have people who are encouraging me to stay and who believe I can make it.
-Got help to pay our bills.
-Seeking advice and perseverance.
-I asked for more help and opinions.
-My obstacle was financially driven, since I was not able to receive financial aid. I managed to stay in college because I showed that I was committed to earning a degree and found financial aid elsewhere. I am still struggling.
-I asked for help and adapted my schedule to my choices.
-Got financial help for rent.
-Borrowed money to pay for classes.

Appendix L

Staying on the path: What assistance did COD give you to stay in college?

Theme A: Personal/official mentoring, advice, & guidance

Academic counselors	(48 entries)
Professors/Instructors/Teachers	(19 entries)
Tutoring labs & centers	(10 entries)
Alumni	(1 entry)
Coach	(1 entry)

Theme B: Programs and services

<i>Programs and program staff</i>	
BOG waivers	(5 entries)
CalWorks	(3 entries)
Classes/Tuition	(1 entry)
DSPS	(5 entries)
EDGE	(2 entries)
EOPS	(5 entries)
FAFSA	(2 entries)
Financial Aid & Scholarships	(20 entries)
Foster Youth	(1 entry)
Horizon Books loan program	(1 entry)
Library services	(1 entry)
Mental Health services	(1 entry)
MESA	(1 entry)
My COD	(1 entry)
Pell grant	(1 entry)
SII and MBTI tests	(1 entry)
SEP	(5 entries)
Student Center	(1 entry)
The Printing center	(2 entries)
TRIO	(1 entry)
TASC center	(7 entries)
Transfer center	(3 entries)
Veterans Administration & benefits	(1 entry)
Web Advisor	(1 entry)
Work Experience center	(1 entry)
Workshops	(2 entries)
<i>Course support</i>	
Canvas	(2 entries)
COD website	(3 entries)
Online course options	(3 entries)

Theme C: No assistance sought or none offered

No/none	(16 entries)
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Appendix M

Staying on the path: Is the assistance working?

Why is COD assistance working?

Theme A: Provides tutoring, assistance, and guidance

-I needed a lot of math tutoring and I got a lot of help at the labs. I really liked that those services were available.
-They will help me in the Academic Center in DSPS which is very helpful.
-Tutors are all very helpful.
-I have wonderful teachers guiding me through the process.
-If you are not sure you can ask a counselor.
-They help me with tutoring and knowing what classes to take.
-The counselors I have talked to in EOPS are well informed on what a student needs to do to get through college.
-Get a lot of help with my math class from the Tutoring Center and that assistance is very helpful.
-The assistance is working because professors have office hours where I am able to get help and understand topics that may have been difficult in class.
-The tutors help with math, the alumni help with experience, and my professor helped me with my major
-Counselors' advice has ensured that I am not wasting time taking courses I don't need.
-The assistance is working since it was provided for free and the counselors were flexible with their time and the amount of time to attend to my issues. Nothing felt rushed and I was not given wrong information.
-The assistance from the counselor is working from the start of me going to COD because everything has been according to plan with my classes and it has been working out perfectly.
-Counselors are always there to guide and hear you out.
-Provide advice and assistance.
-Tutors are always at the TASC center.
-They are very helpful, always open to help to reach your goals.

Theme B: Facilitates enrollment in required and relevant courses

-IT HELPED BECAUSE I'M ABLE TO TAKE CLASSES.
-I started taking required classes.
-Financial Aid is pushing me to do more classes. The more classes I do, the more money I get. CalWORKS and my math help in Desert Hot Springs, make it easier for me to take the classes I need.
-It is working due to the fact that it helps me choose the class I need.
-The counselor helped with getting the classes I need.
-It is working because their help kept me away from taking a bad class that did not go towards my degree.

Theme C: Helps resolve personal and/or academic issues and obstacles

-When you feel frustrated and overwhelmed and the professor and staff go out of their way to accommodate you and resolve your issues, it makes a big difference.
-I received tools to help me do better.
-The assistance from the Horizon Program is working because I don't have to pay for books. They help me, they loan the books to me for free. Also, Financial Aid helps to cover for the cost of the school fees.
-Helps me pay for books, uniforms, gas, food and rent.
-My classes are free. I doubt I would be attending if I had to pay for classes.
-Professors are able to help me understand the material better outside of class time.
-They gave me the tools to help me.
-It helps because I can audio record the classes and it helps me take notes later on.
-It covers the expense of classes so that any additional aid helps me pay for bills and living expenses.
-Helps to not have to hold a full time job.
-Because to fix a financial problem all it really takes is money.
-It is working because sometimes I do not have the tools or help I need to finish my homework and the TASC offers those services.
-The assistance is working because it helps me with difficulties I have faced in a course.
-I needed time to deal with things in my personal life, so getting extended deadlines enabled me to balance my personal and college life.
-Offering help to students who don't live as close to the main campus and free bus rides and free printing and internet are the best things. I have been lucky enough to receive this assistance. The DHS campus has been a lifesaver and is helping me stay on track and make sure I can pass all my classes with all the help they offer.
-It is the only way I can afford it.
-It is working because it is making continuing education in a different field affordable.
-I needed money to get to and from school. The money helped.
-I am poor and need the BOG grant, and it really helps with that part of my expenses. If I time it right I should be able to afford most of my classes now and in the future.

Theme D: Provides clarity, certainty, and confidence

-I have a set plan to completion.
-It's been helping me stay on path so I can achieve my dreams.
-The assistance is working because I feel more confident in the choices I have to make to reach my goal faster without having to doubt taking the wrong classes or classes that will not benefit me.
-Helps me stay focused and pay for college.
-It's working out very well; since I'm with my phone a lot, I can get an update right away.
-Always available with pertinent information and assistance.
-Helps keep us on track on what our major needs.
-It is good to know that there is support from COD staff there when it is needed and all I have to do is make time to talk to someone.
-Counselors are helpful letting me know how much I need to transfer and how much classes I have left.
-The counselors are knowledgeable in what they are doing so if I have a question they can easily help me.
-It is working. Has provided me answers to any concerns or questions.
-Because it helped me organize my ideas.
-Gave me a reality check.
-I can easily see what I still need to complete.
-The student planner tells you what to do and you can get an estimate of when you'll graduate.
-They explained everything to me in detail and were there to help me every step of the way.
-It's working because I constantly have to remind myself to finish school.
-Having the ability to easily find assistance for different types and aspects has been very helpful.
-They help guide you in the right path to finish your degree.
-The assistance helps because sometimes one needs that extra confidence to surpass their expectations and sometimes one just needs to have a conversation to realize many things that can help.
-It is helping me choose my classes.
-Their assistance is very helpful to me because they are very specific with what I need to do, when, where, and how.
-It helps because I was lost on what classes I should be taking. My counselor was able to clarify this for me.
-The assistance is keeping me focused and preparing for the real world.
-It works for me because it allows me to see all and any courses I need to take to achieve my goal.
-Keeps me updated on new things happening on campus.
-Because they are consistent.
-Assistance is working because there are people that you could ask questions and get help.
-The assistance has helped me keep my options open and give me hope about my future.
-It is working because they help to answer all your questions.
-I don't ask for help much, but when I do, there is always someone with the answers I need.
-Because they help you see what you need to do and the best way to do it.

Theme E: Promotes proactive & active involvement in education

-The faculty knows how to maintain and display a healthy amount of empathy while carrying out their assigned positions where there's no fear or apprehension attached to asking for help.
-Due to the EOPS program I am required to do 3 mandatory meetings with a counselor and going there to review my status in my classes is definitely helpful. Sometimes we all need to hear it from someone else.
-Allowing me to afford to work much less while going to school.
-It's a good motivator because I don't wish to fail.
-Helping me choose classes.
-They keep us on track and encourage us to graduate.
-Keep me on track and motivated.
-I feel that it has helped to motivate me to do better in school so that I may get off of academic probation.
-Because I'm learning.
-It is working but more required meetings should be demanded.
-It is working because I am going out of my way to look for the assistance.

Why is COD assistance NOT working?

Theme A: Assistance is not available, difficult, and/or inaccessible

-It's not being given.
-Not everyone qualifies for assistance.
-It's too difficult to get.
-Waiting is too long.
-I have a hard time seeing counselors and sometimes the teachers at school may not be flexible or empathetic.
-When we call in for help, I feel like we get the run-around and answers that aren't exactly helpful.
-Cranky people who give attitude!
-Because counselors don't care.
-I've had a few counselors scoff at me, or flat out insinuate that I was not able to do certain things; the head of the nursing department tried to veer me off possibly getting into the nursing program because she said it would take too long. I never asked her how long it would take; however I just wanted to know if it was possible to enroll after I got my bachelors degree. I cried afterwards.
-Asked for an appointment before registration started. I didn't get a response back for a week until I wrote my counselor again. I told her my availability and she scheduled me outside of those times during a time I have class?? Maybe it's because I'm on probation that you guys pushed me to the bottom of the list, which isn't right.

Theme B: Assistance is not effective and/or confusing

-Because I don't have answers to my questions.
-Can't stay in school without a source of income.
-That is why I was not able to finish college because of monetary obstacles.
-They confuse me more than I already am.
-I did a lot of my own assistance after a counselor wasn't helpful.

Theme C: Staff not able to solve issues

-Because no one can change my semester register date.
-It's not working because I am having trouble with my financial aid.

Theme D: Inadequate resources

-Hire new math teachers.
-The scholarships I get are helpful but unfortunately it isn't enough to take care of my family while I attend college, so there is still a lot of financial stress I face.
-College does not have enough professors for the intake of students.
-It's not enough to feed, house and transport me. My EBT got canceled, so now I have LESS resources.

Theme E: No assistance has been offered, provided, and/or sought

-No one helps me.
-I don't have much assistance.
-No assistance or alternatives were offered.
-Because no assistance was provided by COD.
-I haven't received any personal assistance.

Appendix N

Staying on the path: What can COD do to help you to be successful?

Theme A: Issues and concerns with academic counselors and staff that should be addressed

-Hire more counselors if the reason for the lack of response is that they are too busy.
-Simply have professors, advisors, and counselors more available for students who are seeking the help.
-More access to counselors, I haven't been able to meet with one since forever, so I stopped trying.
-Make it easier to see a counselor.
-Maybe hire nicer people. The ladies in Financial Aid are always so rude.
-Counselors are hard to get a hold of.
-Provide accessible tutors.
-Staff is very rude and makes me and other students feel like it's best to avoid going to the counselors.
-Update and retrain the counselors.
-Provide counselors who are empathetic to students' needs and have time to see them.
-Counselors should know the student better and be more knowledgeable.
-Over the past several years I have sent e-mails to the counseling staff and have not received a response. That was quite frustrating.
-I think all the teachers should be more flexible with the students.
-Counselor area needs a lot of work. I hear it from everyone else in the college campus, so I know it's not just me.
-Prompt scheduling of counseling appointments.

Theme B: Additional resources, facilities, & opportunities

-Make food on campus more affordable for those who do not have cars and cannot go off campus in time for their next class to eat.
-They should make accommodations for breastfeeding mothers.
-Have more career options
-PROVIDE MORE TEACHERS.
-Hire new math teachers.
-Offer more classes so there's more variety.
-Provide childcare.
-Provide tutoring for harder classes (stats).
-I explained to DSPS if they could teach how to navigate online classes that would be helpful because I have to drive 45 minutes one way to the college and the gas and car up keep are very costly.
-Create more adapted classes.
-Continue to hire staff and educators who have a passion to teach and help students improve.
-I would like to see the college expand. The majority of professors at COD are truly great and passionate about what they teach, but unfortunately, classes are too small and teachers are too few to accommodate the amount of students who need to get into classes.
-Offer more online classes.
-I really think more online classes should be available.
-All classes should be available during all semesters.
-It would be nice if parking stickers would be discounted for students who have financial hardship and can't afford them.
-Have a campus closer to home, so I have more time doing homework, instead of wasting it driving all the way over there; and I can take more class, I can be a full time student. I don't want to commit to classes that are far and run out of gas, be late, or rushing back to pick up the kids on time.
-Create more availability for classes, especially important classes for popular majors.
-Include more online and night classes for those who cannot attend regular school hours.
-Make more online services for those who are already in the workforce, especially someone working in the field of their major.
-Provide more online courses.
-Offer more classes at different times.
-Offer online math courses for full time working students.
-Help with child care.
-I feel like they do not have many classes to offer.
-Provide more counselors!
-To help me be successful, the COD should provide more areas to stay on campus and do homework because as soon as I leave campus I am on to other things, but if I stay after class then I get my work done right there while it's fresh in my mind.
-A daycare center on campus for students' children would be nice.
-Offer as much aid as they can to students who can access it and to those who cannot. So it doesn't hinder their ability to graduate or transfer.
-I feel COD should have longer hours for study areas.
-Have more counselors.
-Hire more professors.
-Extend hours of tutoring and access to the Academic Center.
-Add more mental health counselors/therapists.
-Make every class have an online option.
-Look into having more STEM classes available. Try to expand them to other campuses like Indio.
-Add video conferencing with counselors.

Theme C: Implement programs that guide and are actively engaged with students

-Invite students to be more involved based on subject criteria.
-Direct them to alternative organizations and programs that can aid students in different ways.
-Providing more social activities.
-Encourage students to not give up, classes can be difficult with timing conflicts, but I believe that with simple encouragement from professors and counselors, students will feel empowered to continue their goals.
-Set reminders when assignments are due.
-Continue to motivate students.
-I have spoken to many people my age or older and they would like to go back to school but are intimidated by the technology and just the idea of beginning. Maybe reach out to those people as well.
-COD does a great job in helping me become successful by constantly offering assistance and helpful faculty available at all times.
-Have more meetings with the students to make sure they are on track and taking the right classes.
-Care about their students.
-Become more engaged within the students.
-Give us more help when we need it instead of telling us we have to do it on our own.
-Offer an encouraging support group for students in the same major to connect with each other.
-Have the counselors meet with every student after they fail twice so they work something out.
-Have specific advisers for each career path that the students can gather valuable advice from.
-Check on the classes we take periodically to make sure that we stay on track.
-Provide more encouragement.
-Possibly have mandatory checkups.
-The college should ask more about student experiences.
-Continue motivating, guiding, and supporting us.
-For those students who decide to drop a class or drop out, they should have to go and see a counselor before it's processed.
-The students who are struggling could have a mandatory meeting with a counselor.
-I'd say just to keep up their awesome effort & frequent counselor meetings.
-Have one-on-one meetings with students to make sure they are on the right track.
-Providing online tutoring 24/7 to students who can't always make it to a tutoring session.
-Have a hotline or a comment box on the COD website for students to report issues or problems that they're having, so that a team could look at how to solve the problem and get back to them.
-Keep the focus on the students. Listen to our needs and continue to help make changes to help us move forward with our education and goals.
-Acknowledge students who attend COD; celebrate them. It may seem hard, but small things make a difference.
-Make it mandatory to go see a counselor.
-Check in with students monthly.
-Allowing student to discuss their intentions with counselors, encouraging a positive attitude, providing more services for students with mental illness and encouraging therapy resources.
-Offer a way that students can raise concerns.
-Reach out to students more.
-They should continue to be here with students and make us feel secure.
-Keep the counselors accessible and ready to answer questions and provide advice/help.
-Have someone a student trusts to go to with an obstacle/concern for support and assistance.

- I really wish I started off this school year with the knowledge that I have now. If I knew sooner what I now know, I would have attended school full time and not try to manage a full-time job at the same time. I wish I had sought counseling sooner I feel that maybe COD should require that students seek counseling when attending their first and second semesters.
- Have more obligatory counselor meetings. Sometimes setting up your own meetings can be intimidating or overwhelming.
- Try to set up meetings with students who seem to be struggling.

Theme D: Clarify and/or enhance requirements, processes, and outcomes

- Survey the needs of the students.
- Ensure professors aren't making things up as they go and that their courses have clear outlines with unchangeable important dates.
- Continue providing and enhancing the services that are already in place.
- Help students decide on a major at an early stage in their college career.
- I feel more information about transferring is needed.
- Focus on regulations and administration of students dropping classes and how these rules affect students staying at COD.

Theme E: Promote events, opportunities, requirements, and course information so they are more available

- Have all the programs available or explained in orientation.
- Promote and advertise more of the programs and help provided for students of low income.
- Enforce professors to use Canvas so students can see their grades right away and have better assignment organization.
- Provide more information for programs on how to help low income families so that they can have a better future for their kids.
- Give incoming students a chance to apply for pLEDGE or let them know about the program and that they might be eligible.
- I think just helping students know the resources the school has to help them.
- Keep up their programs that help students get better informed and guided into their majors/degrees.
- Provide more direction and information on all Financial Aid programs available and promote and support them.
- Email tips and things that the college offers.
- Keep me informed on what's going on and what I can do to get my degree.
- Make the way of getting help or assistance available to first year and second year college students available all the time.
- Offer presentations where I meet alumni.
- Make diversity trendy at COD. Hang posters of students from all over the world so international students feel welcome.
- Reaching out and helping me find resources like FAFSA and other payment opportunities.
- Promote mental health facilities and programs.
- I liked the emails I received about health, meditation, good diet and exercise.
- Offer presentations that highlight successful students (past and present).
- Provide more assistance in exploring majors so students know if a major is right for them or not. This could be field trips to relevant locations, such as NASA or forensic labs.
- More exciting academic and non academic activities and events will motivate students.
- Have different speakers from different industries talk to students about their career path outside of college.
- Develop a program that shows how your major can actually help you achieve in the real world.
- I would like to see more school unity.
- Make course deadlines more known.
- The Web-adviser should have a degree progress report page showing student degree progress.

Theme F: Address and solve “student-specific” idiosyncratic issues & problems

-Please reverse my Academic Disqualification so I can continue.
-Allow students who have only a few classes left to graduate to register first, even if the number of classes they took at COD is less than what is required now.
-Give me orientation.
-Take students backgrounds into consideration to see if things can be affordable to all.
-Continue to support those who need financial support.
-Lower tuition fees.
-Help people who need it instead of going through FAFSA.
-I'm 42 years old and starting a new career after being laid off. I already have a degree. While I don't think I should be top priority for registration, it's frustrating that I hear about 18 yr olds first semester students having top priority that are not disabled/military or any other special class warranting higher priority. It's also frustrating that students with higher priority snag in-demand classes (A&P I & II, micro, etc) then later drop the class, but still have high priority for snagging the class again. I need to get moving on this new path, but now I'm concerned I won't be able to get my last two requirements for nursing school completed next semester which will delay me an entire year due to the timing of the application process and the courses not being offered during the summer.
-"First priority student" shouldn't be a thing even though they're in sports.
-Cheaper books, not canceling classes, and not making me take classes that I don't need.
-Do away with prerequisites.
-Incentivize teachers to not use online material that costs way more than a standard used book. This is a community college for those of us who are not always as financially able, so cutting out of pocket expenses for students could help.
-My struggles are financial so these are my issues.
-Quit making students take irrelevant classes and encourage students to find their own purpose in life rather pursue a career that will ultimately make them live a passive, unhappy life.
-There should be a way for Financial Aid to hear your story if you have no communication with your parents.
-Continue the EDGE program!
-I have noticed that classes are packed at the beginning of the semester but attendance dwindles dramatically by the end of it. Having some kind of consequence for frequent withdrawals (such as lowered priority) would encourage students to remain in their courses.
-For people coming from farther cities it is very expensive to travel to college every day. I wish we can have extra support.
-They should take out unnecessary requirements for certain classes and require certain classes that are beneficiary to the student.
-Don't threaten to take away students priority registration due to their major and inability to get the classes they need. It isn't the student's fault that they can't get the classes they need. It's usually due to the high volume of students already in said class.
-Add "you are here" dots on the maps around campus. For students trying to find a new class it was difficult and reading the maps around campus (or in the catalog) without a "you are here" dot made things more difficult since you weren't even sure what buildings you were by.
-COD should provide me with financial aid so that I don't have to work a part time job and I can focus on my education.
-Give grants to middle class students.
-Help with the financial issues and continue to be organized with Canvas and classes.
-Remove class requirements that aren't useful.
-Help students with transportation, homelessness, and food.
-It's getting harder to be in a class among young students to accept my age bracket.
-Make classes easier to get into.
-I'm aware that they are looking for a way to make meal cards available for students and that seems to be a smart idea.

-They should give free classes.
-More flexibility for scheduling of classes; I am a working parent of two girls.
-Develop a localized “GoFundMe” setup for all students' books and materials, then hold a drawing or competition to award the funds.
-Replace the wooden chairs in the College library. The new healthy way to do work on a computer is by standing at Kiosks. A new medical study is that people live longer and have healthier circulation if they stand. The chairs are causing me lower lumbar pain, cutting the circulation off in my legs directly on my sciatic nerves.

Appendix O

Ensuring learning: Are you prepared for the next steps?

Feel prepared for next steps

Theme A: Confident am acquiring knowledge, skills, and resources needed for next steps

-I have a lot of resources to help me.
-So far I've done well in the classes, 97% or better.
-Junior college is always a good way to gradually learn how college works before moving on in one's educational journey.
-I feel like COD is a good stepping stone to a university.
-My classes have helped me.
-Courses taken have been difficult and allowed me to challenge myself. They provide a good foundation of knowledge so future courses taken will be understood.
-I feel very prepared because the courses I've taken, especially Psychology, have helped me to become more aware and that helps me understand.
-I have become an honor student upon arriving at COD. I have many academic scholarships for my grades when I transfer to the next level which is a 4 year university.
-I have gained knowledge and experience that I did not have before.
-The classes here are interesting, high quality and directly relevant to my career. For these reasons, I feel prepared.
-I feel like I'm prepared because the professors would let you know about things you need to do in order to pass your classes.
-I feel prepared because I am getting my general education out of the way.
-Prepared for CompTIA exams by classes and college approved vouchers.
-Certain classes have left me quite satisfied, and I would even say that they have prepared me extremely well if I were to ever swap my major.
-I took great knowledge in and learned great life lessons I am ready for so much more thanks to COD.
-I have found that a college education is good for everyone to open your mind, learn to be organized, opens up your vocabulary, and areas of discussions.
-I feel more experience as a student and am ready to go onto a UC.
-Because since I have been at COD for almost 2 1/2 years I have expanded my thinking. I can run programs on my PC I never knew how to operate before, type professional papers, and have many more skills.
-I feel like the college is preparing me for the next stage of my educational journey.
-I am able to take the classes I need along with my degree classes to help me refresh and rejuvenate after being away from school for a few years and get back on track after some personal trauma.
-I was able to receive the knowledge and awareness of the field I am studying in.
-I see this time of education as a springboard to a more elevated, knowledgeable place that will be appreciated by future employers and even co-workers.
-COD has helped make me who I am today because the college has taught me how I can be successful in my career.
-Classes have been relevant to my major (business).
-All the courses I have taken have prepared me in one way or another for my future of going to a university.
-The curriculum and instructors cover all areas.
-I feel prepared because I practice every day either studying or practice skills at home, work, and school.
-School has taught me time management especially with having to work and attend school at the same time.
-I learned more about myself at COD and what I want to do in terms of picking my major.
-I have saved money which I am content about.
-The classes help prepare me for higher level university courses and the college offers great assistance to the students so that we know we are on the right path to continue onto higher education.
-COD has expanded my knowledge and prepared me for the future.

-Considering I am almost done with my journey and getting my teachers certificate I feel way more prepared than when I started. I've learned what works for me and what doesn't and I've had wonderful teachers to help guide me through the process.
-I have used the knowledge I learned here and applied it to my jobs.
-I feel the education I am getting at COD is properly preparing me to climb my way up the college ladder.
-The classes are very helpful. Some teachers could push you a little more and take their classes more seriously but for the most part they are pretty good.
-I feel prepared because I have gotten so much knowledge from different types of courses I have taken throughout the years.
-In terms of my learning experience here at COD, I feel prepared for the next step in my educational journey and/or future career because COD has taught me more than I need to know and has given me a real college experience.
-I still have a few years left at COD but I feel what I've learned here so far has been very valuable and I'm ready for what everyday life has to throw at me.
-I've been doing everything on my own and have been successful. So I feel I am ready.
-I think I have what it takes to be successful. College prepared me.
-I have learned what I need to move on and learn even more.
-I'm still in classes but I feel I am learning the necessary skills to complete my certificate and gain employment.
-I feel prepared for the next step because I believe the courses I've taken have pushed me to become a better student.
-I feel I'm ready for the next step of my academic journey because I believe the courses and professors I've taken have pushed me to become a better student.
-I feel prepared for university because I have learned how to better manage my time over the last two years at COD. Although I still procrastinate at times, it is not nearly as bad as it was when I first started.
-My English 1A class required so much writing that I believe in myself to overcome any writing class now.
-The classes are good, I liked my teachers and I feel I am ready with the material that I learned to continue my education.
-I have learned the basics of writing that will help me in the rest of my classes.
-I have learned a lot of knowledge that will help me to succeed.
-I feel more prepared because of the important classes that I take are relevant to the degree that I'm pursuing.
-I feel specifically that ENG 1A has made me a stronger writer and thinker.
-I feel that the classes I have taken at college of the desert have helped me develop better writing and speech skills.
-I have become a harder worker and understand that there are many perspectives that if I don't understand I can learn to work with.
-I am used to the stress and knowing the amount of effort I will put forth.
-Because it allows me to get a taste of college and to not be in debt before transferring
-My IGETC requirements are fulfilled and I have better study habits than I did in high school.
-I am learning things that I've heard are important to know from research in my prospective field.
-I feel prepared because getting these credits and passing the class shortens my time in college.
-I have taken classes at COD and online. If you really put in the effort and time to learn it will go great.
-Taking classes makes me feel well prepared to continue my career.
-I feel prepared for the next step in my educational journey because I've learned to become more responsible in college and acquire better time management.
-I went through a tough time at the beginning and struggled a lot in the middle, but I'm nearing the end and I'm ready to face it knowing that I've grown as a person and as a student. I'm ready to finish and go on.
-I got into the right program to help me with my career.
-I feel like the student web portal helped me look at what is left and what I already took and it makes me feel like I have made a good progress.
-COD helped me prepare by providing me with real life situations.

-Great education and have been exposed to various opportunities which have helped me grow.
-I have been giving my all in my classes and it's paying off.
-I really enjoyed the classes at COD and feel like I learned a lot, especially the ones in line with my major.
-The choice of courses available and material provided has been excellent.
-The lessons and habits I have formed will assist me in the future.
-I feel I am prepared to take the next step in my educational journey because I have been exposed to information which requires extensive critical thinking and I understand it's necessary for preparation.
-The Graphic Design class is designed to help students actually get jobs in the industry and be prepared for the industry.
-I feel prepared to transition to my future career because I have had hands on experience for what I am studying.
-I feel prepared because COD is helping me to get on track and working hard to get out in 2 years or so. The resources have helped me all the way.
-I think the COD is doing a good job in preparing for the next step in my career. As a student, I have to make sure I meet the necessary standards.
-Although it is a lot of information, I feel the information is relative to my career and is helping me to prepare for what's to come by setting my foundation.
-The courses that I am taking help me prepare for what to expect in a classroom.
-I feel prepared because I took classes at COD that will benefit me in the future especially when I transfer.
-COD chemistry gives me a huge head start and advantage over other students. It also gives me both college credit and high school credit.
-I have learned valuable skills in the courses I have taken and I have had people to help me.
-It really is expanding my knowledge so I see things in a different perspective.
-Well taught and thorough coursework.
-I'm prepared because all the classes I have to take are crosses to the one I will have to take when I transfer to the other college.
-I have to pass several certification tests in order to have the certifications on my resume and with the tools provided by the classes and the books I feel as though I can do that.

Theme B: Staff support and support programs have prepared me for next steps

-BECAUSE COD HAS GOOD COUNSELORS AND PROGRAMS LIKE EDGE AND EOPS.
-Professors at COD provide a very good education for their students. All professors are very knowledgeable in the subject they are teaching.
-The instructors I've had thus far are very knowledgeable, patient, and really seem to care about their students and their success.
-Because COD has better teachers. Also they have a lot of patience with students.
-I feel prepared because EOPS and staff member Maria Herrera have helped me plan my schedule.
-I believe most of the teaching staff are competent and want to help.
-I feel very prepared to continue my educational journey because my professor has office hours and I had always gone to them and got some extra help in those hours. Furthermore, there have been plenty of tutors to help me understand my homework and the subject matter. The best part of all was that it was FREE!!!
-COD is an amazing school with great staff.
-The professors I have encountered during my time here have really instilled in me the importance of education but have also been extremely helpful in teaching me new material.
-The Professors that taught me during this first semester outlined very clearly the requirements of the class and challenged me to do better. The approach these Professors had encouraged me to accept the challenges and overcome them so as to build a strong foundation for the semester to come.
-COD has great professors and a learning environment. Professors have a passion to teach and every effort is made to help with our successes.

-I feel that the professors at COD provided me with a great foundational knowledge to enter the nursing program. The majority of my relevant classes were BIO or HS, which has some truly great professors. I feel that their passion in teaching helped me engage in class better, and allowed me to fully understand the concepts that they presented.
-I had amazing professors who taught me so much and I know I am smarter because of their instruction and lessons.
-Because of the advisors, counselors, and professors advice I have received and also the classes that have challenged me have made me more knowledgeable and stronger.
-I know how a learning institution works and I know how to look for and take advantage of all the programs offered by colleges.
-Biology and Chemistry teachers are great and Biology is my major.
-I've had a really good teacher who has made me feel ready for the next step.
-COD has wonderful professors with a heart to teach. This makes the learning fun and interesting.
-I feel prepared because I've talked to many people about what the next step is and what I need to do to make that next step.
-Majority of teachers that I've had the pleasure to learn from take the time to explain the material and also provide office hours if extra help is needed.
-I do feel very prepared because COD staff and everyone else are motivating and inspiring.
-Honestly, J. Neymier has affected my education. He explains and engages and asks us twice if we have questions. Out of all of the classes I have taken, he is the only teacher who actually helps us out and this is the only class I have ever learned from.
-Most of the professors that I have had were awesome. Very helpful and teach in a way that makes their classes relevant to life.
-The counselors have helped me choose what classes I need to take.
-I feel prepared for my future career because the teachers have been amazing with teaching me everything I need to know to be ready.
-Being away from school for at least 15 years and coming back my English teacher gave me so much information.
-The professors really do help prepare you with their lectures and help to show how to succeed in the field.
-I feel confident that this school will guide me towards reaching my goals with enough assistance.
-The teachers are usually firm but fair, obviously with some exceptions and I feel they have prepared me for what is to come.
-I am guided by the counselors.
-Because my professors have all been extremely helpful and my classes have all been very informative and, I believe, have done really great at preparing me for transfer.
-The ADN program is preparing me for the NcLEX and my bachelors program.
-Fast Track helped.
-When I got into my major I had no knowledge of it at all, I jumped into the deep end and people around me taught me to swim metaphorically speaking of course. Now I know I want to do this because it's one of the best things ever.
-I feel prepared because they help me to find things that will help with my degree.
-They offered lots of help in the process and the teachers helped too
-My professors were extremely helpful. They were informed and always willing to help. Without them, it would have been hard.
-I feel completely prepared as I was guided in the right direction. I have no questions in regards to my education as I am on my way to a better future.
-There's teachers that are happy to be teaching you and enjoy what they do and that is helping others understand the material.
-The professors work really hard at giving their students one on one time.
-Yes, it has prepared me a lot because COD has the best resources you can ever imagine and people to help you with your educational goals.
-My major professor of ECE has made me feel prepared.
-Yes I do because the teachers I've had have been helpful in many ways.
-I only feel prepared due to my Student Educational Plan that was set up by my counselor and me.
-I feel prepared for my next educational step in my career since COD workers helped prepare a plan and have guided me with advice on what to do.
-COD provides a transfer center that makes it easy to see my options in my next step of my educational journey.

-I feel that I have learned so much. Most of the professors are great.
-I feel prepared because Dr. Jordan does an amazing job at making you feel that you are capable of passing his class.
-Because I know if I need help I have it.
-The professors I have done a good job at teaching the material and prepping me for the next tier.
-I am prepared for the next step in my educational journey because I put in the time to learn the material, with the help of outside sources.
-As long as there continues to be support there's nothing to stop me.
-My biology professor is very strict, but he forced me to understand science.
-As long as I have help available, I should be fine. I get nervous about the future but as long as I have people to talk to I should be fine.
-Having a tight knit educator that is friendly and close to me along with the other students help, making me feel comfortable to approach with problems. I feel welcomed and comfortable on campus enough to move forward.
-The professors at COD are very helpful and dedicated.
-The tutors at the TASC center were extremely helpful when I took tough classes such as math and the help of counselors who want to see you succeed. The TASC center and teachers have prepared me for my future endeavors.
-Because I know what I want to do and have had lots of help planning my future with the schools counselors.
-I know I can go to the counseling office for any questions I have.
-They have a good method of learning what companies need to hire COD students (e.g., "Purple Briefcase").
-I feel pretty much prepared because the professors have been great about answering any questions and helping to alleviate any concerns about my classes and my career path.
-I have been pushing myself to be better and the staff is very encouraging.

Theme C: Next steps are clear (have plan, have prepared, have experience, have confidence)

-I know where to go.
-I feel like I am a lot more prepared for CSU. I'll be able to set my classes in the beginning and make a plan once I meet with a counselor.
-I have clear descriptions of the demands and opportunities for my major and career.
-Once I received my educational plan it allowed me the classes I needed without taking courses that were not relevant.
-The learning experience I have gained so far helped me put together a good study schedule and helped me keep my workload low.
-I am getting used to going to school once again, so going to another school will be mentally easier.
-I feel prepared. I still have a long way to go. I have my planned schedule already in my COD profile so I know what classes I need to take.
-Staying on task and focused is why I feel prepared for the next step.
-I am confident and I know what I want.
-I now know that asking others who've taken certain classes is the best thing to do if you want information on the class itself. Therefore, in doing so, I know what my next step should be in my educational journey.
-I feel prepared to continue my education because I know what type of path I have to take to fulfill my future career. I understand what it takes to reach my career goal.
-I feel prepared by staying on track.
-Properly planning and setting attainable short term goals has been incredibly helpful.
-I'm slowly learning things such as how to manage my time and how not to overwhelm myself.
-I feel prepared because I have an idea of what school feels like.
-I have all the classes I need to take in place.
-I feel prepared for my next step in my educational journey for my future career because I am firm with my decision of what I want to do.

-I feel prepared at this point.
-I've learned to take action on my future and ask questions.
-Overall I feel prepared for the next part of my academic career.
-I am able to find the next classes that I need to get my certificate.
-I know how to apply for next classes.
-Because this has helped me acclimate to "college life" and it will help me in my college journey.
-I feel I can go to the next step.
-I feel prepared because I have an idea of what to expect in my future educational journey.
-SEP has helped a lot.
-Because I think I have more opportunities and I am focusing more on my education.
-I feel I have learned to help myself and whatever my next step is I will be able to adapt to deal with it.
-I understand now the classes I have to take to achieve my goal.
-Every class gets me closer to my goal.
-I feel prepared because I know exactly what I'm going to do and how going to do it from this point on.
-I feel ready because I now know what college professors expect as opposed to high school teachers.
-I feel the criteria are a good base for what is to come in my future education.
-I know the classes that I need, if they are available, I will enroll.
-I know where to go for any help when applying for Universities.
-I know what classes I need to transfer out.
-I'M PREPARED! I HAVE TAKEN MANY CLASSES. SO I AM READY TO START MY LVN PROGRAM.
-It helped me understand what college classes are like, what to expect, and what certain classes will be like in my future.
-I have the tools needed to get a higher education.
-I study hard.
-Because I'm ready to finish.

Theme D: Have positive orientation to future and/or looking forward to next steps

-My instructors in the Fire program are amazing instructors who express their passion for teaching and make learning fun.
-I feel prepared and confident because I'll be doing what I love.
-I am prepared because I am anxious to learn.
-All the classes I have taken, I've enjoyed very much. They are towards my major so I already enjoy them but with "eager to teach professors" this makes my learning experience much better.
-I feel more comfortable and aware in a college setting.
-New classes are always fun to look forward to as well as meeting new professors and people who have all gone through different journeys that we are all there to learn the same subject.
-They taught me that everything is going to be OK even if you fail a course.

Feel unprepared

Theme A: I am not certain am acquiring knowledge, skills, & resources needed for next steps

-I had a couple of experiences with instructors who could probably be a little better on teaching, but I guess we have some of those instructors everywhere.
-One thing that I'd like to note is there are some professors that do have tenure and offer absolutely nothing for students and those professors need to be evaluated.
-The only issue I faced was signing up for a class with a professor that was teaching in Spanish the majority of the time in a class that had nothing to do with Spanish.
-Classes are not challenging, the material is outdated and teachers are biased in their grading.
-Personally, there is still the same or even more pressure to get things done at a certain deadline. Classes are not always filled with a desire to learn rather than a desire to just pass.
-I will be mostly done with math upon graduation from COD so I will not have to worry about whether or not the math department at COD has prepared me correctly. Hire new math teachers
-Money wise I don't feel prepared to transfer. I don't think I've saved enough money.
-The teachers really are lazy.
-I do not feel that the classes I have taken and the knowledge I have learned in those classes is enough to make me prepared for university level classes. I think that when I transfer to a university I am going to struggle heavily.
-I feel like I am not getting quality knowledge in some of the classes I have taken.
-I feel that I need more practice because sometimes you forget material with all the classes that you have and all the information that you have to memorize for tests.
-I haven't learned much about anything other than Psychology with Brooks.
-I need to learn more, I am not confident in my knowledge and abilities.
-The classes I've taken have made my academic skills stronger, but I also work and it feels like I really have to learn how to study the hard way. It would be more helpful if there were workshops teaching study habits and strategies for students. I don't think high school prepared me well.
-This school is easier than a high school. I've learned more and have taught myself more than COD has provided me. And in half the time!
-Thinking I absolutely learned nothing and I felt like that was an important class where I should have learned something to use in everyday life.
-Not enough practical application.
-I taught myself and found the professors rather useless.
-I do not feel I gained much from COD in terms of learning or the college experience.
-I feel there are a lot of useless classes required for a degree.
-I don't feel like I have advanced much here at COD due to lack of resources in department.
-I wasted my time for 3 years, I stayed the same!
-I haven't learned enough yet.

Theme B: Next steps are not clear (no plan, no preparation, no experience, lack confidence, confused)

-The options are not clear, the COD counselors tell me one thing and the CSU counselors say the opposite.
-I am not from this country and don't know how the educational process works here. I am not clear about the Financial Aid, and every time I ask the Financial Aid staff, their answers are more confusing.
-I feel unprepared for next semester. I'm not sure what classes I should take to stay on the right path to my degree.
-For the major I want to pursue, I feel extremely unprepared because I am still confused as to what is required of me as a result of the struggle to speak to a counselor without inane wait times and the inability for the counselor to accurately answer my questions.
-Because I don't know what to do, every one confuses me.
-My major is business for now, but I have no idea what I am really going for. No clue where it will lead me. Frustrated at not knowing what I want.
-I'm still unsure exactly what future career I should prepare for. I have a general idea of where I'm heading but I'm experiencing second thoughts and or doubts but I'm sure this is normal for anyone who is planning some type of career for themselves. I must speak with a counselor for some clarity.
-I still do not feel my best as I am still figuring out the major I want to focus on from here on out.
-I just don't know what exactly the next steps are in my future career goals besides what classes I need to complete.
-Because I'm not sure if the major I chose is for me.
-I am switching majors. I don't know what I want to major in. I don't know what kind of work I want to do.
-Guidance towards getting jobs and experience in field of study should be available.
-I think the only thing that may get in my way is my age. Maybe my journey will stop due to my age. I have had trouble finding work.
-The classes I took this semester have nothing to do with what I want to do, I understand its Gen Ed but I constantly find myself thinking "why are you in this class" because I don't understand how they are going to help me be a business major.
-I have not decided on a major yet. I am going to pursue journalism, but I am not confident in my decision.
-After much online research and asking other people, not at the college, I figured out a few things. Yet, mostly likely there are still many things I don't know, that I should know, and don't even know that I don't know.
-I feel more prepared than before but I'm still uncertain about my future. I still need to research what skills and majors are crucial for my career path.
-Not sure of how to proceed to USCSB. What needs to be done etc.
-I feel as if I need to prepare myself a little more before taking the next step in my journey.
-I feel I'm not prepared because I just started, so I need more experience.
-I don't know how or when to transfer.
-I feel that if I am not successful in school I may not be able to seek employment for my future dream career.
-The whole transferring thing is very confusing and I don't know what to do. What universities to apply to, etc.

Theme C: Having difficulty completing courses and/or degree

-I'm being stopped and threatened to be expelled.
-My counselor made it clear that I have to take so-and-so classes in order to transfer to my university of choice.
-I have not taken any classes that are geared towards my degree because they are difficult to get into.
-I am not sure which classes I will be able to get next semester and whether I will have financial aid because of my grades.
-Science courses hard to pass BIO 14 and 15.
-I am unsure because of my grades I may not be able to attend a decent university and my Pell grant may not be available next semester because of my grades which is due to my own personal issues and scheduling with work and school.
-I don't feel prepared because I do not study or learn very well.

Appendix P

Ensuring learning: Are sequenced courses valuable/not valuable?

Sequenced courses are helpful

Theme A: Sequenced courses build background knowledge that promotes understanding of subject matter, field, major, degree, and career

-It gave me good background information on the subject.
-These classes lead into the next class. From taking Introduction to Administration of Justice all the classes after have been based on what I first learned.
-They build upon one another and relate directly to my career.
-Yes, this was very helpful when taking different courses at the same time. I noticed that Public Speaking and English class focused on same dynamics of speaking and writing skills, as well as, learning different types of resources. Also, other classes seem to work hand-in-hand even though they were different subjects. I would see the same lessons in different subject matters.
-I get a better understanding of my major.
-It was helpful in a way it leaned into the next stage of what I was learning about my field.
-As a nursing student, each sequence is a foundation for the next step.
-I have to take calculus. To take calculus you have to build up to it.
-Gives more insight and adds to my knowledge about that topic.
-It was valuable b/c it taught me where to begin and the different branches of knowledge that exist.
-It helps with organization and connecting things together.
-The sequence design classes build on each other. They helped me learn more in depth about the topic.
-Learning bits and bits help build a map towards a greater picture.
-It made the subject matter easier to understand.
-Valuable b/c the courses will be helpful for my future.
-VALUABLE BECAUSE IT OPENS MY EYES TO SEE OUT OF THE BOX.
-Helpful because you get to see the "whole" picture. For example Anatomy 1 and 2 combine great so one can understand how Chapter 10 on the lymphatic system helps out the cells from Chapter 1.
-The class sequence is logical, and useful, because in my case I am learning about computers- so first I am learning computers, then networks, then detailed info about networks, then servers, etc. This layout enables each semester to build upon the previous one, as well as reinforcing the things I learned the recent semester.

Theme B: Sequenced courses develop practical skills & tools, and/or competence and confidence

-BECAUSE IT PREPARES YOU FOR THE NEXT LEVEL.
-They helped prepare me for the next level.
-The Early Childhood Education classes are sometimes in a sequence and that helps because you learn theories, then you go out into the classroom and actually observe what you've been learning in the class.
-I like the sequence design. It always makes sense to start at the most basic and build upon it. If I had not have had English 1 with the spectacular Professor Joseph Whatford, I honestly would not have known much of the things I needed to write successful papers and how to upload them. He helped me gain confidence in using my computer and took the time to show me MAC to PC adjustments for uploading assignments.
-It makes sense to have taken English before any class where written assignments will be required.
-Otherwise some students may fail, not because they do not know the material, but because they weren't able to write effectively.
-It was valuable because this is going to help me with real life situations.
-The classes provided information that was important to know for the next class in the sequence and make it easier to be prepared for the next level.

-With each class I learned the next steps.
-The sequence was valuable because I could not have taken the second course without the first one.
-I believe the Accounting sequence was valuable in order to learn at the next level.
-In order to take a certain classes, I had to take the one I am taking now. And though I've had my share of troubles, it is a smart idea to build upon classes. That way, the teacher can focus on the class they have and not waste time teaching other students what they should know already.
-I like that I am able to take a class that prepares me for the next level of the class. I think it is helpful to take courses that are similar to one another and continue to get more challenging.
-It helps by building on each other. By the time you're ready for some classes you feel like you already know some things and are prepared.
-Taking the basics then taking another class that is more in depth should build on what you have learned before.
-Music theory is just like Math in that each level builds on the one before.
-Because it builds up your knowledge over time in an ordered way.
-This is kind of a silly question. Of course it's helpful so you don't take a class that treats you as if you should already know certain information and you don't yet know it. For example, I took "Intro to Sociology" before I took "Social Problems". Had I started with "Social Problems" I might have been confused because that class assumes I know things from "Intro to Sociology". So, yes, taking them in sequence is valuable.
-It is important. An analogy is like building a house, without a solid foundation you are not able to build a structure.
-The sequence was valuable because what I learned in one was brought up in the other.
-It's helpful to build on information, but I imagine this wouldn't be helpful if the information wasn't fully grasped in the first place.
-They make me stand out in a competitive world. They have given me tools that make me different than others that are in the same field that I'm trying to get into.
-My English 1A class was valuable because it set the precedent for writing at the college level and prepared me to write for the rest of my classes.
-Some classes do make a good impact on my academics. For instance, psychology, English, and public speaking have helped my writing and speech skills in the best way possible.
-It was valuable because it helped me prepare.
-It was helpful to learn the basics of a subject before continuing on to a difficult part of the subject.
-The sequence design was valuable since I was learning everything I enjoyed about a subject plus it would help me for the next course.
-The sequence design is valuable and helpful at COD because the information that you retain from the required course is very useful, we are learning, and being prepared for the next step for our educational journey.
-The sequence was valuable because I acquired knowledge and understood what to expect from that class.
-In terms of math and science it was valuable because each prerequisite helped me start the following class.
-Because they show us in order how helpful the class is.
-I took Illustrator and Graphic Design which created a synergy as knowing Illustrator (or Photoshop or InDesign) is helpful in graphic design and taking graphic design is helpful when completing projects for Illustrator.
-Some skills taught in prior courses were useful in subsequent courses.
-I feel more prepared for each consecutive class because of the planned classes I took beforehand.
-The sequence design is helpful since a student is only able to move forward if they have acquired the necessary skill for the next course
-You have to learn how to walk before you can run.
-I feel if you design your schedule in sequence you may be better prepared for those classes.
-It helped lay groundwork for the following courses.
-Builds on knowledge that is required for the next course.
-Nursing. You need to build up on the material given.

Theme C: Sequenced courses promote individualized learning and success

-It allows you to learn one step at a time and then continue to build on what you have already learned.
-Easier to master a concept if you do it in progressive stages.
-Previous courses provide a good foundation of knowledge so future courses are better understood.
-Some of my courses were in sequence and connected. It makes the learning process easier to understand and helps me understand the material through different perspectives.
-I believe that they are valuable because they support individual growth.
-The sequence design is made in a way that could only help the students.
-The sequence design is valuable because instead of getting all the different types of information at once, you take steps to get more depth from the topics.
-It helps to start off with the basic classes and build from there so that I am not too overwhelmed from learning a lot at one time and so that I have time to study for my other classes.
-I had to complete remedial math and English classes. These helped me to be successful in the college level classes.
-It made some classes more understandable.
-In other schools, some classes don't require pre-reqs and students can just go into it. As a result many students tend to drop and feel discouraged to take the class again. Although it can be time-consuming, I feel the sequence design can help students not waste their time and set them up for the harder classes that are required, especially science classes.
-It keeps you refreshed and makes it easier to finish the course with an A.
-The sequence helps build on what you currently know to excel in future courses.
-Because it helped me learn math in an approachable order.
-The sequence design was valuable because not only does it help with the rest of the courses, but it allows for information to be retained more because the courses build on each other.
-The sequence design is valuable because it helps students remember the information that they learned in their previous courses.
-Sequenced courses are relevant and valuable because they explain and the next class builds, without being too overwhelming.
-It showed that COD wouldn't let me get in over my head. They would teach me what I needed to know.
-Are valuable because they are well organized in sequence, step by step.
-The sequence is helpful because everything interconnects and it sticks with me that way.
-Taking easier courses first and leaving the harder ones for later gave me room to put more time on the harder classes.
-It is easy to follow and understand.
-I think that sequence classes are helpful because they increase gradually in difficulty. Also, if a student enjoys a class, they are able to take it to the next level and continue to grow in the subject.
-These sequences provide a sense of fluidity to the classes and helps avoid redundancy.

Theme D: Sequenced courses develop understanding of and/or insights into degree requirements and reveal paths for goal and degree completion

-It helps me know what to focus on first and the courses I need to graduate.
-I understand the classes I need to take to fulfill my requirements in order to receive my degrees.
-The sequence gave me a sense of direction in pursuing my major.
-It gives me a path of learning to complete required classes like math instead of just having to take a higher class right away.
-Helps students get on track with what they need to do to obtain their goals.
-It's good for my degree transfer requirements.
-The sequence design was valuable b/c it's helping me with the major I chose to transfer within 2 years.
-Easier to stay on track.
-I know what I need to take to stay on track.
-It is helpful because I know what classes I need to take.
-It makes planning out my courses easier.
-I am able to keep track of the classes I have completed and able to keep track of the classes I need to do.
-Because it showed me how I am obtaining the classes required for my major.
-I know what I need to do and it's a clear path of what needs to get done to accomplish my goal.
-Because it makes my future easier and planned out.
-They let me know what's next.
-It helped me organize my schedule.
-It helps me see a clear path of what is needed and how I can fulfill those duties.

Sequenced courses are NOT helpful

Theme A: Sequenced courses are a scheme to get students to take more classes

-Having to take three English classes when I passed the assessment test and took AP classes all throughout high school was not helpful. The system is geared towards keeping you there rather than transferring.
-I did not see the need for the multiplicity of required math courses.

Theme B: Sequenced courses are a waste of time & effort, and/or are difficult to complete

-It does not prepare students. I saw it as a waste of time. The courses were not that different from each other.
-More time for teachers to waste time.
-Creates a bottleneck with everyone else on the same path. Especially since the courses get more difficult as you go which means some folks who should be further along are now competing for the same course you are for the first time. However, they likely have a higher priority so they're likely to get into the course.
-Specifically in math, I was unable to take the course I needed as I had prerequisites that would have pushed me back 4 semesters. I actually am taking courses at Mt Sac where I was able to bypass this math boundary, and I am completing the one math course I needed for my degree.
-The classes are not available at times.
-The courses are offered in the order they are required. One improvement would be if all the courses in HSAD program were offered both in the fall and the spring.
-Most of the classes are not really helpful and seem more of a waste of time.
-Took away time and money.
-I don't find them valuable to my career.

- It's almost impossible to register for the classes in sequence, resulting in the classes being spread out across semesters and pieces of information learned "at random."
- Some of these sequence classes aren't very valuable. For example, it's not necessary to take Intro to Government before Comparative Government because there's very little overlap between the two. The same is true for many of the courses that require a certain level of English to complete.
- Took valuable time away when I could go to other college faster.

Appendix Q

Ensuring learning: How are Gen Ed courses valuable/not valuable?

General Education courses are valuable

Theme A: Gen Ed courses broaden perspectives and/or develop background knowledge, understanding, and skills

- For my major I need a little bit of everything to understand human emotions.
- They offer a broad amount of knowledge that needs to be learned to fully grasp the concept of what the major, in general, has to offer.
- I learned many new things I wouldn't have otherwise.
- English classes helped me reach the level I needed.
- Allows the student to have knowledge of different subjects and exposes them to new ideas and ways of thinking.
- Giving a better understanding and preparedness of what to expect.
- I just think it's interesting. Plus I feel many are unaware of history, government, psychology, art, etc. It gives us a taste of areas outside our focus and may change our focus!
- This is my first semester but so far the 4 courses I am about to complete are beneficial because they will all contribute to my growth in the medical industry. For example public speaking has helped me gain confidence and better structure on verbally expressing my knowledge.
- The Gen Ed courses are valuable because they help advance your vocabulary, reading, and writing.
- Made my grammar and vocabulary better.
- They give me a foundation and the building blocks needed to continue my education.
- It builds the foundation for any higher level courses.
- It allowed me to branch out and have a taste of other majors available and because of it I was able to decide that I wanted to obtain even more degrees.
- Those classes have taught me things that are helping me in my required classes (e.g., "Intro to Government" helped me understand "Business Law I").
- I hated math for the longest time, now I'm excited to go to my math class, excited that I understand it.
- Learning how to write essays and learning math was a big help.
- Valuable in terms of personal advancement and knowledge gained.
- They help build my confidence in all different aspects and learn new things I never thought I would.
- Critical thinking was good, public speaking was excellent. I believe both of these courses were a turning point for me and I must recommend anyone and everyone to take them.
- The level of thinking for the classes I'm taking will be used in my career and it's good to have basic knowledge of such topics to make better decisions and to just be more informed.
- Gen Ed courses teach basic skills such as writing and logic, which are required to complete later courses.
- They make you a whole, better person. So much knowledge is learned if you are willing to learn.
- I feel they are valuable and push you to learn and experience new things you wouldn't have.
- There are not many Gen Ed courses that prepared me for my major but I think some were helpful. I did not value most of the classes but some of them benefitted me with the improvement of my writing and speech skills.

-The Gen Ed courses that I've taken have been beneficial to my own personal life such as self defense, general nutrition, and ASL. They are all skills I can use in life even if they don't help me with my specific degree classes.
-English 001A helped me with critical thinking and completing a research paper. The professor seemed to have a hard time getting the class to connect and most of the class didn't bother reading the book, but the papers we wrote helped me feel like I was getting something out of the class. The Math course I have taken so far would have been worthless and nearly impossible without the professor. She is great in every way.
-Some are like English and helped me become open minded.
-One Gen Ed course I took that was valuable was Developmental Psych. It was very helpful in the Child Development field because it helped me to see what is expected and understand the signs for developmentally challenged students and what to do to help.
-It betters me as a person.
-They are valuable because they helped me expand my knowledge.
-Because they help round out my major. I might not want to major in Art but learning about the history of it expands my understanding and appreciation of things in my major that happened at the same time as certain periods of art, which I would be ignorant of if not for the Gen Ed classes.
-The teachers I've had for those classes have instilled the value in my learning experience, just as good teachers should.
-I found most of the Gen Ed courses helpful and valuable because I love to learn.
-One that has impacted me was the Psychology, Marriage and Family course that was part of the Gen Ed courses. It helped me with my personal life.
-It helps students understand why.
-Rounds the student.
-It's the basics. I needed them.
-They get students excited about their career.
-They may not be too fun but the Gen Ed courses that I have taken have shown so much to about the world that I didn't understand before, it's almost like I've taken classes that have not only helped with the career path that I have chosen but also helped become a better adult.
-It helped me understand different fields of study.
-They help set up the foundation of our other classes.
-The Gen Ed courses are valuable because they help students improve their skills on things apart from what they learn in their major courses.
-The Gen Ed courses valuable because they help students learn other type of information that broadens their knowledge of their career, and existing issues in the world.
-Since I am a communication major, almost all my Gen Ed classes helped with my communication within a classroom and through my writing.
-A few courses also helped me to develop socially and mentally.
-I needed that brush up on mathematics badly. Without the Gen Ed courses, I probably wouldn't do so well in my major specific courses.
-Basic college level classes have brought me up to level and provide me with the skills and knowledge needed to continue on.
-I think they are valuable because you can branch out with classes and find things you might not have been interested in before.
-I have enjoyed my IGETC/Gen Ed courses! Bio 004 helped me hone my study skills. Soc 003 made me more critical, culturally/ socially-minded thinker.
-Some of the classes are not very helpful towards my major or academics but some of the other requirements are very helpful. Some of these classes have shaped me into a better writer and a better speaker.
-It helps a person become a well-rounded student. It's always good to learn many different things and I feel that the Gen Ed courses do that for students.
-I learned how to write more as well as prepare a speech for other classes.
-One may not think Gen Ed courses are valuable because they feel that Gen Ed courses don't apply to their major but they can provide some insight as well as help a person grow in different areas. I think it is important to be open to many topics and subjects.

-Although they may not deal directly with my major, I see things as interconnected and they help you grow and make informed decisions.
-Trigonometry taught me useful math skills that I will need for my major.
-I think most Gen Ed courses are helpful because they teach basic skills.
-The Gen Ed courses are valuable because they feature ideas which are shared with the major-specific courses.
-Helped me improve and perfect writing skills, as well as, ways to express myself and build confidence to speak in public.
-They helped give me a bit of knowledge from different subjects that I can apply in my everyday life.
-They build a strong foundation.
-A lot of general education classes helped me understand some of my major classes such as history, psychology and math.
-They give me more knowledge of the world and sometimes my major. Even if the content doesn't pertain to my subject the methods of studying have helped for future courses in my major.
-The Gen Ed classes allowed me to see what is available for me to take and have a look at the variety of subjects to study.
-Helped me to get more knowledge of life.
-It gives a broad understanding on various topics/subjects.
-I very much appreciate that the Gen Ed courses helped me to wake up from being "unconscious" to be more aware and emotionally mature.
-Gives you broader info that, depending on the course, can be valuable to life in general.
-They help me expand my knowledge and I look at things in a different perspective.
-They compel me to be more attentive in all subjects including non Gen Ed.

Theme B: Gen Ed courses prepare for next steps and the future

-Help me prepare for different types of classes I will take in the future.
-These courses have prepared me for the next level. I feel I am ahead of those who are just getting to a university and I am glad my Gen Ed course was as demanding as it was.
-Gen Ed is important, without it there is no understanding or knowledge to be applied to future material.
-They help because I won't have to take them when I transfer.
-They're helpful and will help in the long run.
-I want to be a teacher so anything really helps.
-They help you with random life questions and get you prepared for the real world.
-All the classes that had prerequisites were helpful in taking the next higher step in learning.
-They are just like any other classes they prepare you for the more important ones.
-Valuable because they help to be successful.
-It has helped me take the courses that I needed to take while I was still enrolled at a community college.
-Gen Ed courses let me know that I can pass any class.
-Without taking Gen Ed courses I would have never discovered what I wanted to do.
-These classes are what are helping me get into the program I want to get into here at COD.
-They are very insightful and I believe they are preparing me for what to expect on the next step.
-They help me see as a person where I am in life.
-Because they enable me to get into the other classes I need.
-Gen Ed courses are valuable because they prepare you for the rough course that you encounter.
-They help prepare you for your major.
-They prepare me for future classes.

-English 1A was extremely helpful in teaching me to correctly write college level papers, which I will use in most of my future courses.
-They are valuable because you need them to get a degree, regardless of if they are related to your major.
-Gen Ed courses are valuable because they give you time to think about your major and what you really want to do in the future.
-It helped me be prepared for the future.
-The Gen Ed courses are valuable because they prepare for your education and the field you want to study in.
-It's setting me up to take the classes I desire.
-They prepare people for the work force.
-Prepare for my future job because the information from each course is very valuable.
-They are valuable because they transfer to other colleges.
-Gen Ed courses were mostly not relevant to my major, but they were at times thought provoking and provided ideas for future personal life plans.
-They teach me what I need to know and give me the units I need to transfer.
-I think whatever you do in college will help you with whatever you career is.

Theme C: Gen Ed courses refresh and prime past knowledge

-It gets you back on track refreshing your memory but it doesn't slow down your graduating process.
-IT HAS BEEN A WHILE SINCE I GRADUATED HIGH SCHOOL, TAKING ENGLISH AND MATH REFRESHED MY MIND.
-The Gen Ed served as a refresher of what I had already learned before but may have forgotten due to the time gap between high school and my first semester.
-They give us a refresher and help us catch up with what was missed or never understood.
-It was about 10 years since I was last in High School so they helped as a refresher.
-To refresh and bring me back up to college level.
-I was in independent studies throughout the last 3 years of high school and when I went to college I did not know a thing. After taking the Gen Ed courses I was able to learn everything I forgot about.
-You get to go over skills that I forgot and I was refreshed.
-It's a good refresher coming right out of high school and sets the basis on where my mind should be.
-Refresh your memory.

Theme D: Gen Ed courses socialize and prepare students for college

-I think English was the most valuable beside my degree specific classes because it really helps to understand what college is all about.
-Gen Ed courses ease you into the college environment.
-I think the Gen Ed courses have been very helpful because they have helped me get the first feel of college and have given me a little taste of college.
-Gen Ed is valuable to get students comfortable with college work and all the responsibility a student must take on and most Gen Ed courses help students chose a major.
-They have taught me that work is necessary for success.
-These courses prepare you for the college courses.
-They're valuable because they give you an idea on what to expect from higher level classes.
-Showed me what was expected of me and gave me more prep time to understand what is expected of me in college.
-Prepares you for college level learning.
-I feel that taking Gen Ed courses at COD has made me more aware of the college lifestyle.

General Education courses are NOT valuable

Theme A: Gen Ed courses are a waste of resources (time, money, & effort)

-A waste of time.
-I am an adult learner working in my field for 25 years and I did not see the value in completing a required English and Math class since I use both in my field of work daily. It seemed to be a waste of time.
-They were easier than my high school classes and did not teach me anything.
-Sometimes the courses are time consuming and have nothing to do with the major.
-I am an older student and some of the Gen Ed classes felt like busy work.
-Gen Ed courses are a setback. They take away from what I could be learning for my career.
-It just takes us longer to get to our goal.
-Although some General Education courses are helpful and beneficial, others feel like a chore that I have to pay for just to be able to move on. If I am majoring in Business, I shouldn't have to take an art class (although it was fun.) I believe we should be able to take only the courses that pertain to our specific majors and goals rather than wasting our time and money taking unnecessary courses.
-The courses are interesting, but they add much more time at school.
-I just saw it as a waste of time. I have been passing my classes with As and they seem to be taking money and my time away from getting to the important required courses for my transfer.
-Some of the Gen Ed courses do not apply to my major and I feel like I am just wasting my time. I would like to finish my major soon and the Gen Ed courses are not helping.
-Unfortunately, I feel that almost all of the Gen Ed classes that I took were completely a waste of time. Example: the plant science class and lab that I took I feel taught me nothing and have no value in my future.
-Some are valuable but some are a waste of time and money. Some had nothing to do with my major.
-Some are not useful or valuable.
-They're a pointless waste of time. I took these classes in high school for a reason not to retake them in college.
-Gen Ed is a scam to make money. It was high school level education that I had to pay for.
-GED classes are somewhat important, except math. Math is very pointless. It should only be important to those who have math involving their major because the math requirements seem to be holding a lot of students back.
-Waste of money for people who don't need Gen Ed. We should have the option not to take them
-How is history going to help me in my major in Dietetics? I just thought it was a waste of time.
-I don't think their helpful because it can keep you at school longer than you need to be if the major doesn't require it.
-The Gen Ed courses are a waste of time and are redundant with subjects taught in high school.
-Please, for the love of all things Holy, reduce the amount of Gen Ed. Colleges around California should be fighting back to make this happen. I'm a Pysch major and I'm only supposed to take 2 Pysch courses for my major, and then a dozen Gen Ed classes. It's a huge waste of time and money. I came to college to study my field, not learn about the environment and geometry, along with countless other required classes.
-Some are a waste of time and money.
-Waste of time, money, and dedication.
-In some of the courses, I have learned a lot, in others, I feel it was a complete waste of my time, and the teacher was it doing it to fill their time.
-The Gen Ed courses that do not pertain to my major waste my time and hinder me from transferring to a university.
-They are a waste of time. Most Gen Ed classes take up more time than the hard courses that are required for the major. I've had classes that are 3 credits that are harder to keep up with than 5 credit classes.

Theme B: Gen Ed courses are redundant, not relevant, and/or not necessary

-Not part of my major.
-I already took those classes in high school.
-They are high school classes that you have to pay for (or get funding), but aren't very relevant. English is helpful to a CPA only in business communication, poem analysis is wholly irrelevant. History classes are irrelevant. Science lab is irrelevant. But I have to spend time and money on these classes anyway to meet requirements for the degree I need, unfortunately.
-They are not even slightly relevant to my major, Computer Science. The most relevant classes would be math courses, but the times you attend those classes are inflexible by comparison to others, and cannot be done online; I have not had a chance to take a math course yet because of this.
-I'm majoring in Special Ed, I do not see how Biology will be of any use to me or my future students.
-Not all of them are related to what I want or need to do with my career choices.
-The Gen Ed courses at COD are helpful for everyday skills, but I do not feel that they have prepared me for my major. As a result, I do not consider them to be valuable in the long-term for my career.
-I had to take Comm I because I was told my two 2 3-credit hour courses from 28 years ago did not include enough writing assignments. I did 1/10 of the writing in Comm I. Comm I here is nothing but 9th grade grammar with very little paper writing.
-While it gives me some time to know what I like and not like, for people who already know what major they will pick, Gen Ed might be unnecessary.
-Some of the classes I am taking are valuable in preparing me for my major while others are not. When I take classes that are unrelated or irrelevant to my major, it is difficult because I feel as though I should be taking courses more relevant to what I am studying. It seems like I am studying a subject that will be of little or no use to me towards my major.
-I don't think math is really necessary for the career I'm studying.
-I feel most Gen Ed courses aren't necessarily helpful if they do not have to do with your major.
-They weren't helpful because as a music major and even as an English major. What does Science and Math have anything to do with those two majors?
-Gen Ed courses were not really valuable because everything I need to know is taught in my major classes.
-I found these courses not relevant to my major and not beneficial to everyday life.
-I see some value in exposing some students in a variety of subjects, but I feel like some courses seem absolutely unnecessary for certain majors.
-I do not feel they prepared me for my major-specific courses. I am a majoring in Sociology, so I don't necessarily feel like my math classes have anything to do with my major.
-Wasn't necessary for people coming right out of high school.
-They are not valuable to my major.
-I am not taking classes that I care about. I want to focus on music and communications not math or science.
-I don't use English concepts for my CIS course work. I appreciate my English class but it doesn't help me with my major specific classes.
-I am majoring in Music. I don't need math or science.
-Some of the Gen Ed courses do not pertain to my major and are not required for my major.
-I do not believe a math major should have to take an art class unless they are going into architecture.
-Math is the only USELESS Gen Ed. There are math classes that don't apply to my major at all.
-I just feel like with English I've learned it before in high school and as of my other classes I don't seem to understand why I need them for my major.
-I enjoyed my Gen Ed classes. I learned many interesting things, but they were not related in any way to my major which is Criminal Justice.
-I consider them less valuable because they are not specific to my major.
-I have only taken an English class, but I do not feel like I gained much from it or learned anything I didn't already know.

-My degree/certificate doesn't require Gen Ed. Therefore I don't need them.
-I wouldn't say they seem too valuable considering they are general classes that I have take throughout secondary school.
-I don't need US history to work in psychology or biology.
-Knowing about the War of 1812 is not useful when baking a cake.
-I believe they are Helpful and Valuable but at the same time I feel that they get in the way of my main course of study. We are individuals seeking our individual path. If I am required to take a course that is not related to what I want to do in the future, I feel unprepared.

Theme C: Gen Ed courses are difficult to enroll in due to high demand and/or are understaffed

-The Gen Ed courses are packed.
-It is hard to get registered in certain Gen Ed classes.
-Not enough teachers for some of the Gen Ed courses.

Theme D: Gen Ed course not taught well

-We started at a great pace, but then sped through the hardest stuff at the end and I didn't feel like I understood much of anything by the last month.
