

Having a Plan Matters

A Resource Guide

Attaining a goal becomes dramatically easier when the goal is specific and the path to reaching it is clear. A key focus of guided pathways is helping students start with the end in mind. And one hallmark of pathways is requiring each student to develop a complete program plan in their first academic term.

When students follow a clear academic plan, they are less likely to take excess credit hours, which waste time and money—two things that community college students can't afford to waste.

The purpose of this tool is to enrich your conversations about the actions you can take to ensure that students have a clear plan for attaining their goals.

VIDEO CONTENT: Having a Plan Matters

In the following video clips, students and staff members express the importance of a clear plan and pathway.



- » Which video clip stood out to you the most?
- » What actions can your college take to ensure that every student has a clear plan and pathway?

SELECTED READINGS: National Reports

These two reports feature data that illustrate the importance of clear and intentional academic planning experiences.

- » After reading these national reports, what section or data points did you find most interesting? Why?
- » How might you explore something you read in one of the reports at your own college?



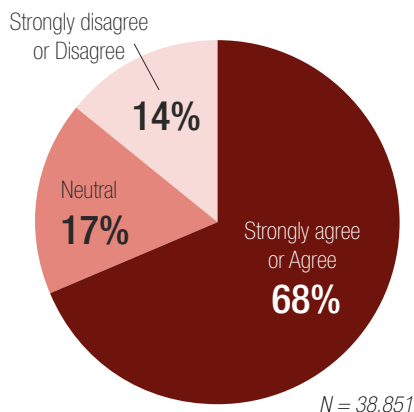
An important point is that in my case, since I'm attending part-time, [my advisor] adjusts my plan to my specific circumstances.

— STUDENT

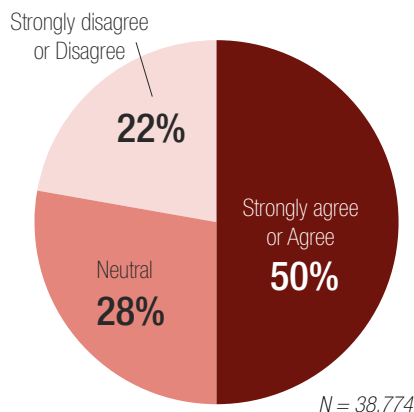
DATA ABOUT ACADEMIC PLANNING AND ADVISING

Below are three Survey of Entering Student Engagement (*SENSE*) items that ask students to think about their experiences with academic advising and planning in their earliest weeks of college. How would your students respond to these items?

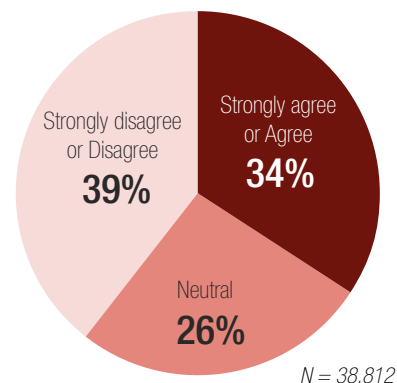
18e. An advisor helped me to select a course of study, program, or major



18f. An advisor helped me to set academic goals and to create a plan for achieving them



18h. A college staff member talked with me about my commitments outside of school (work, children, dependents, etc.) to help me figure out how many courses to take



Source: *SENSE 2021 Cohort Data*
Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

“*Now that I have a feel of how it works with my guided pathway and scheduling classes, I’m probably going to finish my B.S. a lot sooner than I thought I would, so I’m really excited.*

— STUDENT

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- › Does every student in every program have a clear plan for program completion and employment or transfer?
- › Are all first-time students required to develop a complete program plan in their first term?
- › Are all students meeting with an advisor before registering for classes the first time?
- › Are we talking to every student about how long it will take them to complete their degree?
- › Are we talking to every student about how much it will cost them to complete their degree?
- › Are students meeting with an advisor every term they are enrolled?
- › Do we schedule classes so that students can take the courses they need to advance when they need them?
- › Are we helping students review progress on their academic plans each time they meet with an advisor?
- › Do we (and students) know how far along students are in their programs, in terms of both time and money?
- › Do we have a clear process for students who want to change their paths? If so, do all students know about it?