



Achieving the Dream™

# Environmental Scan Florida Student Success Center

2018

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# Introduction to the Florida Student Success Center Environmental Scan

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The Florida College System invited Achieving the Dream to conduct an environmental scan of institutional, state, and national student success initiatives relevant to the state and its 28 community colleges. This environmental scan provides a summary of student success initiatives for implementing guided pathways and a mapping of institutional strategies across existing activities.

To conduct the environmental scan, Achieving the Dream reviewed a number of state and local documents provided by The Florida College System, held a series of phone calls with key Florida College System staff and leveraged websites to gather additional information. Given the indirect data collection methods, the information may be incomplete but provides strong background context.

The environmental scan is organized such that key findings are highlighted in an executive summary followed by sections on Leadership and Data, Access, Affordability, Guided Pathways, and Student Completion. Each section includes (1) general observations; (2) key national, state, and college data; and (3) questions to consider based on the data. To aid the reader, there are general observations and critical questions at the beginning of each section. An appendix contains matrices that describe which colleges are involved in which student success efforts to provide a summary at a glance.

Achieving the Dream is pleased to support the Florida College System and the Florida Student Success Center (SSC) by producing this environmental scan which may be used as a living document and adapted for future use.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The environmental scan of institutional, state, and national student success initiatives relevant to Florida and its 28 community colleges revealed strong student success efforts as well as areas of opportunity. This executive summary highlights areas in which the Florida College System and Student Success Center may wish to focus to strengthen implementation of guided pathways.

- **Greater exposure to national student success reform efforts among Florida colleges:**
  - While many Florida colleges have been intimately engaged in national reform efforts and have achieved top honors and awards, not all colleges have had the same exposure.
  - Some states like Maine, New Jersey, Ohio, and Tennessee have sought philanthropic support to engage all of their colleges in national change efforts for an overall more equitable approach to student success reform.
  - There may be an opportunity for the SSC to create a college mentoring program in Florida whereby seasoned colleges (like Indian River State College, Miami Dade College, Tallahassee Community College, Valencia College, and others) share their learnings with those who have not had the opportunity to be as engaged in national reform initiatives.
  
- **More attention on adult learners:**
  - The scan produced ample evidence that Florida colleges pay close attention to high school students and the First Time in College (FTIC) cohort (which we suspect is related to the performance based-funding model and recent grant-funded initiatives). Attention on these populations is evident through recruitment, onboarding, advising, and student supports, as well as increasingly national, industry-recognized progression and retention metrics.
  - However, with the exception of veterans and active service members, it is not clear that adult learners who do not enter college directly after graduating high school are provided equitable attention and support.
  - About 18 of the 28 colleges provide credits for work experience, but the extent to which this occurs within those colleges is not known. Institutions can consider how credit for prior learning and other recognition of college-level learning could serve as a credential attainment and adult student recruitment strategy.
  - Few competency-based education (CBE) initiatives were identified through the scan. CBE may appeal to and support the success of adult students given the self-paced approach CBE offers.
  
- **Other student groups in possible need of attention beyond those defined by demographic characteristics:**
  - Per the state Equity Reports, Florida colleges are comprehensive in tracking achievement gaps for underrepresented students.
  - However, there might be an opportunity to look beyond demographic characteristics to determine if other student groups require more attention as well (e.g., long-time persisters with no credential, part-time students earning fewer than 6 credits a term/12 credits a year, or students who have stopped/dropped out).
  - Drilling into data through a different lens might produce interesting insights to inform success strategies.

- **Curriculum mapping within meta-majors evolving but mapping for part-time students is not evident:**
  - While most colleges in Florida have created meta-majors per state guidelines, progress is still evolving on curriculum mapping. Some colleges are further along than others and the results of all curriculum mapping are unclear.
  - At least one college reported streamlining curricular options through the elimination of more than 50 courses. This college might serve as a model for others.
  - Curriculum mapping for part-time students is important but was not evident through the scan.
  
- **Outcome assessment of math pathway reforms beneficial to inform next steps, especially around gateway course redesign beyond math and English:**
  - Per SB 1720, Florida colleges are progressing well with the redesign of math pathways (or replacing college algebra with other math sequences that are tied to labor market need).
  - The extent to which gateway course redesign beyond math and English has occurred is not known.
  
- **Opportunity to strengthen career exploration and guidance for students in the pre- or early college experience:**
  - While 100% of colleges said they offer some form of career coaching for students, the inventory of career guidance efforts identified through the scan was thin.
  - The SSC may have an opportunity to help colleges strengthen career planning (beyond incorporation into a First Year Experience course) to ensure informed career choice among students.
  - Tracking concentration in a major field of student (or meta major) between students' second and fourth terms to minimize the number of times students change majors, reduce excess credits at the point of graduation, and improve overall time to completion may be worthwhile across all Florida colleges.
  
- **Educational plans referenced throughout the scan. Consider integration of student financial plans into educational and career plans:**
  - It appears some colleges require the creation of career and academic plans for students but there was no mention of financial planning for students (beyond FAFSA workshops). Integration of financial plans into career and educational plans would be worthwhile.
  - It is unclear if technology platforms are used to host career and academic plans so they are visible and can be tracked or monitored by students, staff, and faculty. It is difficult to know if students are "off-path" if the path is not apparent to all.
  - Some colleges are using degree mapping or Guide to Personal Success (GPS) software to track student progression through a path.
  
- **Possible need to shore up onboarding and advising for all new students versus the FTIC cohort only:**
  - Some colleges have made orientation and First Year Experience courses mandatory for FTIC students only.
  - Similarly, some colleges have "assigned" advisors for FTIC students only.

- **Opportunity exists to align advising with pathways work and ensure an integrated, holistic approach to advising and student supports:**
  - A common understanding of advising approaches is needed. The scan identified colleges using an “appreciative” approach, an “intrusive” approach, an “intensive” approach, and some say they are applying a “proactive” and “personalized” approach. Nevertheless, no evidence exists to reveal how college practices support these approaches, how colleges distinguish each approach from one another, or what each approach entails.
  - While several colleges have a hand-off point from front-end advisors to faculty advisors, there is no evidence of strong or innovative partnerships between advisors and faculty to enhance integrated student support. The extent of clear referral pathways and processes that enable effective transition of students and ensure efficient follow-up is unknown.
  - It is also unclear how information sharing about students occurs across the institution (across advisors, counselors, success coaches, transfer advisors, faculty advisors, academic student support centers, etc.)
  - The extent to which policies make advising mandatory at very specific times is unclear. Some Florida colleges only require advising for First-Time-In-College students (versus all new students).
  - Consider opportunities for colleges to use efficient and effective advising resources to support more students. High-quality self-advising resources being used by Florida colleges to offset advising time and minimize campus visits for part-time and other student groups were not evident. Group advising strategies were also not evident.
  - Consider segmenting students based on cognitive and non-cognitive needs and equitably providing support to meet those needs. The scan did not reveal these practices.
  
- **Academic student supports strong but integration with advising and other supports not clear:**
  - Most colleges are heavily engaged in peer tutoring, innovative virtual tutoring, mentoring, and other academic supports.
  - It is not clear how academic supports are integrated with advising and other student supports to ensure seamless assistance across departments.
  
- **Use of early alert systems on the rise but data sources and broad-scale adoption unknown:**
  - The scan revealed many colleges are purchasing early alert systems like Hobson’s Starfish, STARS, Drop Out Detective, and others, but it appears that most of the alerts or signals are tied to course performance (faculty-initiated with advisor follow-up).
  - The SSC may have an opportunity to help colleges strengthen alerts relating to non-cognitive and other factors. Student disengagement can be tracked through Learning Management Systems (LMS) for all courses, not just online courses, but policy changes would be required.
  - There is no evidence of broad-scale use of early alert systems across faculty and staff or whether or not there is clarity in roles/responsibilities for student follow-up given the many layers of advising, success coaching, mentoring, etc. that exist within colleges.
  
- **More questions about teaching and learning produced by the scan:**
  - Do all colleges have Centers for Teaching Excellence in place?
  - What technology is used to support instructional delivery and how widespread is technology utilization?

- How has pedagogy evolved or innovated to meet changes in the learning needs and learning styles of students and the requirements of employers?
- Are faculty trained in culturally responsive teaching techniques and processes, such as those offered by the Community College of Baltimore County (and their annual conference for community college stakeholders)?
- **Opportunity to scale auto-grad policies and incentives for timely completion of last class(es):**
  - All colleges should implement auto-grad policies (currently at 75%).
  - Only 45% of colleges provide scholarships for the last class needed for a credential.
  - Florida colleges have strength intracking student completion, including disaggregation of data for underrepresented groups, but no information was evident in the scan documents about labor market outcomes or completion of a bachelor degree within six years from students' start at a community college.
- **Opportunity to improve an already strong system of articulation and transfer with the addition of 3+1 programs**

Achieving the Dream is pleased to support the Florida College System and the Student Success Center with this environmental scan. Given the many strengths of the Florida colleges and areas of opportunity uncovered through this scan, consider how the Student Success Center can leverage these strengths and opportunities and services from partner organizations to provide support to implement guided pathways and advance student success.