



Richard Bland College

of WILLIAM & MARY

Learner Success at Richard Bland College of William & Mary

A Report of the Learner Success Laboratory's Comprehensive Self-Assessment, 2021-2022

Acknowledgments

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Any project spanning eighteen months or more will experience change and disruption in the process, and as with most things occurring between 2020 and 2022, this project has seen its share of adaptation as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic in addition to the regular shifts and movements of academic life and work. The LSL team would like to thank those who initially took on leadership roles within the LSL who departed for one reason or another before the process could be completed. To the members of the original LSL Leadership team that are no longer with the College—Celia Brockway, Carly Baskerville, and Teona Henderson—thanks so much for getting this thing off the ground, for charting a path, and for creating charges that allowed the work to continue apace in your absence. Your effort, organization, and

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Sincerely,

The LSL Leadership Team

Thom Addington, Tiffany Birdsong, Eric Earnhardt, and Jason Pode

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Introduction

To be written by the Provost or President.

Executive Summary & Key Recommendations

To be completed after conversations with ACE and the Provost/President upon review of Final Draft and Peer Review Report.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Guided Pathways Reforms

1. Implement the Ask, Connect, Inspire, Plan (ACIP) model of onboarding.
2. Organize advising conducted by Student Success staff and by faculty according to “study/transfer plans” that accord with the following six meta-majors and an “exploration/undecided” track:
 - a. Liberal Arts & Humanities
 - b. Science & Technology
 - c. Health & Biosciences
 - d. Business & Entrepreneurship
 - e. Education, Counseling, & Public Service
 - f. Advanced Manufacturing & Logistics
3. Create academic and career communities around these broad areas of interest (meta-majors) to include designated faculty, college partners, and guests to foster networking, internship opportunities, and a sense of belonging, momentum, and professional identity.
4. Cease automatic admission of students as Associate of Science degree-seekers and base degree track on initial onboarding, advising/career counseling, and meta-major selection.
5. Develop a standardized curriculum for First-Year Experience Courses (GPS 101) that supports the ACIP model of onboarding and advising within meta-major communities.

Mission and Vision / College Identity

1. Consider forming a College/Program Advisory Board to help direct the College’s programs with the clear directive to advance the liberal arts curriculum of the institution in ways that will contribute to cultivating the stated values of the College within the communities that surround RBC, within the Commonwealth, and beyond.

Division of Academic Success Structure

1. Continue to pilot the Division of Academic Success, which places Academic Departments, Counseling and ADA, Library Services, and Student Success under the direction of the Director of Academics.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

1. Progressive, expansive, and mandatory DEI training for all faculty and staff.
2. Drafting and implementation of anti-racist and equity-focused policies at every level of college operation.
3. Implementation of an explicitly anti-racist and equity-focused Guided Pathways model.

Data and a Culture of Analysis

1. Creating a "Metrics that Matter Most" Dashboard that combines Strategic Plan KPIs with Equity, Effectiveness, and Early Momentum Indicators identified through the CCRC institute
2. Adopting best practices from the Association of Institutional Research:
 - a. Activating a networked institutional research function
 - b. Leveraging institutional research as a teacher of data and analytics good practices
 - c. Providing data and analytics tools that activate data-informed decision making
 - d. Offering campus-wide professional development of data-related skills and competencies
 - e. Focusing on the student

Website & Communications

1. An automated process that incorporates results from career/skills inventories and a student's stated interests or goals that can provide students with a comprehensive Associate Degree Completion Plan at RBC and recommendations for suitable transfer locations should be a goal of data and website development.
2. Develop a portal to promote partner involvement/engagement involving:
 - a. Attending social/networking events
 - b. Sitting on a panel or making a presentation
 - c. Participating in career fairs and transfer fairs
 - d. Hiring an RBC student as an intern or employee
 - e. Becoming a Transfer, Dual Enrollment, or other Educational Partner
 - f. Becoming a performer, vendor, or participant in Pecan Festival activities and events
3. Leverage community partners in Marketing and Advertising to highlight RBC's coordination with local businesses and economic/workforce development.

Faculty & Staff Support

1. Support for ongoing work in the Faculty Affairs Committee to promote reductions in faculty workload.
2. The creation of "faculty development plans," "creative contracts," or "flexible workplace agreements" that allow for individualized professional development to avoid burnout and promote the mission and vision of the College, the RBC Strategic Plan, the Quality Enhancement Plan, and guided pathways reforms.
3. Support for continued efforts by Human Resources to measure workplace satisfaction and promote workplace enhancement measures, including efforts around equitable compensation.

Guided Pathways Reforms

For years, Richard Bland College has acknowledged the promise of the key principles of the American Association of Community College's (AACC) Pathways Project:

1. Mapping pathways to student end goals
2. Helping students choose and enter a pathway
3. Keeping students on a path, and
4. Ensuring that students are learning.

Even before the publication of *Redesigning America's Community Colleges* (Harvard UP, 2015), guided pathways reforms were being adopted at two-year colleges across the nation as a way of clarifying for students the choices and programs of study in college with several benefits for learners in mind:

- Fewer surplus credits that translate into less educational expense
- Quicker time to degree
- Easier program selection, course scheduling, and academic/career planning
- Momentum-building toward completion of an associate degree, and
- More credits that transfer within a major, improving the odds of baccalaureate completion.

As the guided pathways movement has grown, these benefits have been documented and demonstrated among numerous two-year college systems, but the AACC acknowledges that progress has been slow and "certainly not scaled enough-to achieve the improvements in completion of college credentials" that their researchers envisioned ([AACC](#)).

The Community College Research Center (CCRC), housed at Columbia Teachers College, is a partner of the AACC Pathways Project and has recently chosen to focus on one segment of this problem: the issue of the scale of guided pathways for small, rural colleges. Representatives from Richard Bland College were fortunate to participate in the CCRC's Summer 2021 Institute, "Guided Pathways at Rural Colleges: Using Data to Launch Large-Scale Reform," which was led by Hana Lahr and, in part, by a co-author of *Redesigning*, Dr. Davis Jenkins. The institute focused on data-driven strategies and tools for small, rural institutions for which guided pathways reforms could be both particularly helpful and particularly challenging. The RBC team left the institute excited about the promise of guided pathways reforms for RBC students and optimistic about the possible benefits for Richard Bland College. Conversations among the institute attendees from RBC and with the LSL Steering Committee and Subcommittees about the work completed at the institute, as well as other research on guided pathways reforms, have resulted in findings and recommendations around Guided Pathways for Success at Richard Bland College (GPS@RBC), a key feature of RBC's 2020-2025 Strategic Plan, *Seize Your Potential*.

I. Admissions and Onboarding

FINDINGS

Data collected by RBC for the CCRC institute began with the categorization of Fall 2019 students by degree program. Of the 2,405 students enrolled during the semester, 1,466 of them were dual-

enrollment, non-degree-seeking students. For degree-seeking students, degree program areas were divided as follows:

Degree Program	Total No. Of Students
Associate of Arts	55
Associate of Science	766
A.S. Behavioral Science	10
A.S. Business Administration	36
A.S. Clinical Lab Sciences	2
A.S. Life Science	4
A.S. Math/Computer Science	15
A.S. Physical Science	1
Non-Degree	70

Table 1.0 - Program Distribution of Fall 2019 RBC Students (Excluding Dual Enrollment)

For its purposes, the RBC team accepted the data as generally representative of RBC program distribution across academic years. From these data, the team determined that most students were being admitted as seekers of the general Associate of Science degree for two main reasons. First, the Banner system currently admits students as General A.S. seekers automatically unless students express a desire to be admitted into another program. Second, the General Associate of Science degree has traditionally been considered a valuable post-secondary credential for undecided students, allowing flexibility and transferability of courses with a customizable program of study within RBC's liberal arts curriculum. It was also generally assumed, therefore, that a sizeable number of students in the A.S. program could actually be in the "undecided/undeclared" category. Moreover, there was concern among the team that some students were taking courses required by the A.S. degree that presented obstacles to degree completion without being aware that changing their degree program could eliminate those course requirements.

While collecting this data, the RBC team was also asked to provide data in two areas related to its programs for which RBC could not provide information. These included the "Workforce/Transfer Category" of the program: was it low-, medium-, or high-growth/income, and was it geared toward workforce or transfer? Unlike community colleges, RBC only provides programs designed for post-secondary credentials, not narrower vocational/workforce certificates or preparation for licensure. This is not to say that workforce potential of degrees should not be quantified for assisting with student advising, including as part of separate or integrated Career Services supports. Similarly, although all RBC programs fall within the "transfer" category, it was noted that RBC does not provide students with an "undecided/undeclared" category. Indeed, RBC students declare neither majors nor meta-majors (broad areas of academic/career interest), and this major/meta-major selection was the second data-point that RBC could not provide to the CCRC researchers during the pre-work phase.

During the institute, the RBC team also reflected on students' experiences in the current onboarding process (from admissions through their first semester of college), and recorded the following observations:

- During the applications and admissions process, there are opportunities for students to express their academic and career interests. However, the majority do not express these. Student Success staff contact students to inquire further and ask about intended degree and extra-curriculars, but not inquire about meta-majors, majors, or programs of study, nor do they proctor or direct students to available skills/interest inventories.
- Students currently connect with faculty informally through word of mouth and through coursework in a content area. Clubs provide opportunities for student networking within an area of interest. Alumni contact with students is limited, although Handshake is a tool that presents modest opportunities for students to begin connecting more with alumni & partners.
- ESE courses are meant to provide courses in areas of interest based on themed offerings that depend upon faculty expertise and interests. Ideally, students are linked with a faculty member in their area of interest, but this is not consistent or formalized. Additionally, ESE is not mandatory and participation in the courses has fallen among incoming students.
- Learner Mentors record student intentions for their career/transfer, and LMs assist students with study plan checklists developed by Dr. Mary Gurnick in concert with RBC faculty. LMs also use transfer guides with four-year partners, and they assist students in creating schedules reflective of advising conversations. Career guidance according to economic return on investment or other career advising is not formalized and may not occur for many or most students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

After examining case studies and being presented with the CCRC's **"Ask, Connect, Inspire, Plan"** model of onboarding (which collects evolutions in thinking on Guided Pathways since *Redesigning*), the RBC institute team considered the potential effects of adopting this model for RBC. How might RBC admissions and onboarding be formed within a guided pathways framework in order to advance learner success as measured by retention, completion, student satisfaction, number of surplus credits, transfer of credits within a major, and equitable outcomes? The RBC institute team, and the Learner Success Lab team, have discussed and presented some possible answers to this question and solicited feedback from stakeholders, and make the following recommendations.

In the short term, students should no longer be automatically sorted into the General Associate of Science degree; instead, they should be informed during the application and admissions process of the available degree options and, if necessary, enroll as "undecided/undeclared."

Accordingly, degree options should be categorized according to the following meta-majors representing major areas of study within RBC's curriculum:

RBC's Six Meta-Majors

- Advanced Manufacturing & Logistics
- Liberal Arts & Humanities
- Science & Technology
- Health & Biosciences

- Business & Entrepreneurship
- Education, Counseling, & Public Service

Degree Programs and Certificate Programs can be categorized according to Meta-Majors for advising and degree selection purposes as represented in Table 2.0 and Figure 1.0:

Advanced Manufacturing & Logistics
Virginia Federation for Advanced Manufacturing Education (FAME), Logistics Certificate
Liberal Arts & Humanities
Associate of Arts (A.A.), Fine Arts Certificate, Communications Certificate
Science & Technology
Associate of Science (A.S.), A.S. in Mathematics/Computer Science
Health & Biosciences
A.S. in Clinical Lab Sciences, A.S. in Life Science, A.S. in Physical Science
Business & Entrepreneurship
A.S. in Business Administration, Communications Certificate
Education, Counseling, & Public Service
A.S. in Behavioral Science, Communications Certificate

Table 2.0 - RBC Meta-Majors as Categories of Degree and Certificate Programs

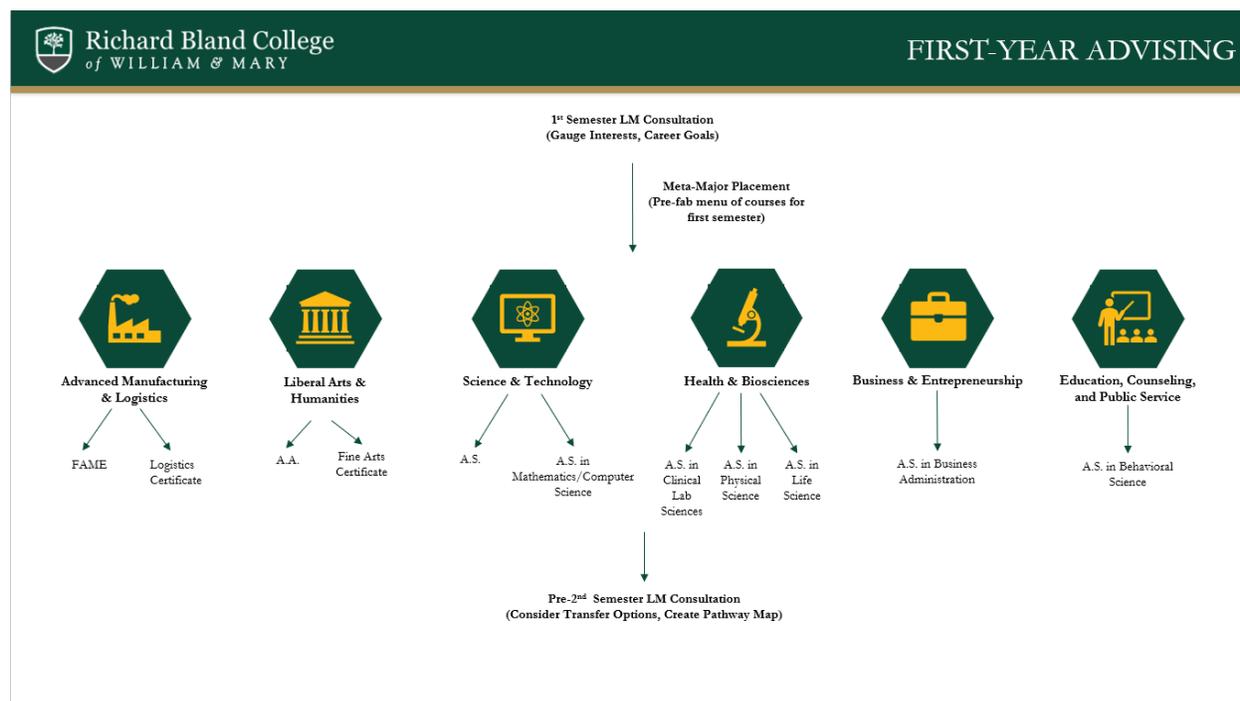


Figure 1.0 - 1st Year Advising at Richard Bland College, 1st Semester LM Consultation (courtesy of Thom Addington, Director of Student Success)

These meta-majors simplify the “Ask” phase of onboarding for students by requesting that, if they cannot narrow their academic pursuit to a single degree or major, they can attempt to narrow it to a

broad area of interest. This model is not intended to “restrict students’ options” but to “help students make better decisions without limiting their options” (Bailey et al. 16). Of course, students may elect not to select a meta-major, but the lack of selection of a structured program of study should not result from RBC’s failure to make multiple attempts to assist students in understanding available options that could promote their success. Moreover, the selection should result from structured rounds of inquiry involving multiple opportunities to express and explore academic and career interests such as:

- Opportunities to list one’s intended meta-major, major, transfer institution, and intended vocation on the RBC application.
- Opportunities to receive information about and explore RBC’s meta-majors and degree programs/certificates easily on the RBC Website and in promotional materials.
- Opportunities to take academic, career, interest, and skills inventories to narrow down possible academic and career trajectories (complete with information on the regional, state, and national labor market statistics related to those fields and careers, such as those found on onetonline.org and from the Bureau of Labor Statistics).
- Opportunities to receive a recommendation for choosing a meta-major through a survey or “sorting/flow-chart” feature on the RBC website.
- Opportunities to meet with a pathway specialist to help find and complete inventories and interpret their results, use web-based tools, and analyze labor market data and articulation agreements in order to make the best decisions about programs of study and transfer options.

In addition, by thinking of meta-majors not only as tools to assist students in selecting a program of study, but also as nodes for the development of “academic and career communities,” meta-majors offer opportunities to “**Connect**” students to multiple groups relevant to their experience in college and in their career. These academic and career communities would include alumni, faculty, partners, peers, scholars and speakers, and staff who share a common experience and expertise within that meta-major. For instance, students interested in pursuing degrees in History, Philosophy, Religion, English, Spanish, French, Art, Theater, or Music could be connected to faculty members associated with the Liberal Arts and Humanities meta-major. These faculty members would attend special events on campus such as mixers, panels, presentations, exhibits, performances, etc., in order to foster interest and relationships with students in these areas. Partners from local theaters or exhibition spaces and studios, historical associations and sites, places of worship or study, etc., could be incorporated into these communities in formal and informal, curricular and extra-curricular ways. Building a sense of identity and community within a meta-major could contribute to a greater sense of belonging, foster professionalization within a field, and lead to internship and externship opportunities and important moments of personal connection that meaningfully increase levels of comfort and educational momentum among students.

Indeed, such moments of connection “**Inspire**” students to continue their studies, but inspiration also derives directly from experiences within the classroom. While guided pathways reforms have traditionally and understandably focused heavily on supporting student success in first-term English and math courses (which are early and reliable predictors of students’ success in college), more recent thinking recommends closely examining first-term enrollment and grades in order to determine which courses students are taking, how they are performing, and why. In particular, researchers from the CCRC suggest that active and experiential learning be integrated throughout programs and that students be

taught to be effective learners in college-level program foundation courses, not just math and English (Jenkins, Lahr, and Mazzariello, *forthcoming*). Following this suggestion would mean attending to introductory courses within a given meta-major/major/discipline that can and should be encouraged for students in their first term and that would deliberately incorporate experiential, active learning experiences designed to build excitement alongside foundational knowledge. So-called “light-the-fire” experiences aim to foster momentum through early and active exposure to a field, or to allow students an early opportunity to realize that the field they thought they were interested in is not for them, and to pivot without wasting valuable time, energy, and resources.

Building on the Exceptional Student Experience (ESE) framework, first-year, one-credit Guided Pathways for Success (GPS) courses could continue to provide students with critical instruction in effective college learning while also being organized by meta-major in order to promote connection and cohort-/community-building among populations who share a broad area of interest. Alumni, faculty, partners, and staff could contribute to instruction through educational programming and hands-on activities that expose students to the experiences of individuals in fields aligned with those they are pursuing. These individuals could speak about the values, skills, and knowledge necessary for careers in these fields. For students who remain undecided/undeclared, the focus of their GPS course could focus on academic and career exploration by incorporating career advising paired with skills/interest inventories and could leverage the programming of GPS courses within a meta-major to allow students opportunities to explore different interests early in their college career.

These first-term activities of asking, connecting, and inspiring are designed to culminate in an individualized education “**Plan**” by the end of the first semester. Pathway specialists should work with students throughout the first semester to develop a plan for their time at Richard Bland College that will result in the achievement of the students’ goal. These plans will differ based on numerous factors such as the number of credits students obtain before enrolling at RBC, their chosen meta-major or degree program, their intended major upon transfer, and their top transfer choices. However, creating and recording these individualized plans will permit pathway specialists to track student progress along their pathway in subsequent advising meetings. Depending on student progress and changes in priorities and/or choices, the plan can be altered, but the early development of a detailed and comprehensive plan of study (1) demystifies the scheduling and course-taking process, (2) allows students to understand what will be expected of them in order to achieve their intended outcome, and (3) begins building momentum toward a clear end-goal for which they can anticipate a sense of accomplishment and that they understand will result in increased academic and career opportunities.

II. Advising: Career and Transfer Exploration

FINDINGS

The mission of the Student Success Center (SSC) at Richard Bland College outlined within the Exceptional Student Experience model had been to “ensure an exceptional student experience. Using a wide variety of wrap-around support services, The SSC fosters a campus culture of collaborative and engaged learners working in a rigorous academic and social environment.”

With the publication of the 2020-2025 strategic plan and an eye toward Guided Pathways reforms, and with recent changes in leadership and direction within the Division of Academic Success and the Student Success Center, this mission has been revised to the following statement:

The mission of the Student Success team at Richard Bland College of William & Mary is to guide students in choosing and pursuing a pathway toward their fullest potential.

This mission outlines narrower directives for the Student Success team.

When first implemented, the Learner Mentor model introduced important supports for students by offering accessible, personalized advisors knowledgeable about RBC's articulation agreements and academic programs, and about the experiences and challenges of individual students. However, Learner Mentors also faced numerous challenges in attempting to fulfill their mission. One of these challenges was the number of different job responsibilities; one job description for Learner Mentors listed twenty-three separate job responsibilities ranging from registration of students to placement test proctoring to individual case management and data analysis, to working with high schools and transfer partners and creating workshops, conducting orientation, and creatively elevating the "Exceptional Student Experience" on campus. As a result, there was a sense that Learner Mentors were being asked to do too much without the benefit either of the number of staff required and/or the proper direction to advance critical aspects of their mission, particularly as it related to guided pathways reforms.

For instance, learner mentors often reported spending much of their time registering students for courses and enrolling new students as part of an advising model emphasizing high-touch, intensive, and wrap-around support. Essentially, Learner Mentors functioned as a sort of enrollment and registration task force that also met consistently with students and attempted to intervene when students were struggling academically, behaviorally, financially, or socially. They executed these duties in the absence of degree programs organized by meta-majors or plans of study resulting from comprehensive Program Mapping. Additionally, Learner Mentors were not trained as Career Counselors to be able to provide students with Career Services support such as labor market information and occupational advising, nor were they outfitted with resources and a mandate to proctor skills and interest inventories to aid with academic and career exploration among undecided/undeclared students.

The Learner Mentor model displaced one in which faculty served as the primary academic advisors. Faculty Members have reported mixed feelings about the Learner Mentor program as constituted under the Exceptional Student Experience model. Some are pleased that the advising load for faculty has been reduced and students have received more individualized service, while others feel as though the specific benefits to students of receiving academic guidance from faculty has been reduced and opportunities for connection and specialized advising experiences are being missed. As indicated in the surveys conducted by the LSL Faculty & Staff Support subcommittee, faculty would like a larger role in advising, believe that they need more training in order to be able to advise students appropriately, believe that the guided pathways system will help with student retention and completion, and would like to see opportunities for creativity and flexibility in their teaching load and scheduling in order to accommodate involvement outside the classroom in advising and community activities (see the chapter on Faculty & Staff Support). Additionally, faculty and staff, including Learner Mentors themselves, note that students

sometimes become overly dependent on the services of Learner Mentors. Learner Mentors must be empowered to cultivate self-sufficiency in students, assisting them in navigating their college experience but transitioning more to duties around pathway navigation, guidance, and pathway monitoring.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Learner Success Laboratory supports the changes to the SSC mission that narrow directives for Learner Mentors and align them with principles of the guided pathways framework. In particular, the Learner Success Laboratory also proposes Learner Mentors be called “Pathway Specialists” or a similar term that captures their primary role as guides performing the specific roles of:

1. Asking students about their academic and career interests and goals
2. Supporting students in developing their individual strengths with targeted interventions suited to their specific goals
3. Connecting students to academic and career communities through advising and GPS courses
4. Assisting students in developing a comprehensive plan for their time at RBC and beyond by the end of the first semester

This change would promote ownership and self-sufficiency among students by ensuring that they possess a comprehensive plan of study developed according to their own interests, strengths, and goals. This change would also simplify targeted interventions on the part of Pathway Specialists who could easily consult a student’s plan in order to track progress along their chosen pathway.

Already, Learner Mentors have moved away from a caseload system in which a student is assigned to a particular Learner Mentor and toward a shared case management system in which students consult any Learner Mentor on an as-needed basis. Student files and LM comments are shared among Student Success staff. This system has numerous advantages which include accessibility, distribution of labor, and ease of data-gathering for targeted intervention. With a plan of study in place and guesswork removed from course scheduling, Pathway Specialists will have more time and resources to collaborate with faculty and departments in promoting the academic and career communities that build a sense of belonging, a sense of certainty, and a sense of momentum toward completing an RBC degree. Pathway Specialists could assist in this role in two primary ways.

First, Pathway Specialists could become experts in particular meta-majors and pathways by consistently attending the meetings of academic departments or academic and career communities and contributing to conversations their conversations about transfer institutions, articulation agreements, and plans of study. They would also take the information and proposals from faculty back to the Student Success Center. Pathway Specialists could then partner with these same faculty to coordinate programs and activities, including GPS courses organized by meta-major.

Second, Pathway Specialists could be enabled to perform this first task if they could connect students to Faculty Advisors once a student has completed their comprehensive plan. After their first year of study, a student could meet with their Faculty Advisor instead of their Pathway Specialist for discussions that relate to their transition to a transfer institution and their professional career within a discipline, including the opportunities that diversification or specialization of study might offer.

III. First-Year Experience (FYE) Courses: From ESE to GPS

FINDINGS

By comparing the primary elements of ESE 101 and RBC 101, which have defined advising and the first-year experience at RBC for over a decade, and by putting this comparison in the context of the “Ask, Connect, Inspire, Plan” model of onboarding recommended by the CCRC for Guided Pathways advising, past misalignments become clearer and reveal possibilities for incorporating the best parts of each program into future GPS courses.

Exceptional Student Experience (ESE) courses were initially offered in the Course Catalog for the fall 2016 semester. They were then and remain today one-credit courses that students are not required to take and that do not transfer for credit, as is the case with many other similar first-year experience courses at colleges across the nation. They are taught primarily by faculty on a topic of the instructor’s choosing related to the instructor’s interest and expertise. There is no structured curriculum across ESE courses or standardized assignments. Instead, instructors have discretion to create lessons geared toward the following Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes:

<p>Course Objectives:</p>
<p>Students will develop proficiency in five competencies: communication, curiosity, academic and personal development, literacy, and leadership. Students will demonstrate this proficiency academically and interpersonally.</p>
<p>Course Learning Outcomes:</p>
<p>At the conclusion of this course, students should be able to:</p> <p><i>Communication</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students will demonstrate competency in oral, written, and interpersonal communication • Students will engage in effective conflict resolution strategies • Students will engage with faculty in and outside the classroom <p><i>Curiosity</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students will effectively use critical thinking in problem solving, reasoning, analysis, interpretation, and synthesizing information • Students will learn about the value of higher education to both society and to individuals; appreciate the value of the general education curriculum and the worth of lifelong learning and scholarship <p><i>Academic and Personal Development</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students will demonstrate academic engagement through regular attendance and participation • Students will exhibit greater emotional intelligence in addressing life challenges

- Students will refine short-term and long-term academic goals
- Students will understand academic honesty and exhibit ethical conduct

Literacy

- Students will develop information, communication, media, and internet literacy
- Students will develop creative literacy
- Students will develop increased cultural literacy through awareness of values and concepts specific to the varying contexts of the global community

Leadership

- Students will acquire the leadership skills necessary to engage effectively in contemporary life with a sense of teamwork, collaboration, cooperation, and the ability to navigate physical and virtual workspaces.

Table 3.0 Initial Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes of the ESE Program

After the implementation of these initial learning outcomes, new outcomes were developed. Although the course description listing the five competency areas did not change, the new learning outcomes gained by being much more concrete and measurable, but some suggest that they suffered from being prescriptive or mundane.

- Demonstrate how to conduct oneself as a college student in the classroom
- Operate online tools available to RBC students, including library databases, Canvas, and Outlook 365
- Recognize campus resources and physical locations
- Demonstrate good study habits and time-management skills
- Describe how establishing positive relationships with other students, faculty, and members of the campus community impacts the college experience
- Exhibit understanding in the area of financial literacy
- Define and give examples of critical thinking

Regardless of these changes, a 2018 report on the ESE program described four “basic tenets” as essential to the program:

- Predictive Analytics to increase retention
- Learner Mentors to create 1-1 educational paths
- One-Stop Student Success Center
- First-Year Experience course

Before ESE courses, First-Year Experience courses were part of the RBC 101 program. The RBC 101 program was developed out of an extensive QEP process with the core focus of “engaging incoming students in systematic and strategic academic planning” (“RBC QEP Impact Report” 2). The QEP solicited input from stakeholders from the fall of 2006 to the fall of 2008 and was implemented to various

degrees of its original design from 2010 to 2013 when faculty elected to discontinue the program. RBC 101 courses designed lessons toward the following learning outcomes:

- Increase their knowledge of relevant facts relating to their chosen career areas, academic majors and transfer institutions
- Develop, articulate, and assess personal academic and career goals and construct informed strategies for their attainment
- Increase their understanding of the purpose and value of a liberal arts education, of the academic skills emphasized in RBC courses, and of these skills' relation to desirable, work-related skills

RBC 101 courses were designed to accomplish the following strategic goals:

- increasing first-semester students' contact hours with academic advisors,
- increasing the number of explorations concerning career and transfer possibilities by students
- instituting a more student-centered, developmental model of academic advising

College faculty and staff hoped that the program might also have a "broader impact on student motivation and engagement" (1) and affect metrics like retention and graduation rates and visits to faculty office hours.

Among other assignments, RBC 101 courses required one central deliverable from students: an Academic Planning Portfolio that consisted of the following materials:

1. A Personal Vision Statement
2. A Prospective Résumé (including "anticipated degrees")
3. A Report on a Prospective Career Exploration (based on the US Department of Labor's O-Net Website)
4. A Report on a Prospective Transfer Institution and Baccalaureate Program
5. An Associate Degree Completion Plan (with a tentative semester by semester listing of courses the student could take in order to attain a degree from RBC)
6. Copies of the Syllabi for all their RBC courses
7. An optional addendum of Exemplary Course Work completed by the student. (6)

Faculty taught RBC 101 courses that essentially integrated academic advising and career and transfer exploration into the first-year experience courses. This work was meant to be supported by the then newly-created Academic, Career, and Transfer (ACT) Center, but reductions in funding and staffing in 2010-2011 meant that the work of the ACT center continued under the Center for Student Affairs and "the development and integration of a Student Mentor program into the College's First Year Experience program, which was to be conducted by the Director of Advising, was postponed" ("RBC QEP Impact Report" 3).

A comparison of the RBC 101 program (2014) and the ESE 101 program (2018) reveals that program elements that could ideally be combined existed in one or another program but not both. Table 4.0 below shows that the ESE program (1) took place in the context of a student mentoring team (Learner

Mentors), (2) that it was focused on basic college competencies like use of Microsoft programs, study habits and time management, conduct, and relationship building, and (3) that it used data to track students' risk in their coursework (dropout detective). The RBC 101 program did not benefit from these elements, or not nearly to the same degree, but did have elements that the ESE program did not: (1) a standardized curriculum and assignments, (2) career and advising inventories to help students explore their transfer and career paths, (3) a thorough orientation process, and (4) the robust involvement of faculty in student advising.

Program Element	Presence in ESE 101	Presence in RBC 101	Presence in GPS 101 (Ideally)
Standardized Curriculum & Assignments	-	+	+
Career Advising & Inventories	-	+	+
Student Affairs Mentoring Team (Learner Mentors)	+	-	+
Structured Faculty advising	-	+	+
Focus on Basic College Competencies	+	-	+
Data Analytics for Intervention (Dropout Detective)	+	-	+
Data Analytics for Pathway Advising (mapped programs, plans of study, articulation agreements)	-	-	+
Automated, interactive planning tools	-	-	+
Meta-Major Organization	-	-	+
Incorporation of "Light-the-Fire" Experiences and Exposure & Networking Events	-	-	+
Reduction in number of management systems to track student progress	-	-	+
Thorough, comprehensive orientation process	-	+	+

Table 4.0 "Program Elements of ESE 101, RBC 101, and GPS 101"

RECOMMENDATIONS

More standardization of the curriculum in GPS courses would benefit students by providing consistent expectations and enforcing more commonality and uniformity in the first-year experience, as would the requirement for more academic and career exploration. Specifically, the required deliverable of an Academic Planning Portfolio from RBC 101 should be re-adopted for the course and include some version of the following three items from its earlier iteration:

1. A Personal Vision Statement
2. A Report on a Prospective Career Exploration (based on the US Department of Labor's O*Net Website or other assessments and inventories)
3. An Associate Degree Completion Plan (with a tentative semester-by-semester listing of courses the student could take in order to attain a degree from RBC)

These changes are in keeping with Guided Pathways advising and the Ask, Connect, Inspire, Plan model of onboarding, and are enabled by the program mapping and meta-major implementation and the development of clearly-defined plans of study based on (meta-)major and transfer plans.

As opposed to making other more detailed and specific recommendations about the first-year experience courses at RBC, the conversations within the Learner Success Lab resulted in three visions for the first-year experience course that could be pursued discretely or implemented at once or in phases as circumstances and resources allow and as data confirms or disconfirms the value of approaches taken through pilot programs. These visions, therefore, are not mutually exclusive.

Vision 1: FYE Courses Organized by Meta-Major to Create Academic and Career Communities

By organizing GPS courses by meta-major, students can take their FYE courses with peers who share the same interests and are taking many of the same courses as themselves. Students can be mentored by instructors with expertise in their discipline or a related one, can attend events organized to build community among cohorts, can network with contacts in their career area through meetings and mixers (connection with alumni and partners), and can build momentum toward their associate degree with the comradery and mutual supportiveness that comes from a learning community with a sense of belonging and identity. LSL leaders have suggested that healthy academic or athletic competition among cohorts in different meta-majors could be a source of excitement on campus. Although there would be difficulties with some academic and career communities being larger than others, therefore requiring more faculty members from certain disciplines to teach and manage those cohorts/communities, teaching releases and compensation could be afforded to these individuals. Additionally, such courses would also offer opportunities to maximize contact with inspiring full-time faculty in a discipline to provide hands-on, light-the-fire experiences. This ratio problem could also be alleviated by requiring application to enter certain communities/cohorts with a set number of available seats. Such a system, like that employed by Diablo Community College (<https://www.dvc.edu/current/learning-community/first-year-experience.html>), creates cohort experiences that also link students on the same degree-track/pathway to the same courses across the first semester. However, it clearly defines how many

seats are available for each cohort. Finally, some students may be undecided and not wish to enter a cohort but to pursue intensive academic and career exploration, sampling broadly from a number of areas in order to find their passion and path, in which case a community/cohort for “undecideds” or “pathfinders” could also be offered for these sorts of students.

Vision 2: The Common First-Year Experience

Whether it be a quote, a text, a theme, a figure, or some other unifying subject or topic, many institutions provide a common experience for students in their first year that unites the entire campus in exploration and reflection on a single locus of collective attention. As opposed to the current model that provides a large number of options based on faculty interest or expertise, this common experience model creates cross-unit conversation and discloses the interpretive lenses of experts and professionals from various disciplines as students, staff, and faculty make connections across courses and across campus. Speakers, essay contests, expos, discussion groups, and other events can serve as opportunities to encourage engagement in the common experience project.

Vision 3: The Team-Teaching Model

While some instructors are extremely conversant with and enthusiastic about certain elements of a first-year experience course, they may be less effective and less interested in teaching others. Instead of asking instructors to discuss things in which they are either uninterested or unskilled and that keep them from pursuing teaching in the FYE courses, and instead of asking students to take classes and attend lectures and activities facilitated by instructors who are less interested or skilled in teaching certain subjects, a team-teaching model could make the most of the expertise of faculty and staff by allowing students to benefit from experts on different areas each week. Instructors could give a one-time lecture to a large group, or they could rotate around to a different class each week and deliver the lecture or facilitate the activity that would be their best contribution to the GPS curriculum. Such a model would require less preparation and less time on the part of instructors while simultaneously resulting in more engaging and varied activities and experiences for students.

Mission & Vision and College Identity

The Mission and Vision of Richard Bland College has been affirmed since the LSL's Interim Report and been made consistent on the RBC website. The Richard Bland College Vision states:

As an extension of William & Mary, Richard Bland College is in the vanguard of learning-outcomes based liberal arts education for university transfer and a model for testing and applying outcomes-driven solutions in higher education.

The Richard Bland College Mission is “To prepare students for a lifetime of endless potential,” and the stated values of the college are as follows:

- A friendly, family atmosphere
- Enthusiastic, student-focused service
- The power of difference
- Building confidence
- Quality outcomes

Details on the Mission and Values can be found in the 2020-2025 Strategic Plan, *Seize Your Potential*, which outlines central aspects of the College's five-year plan.

The RBC Vision, however, contains a number of key elements that have defined Richard Bland College since its founding and that have built its identity and reputation in the region: the findings of the Learner Success Lab on the College's identity are discussed as an analysis and evaluation of the component parts of the College's Vision Statement.

FINDINGS

“As an extension of William & Mary,”

The College's Vision Statement states that Richard Bland College is “an extension” of The College of William & Mary. Indeed, the College bears the William & Mary name, is governed by the same Board of Visitors, and shares a central commitment to a liberal arts education for its students. However, the [Code of Virginia that establishes RBC](#) clearly states that “Richard Bland College is a separate college under the supervision, management, and control of the board” and that the board “shall establish and publish bylaws for Richard Bland College that define the school's functions” and “make such rules and regulations as it deems appropriate for Richard Bland College.” RBC extends the educational values and traditions of William & Mary to the Tri-Cities/Tri-County area (Petersburg, Colonial Heights, Hopewell/Chesterfield, Dinwiddie, Prince George) by virtue of its commitment to the liberal arts, but is less traditionally or technically an *extension* in the sense of being a branch, department, or division of the same institution.

This distinction points to a stronger separation between Richard Bland College and the College of William & Mary than the University of Virginia and UVA at Wise, for example, which is the most similar

institutional arrangement in Virginia to Richard Bland from a legal perspective. UVA at Wise is defined in section 23.1-2211 of the [Code of Virginia](#) as “a division of the University.” The President of UVA is also the Chief Administrative Officer of UVA-Wise, with the University Board naming a Chancellor for the College as a Chief Executive Officer. The sharing of resources and systems, and the coordination between UVA-Wise and the University of Virginia, therefore, are seemingly more substantial and seamless than those between Richard Bland College and The College of William & Mary. Moreover, while the RBC and William & Mary relationship is one marked by essential similarities in vision, there are many marked differences between RBC and William & Mary that complicate cooperation and coordination.

For instance, as a two-year residential liberal arts institution located in rural central Virginia with a student population comprised almost entirely of in-state enrollees (92%), most from within forty-five miles of the College (72%) (Huron 4), and most of whom transfer not to the College of William & Mary but to Virginia Commonwealth University, Virginia Polytechnic University, and James Madison University (among others), Richard Bland College has traditionally served and continues to serve students who have less cultural and financial capital, who are less certain of their educational and vocational goals, and whose academic accomplishments are not typically so traditionally remarkable as those admitted to the College of William & Mary. Similarly, the faculty of Richard Bland College are teaching faculty whose output of academic research is comparatively modest compared to the faculty of William & Mary. Although roughly seventy percent of RBC faculty hold doctoral degrees in their respective fields of expertise, and although the student-to-faculty ratio and the quality of instruction is valued highly by students, teaching and administrative responsibilities and the lack of a tenure system do not allow the time and resources nor provide the incentive to produce the research that could further distinguish the faculty and the institution in the mold of the parent institution.

“Richard Bland College is in the vanguard of learning-outcomes based liberal arts education for university transfer”

The minutes of the LSL Subcommittee on Partnerships record the following affirmation of RBC’s liberal-arts identity in the community (with the William & Mary Board of Visitors’ Chairperson of the RBC Committee, the RBC Provost, the RBC Director of Academics, the Hopewell/Prince George Chamber of Commerce President, two academic chairs, and other faculty and staff present):

RBC distinguishes itself by hewing to the liberal arts tradition of William & Mary, by focusing on essential learning not addressed by the narrower skills-based curriculum of community colleges. This tradition was described as consisting of a broad curriculum in the arts and sciences with particular attention to critical thinking, academic rigor, writing and communication, creativity, teamwork, and habits of lifelong learning.

Essentially, the traditional value of RBC as a liberal arts, two-year college focused on transfer was affirmed, as was the value of incorporating Guided Pathways as outlined in the Strategic Plan in a manner consistent with this liberal arts identity.

In her introductory letter to *Seize Your Potential*, Dr. Sydow refers to a liberal arts education as characterized by the cultivation of the following skills: “critical thinking, written communication, analytical reasoning, civic engagement and oral communication.” Similarly, William & Mary promises its students that their faculty “have structured the undergraduate program so that you learn broadly, learn

deeply, and gain the experience and skills that shape independent thinkers — engaged in the world around you, and prepared to assume a leadership role in your chosen field.” The [William & Mary Undergraduate Catalog](#) states:

"A liberal education, although it has no single fixed definition, is more than a haphazard accumulation of courses. Its essential purpose is to liberate and broaden the mind, to produce men and women with vision and perspective as well as specific practical skills and knowledge."

This liberal-arts vision and identity is shared broadly and enthusiastically among the faculty and staff of Richard Bland College and is reflected in the constitution of the College’s programs, faculty, and facilities. Its goal is “university transfer” as opposed to vocational certification and licensure, which has differentiated RBC from regional two-year institutions in the open-enrollment, community-college system of Virginia.

“a model for testing and applying outcomes-driven solutions in higher education.”

Envisioning RBC as “in the vanguard of learning-outcomes based liberal arts education” has become easier in recent years as program mapping and learning outcomes assessment have been completed and implemented, and as initiatives such as the Multi-State Collaborative for Learning Outcomes Assessment (AAC&U/SCHEV) and the Critical Thinking Quality Enhancement Plan have applied research and rubrics that attempt to define, measure, and advance such liberal arts outcomes.

The degree to which the College is a model for others in testing and applying outcomes-driven solutions in higher education is unclear, as is the degree to which serving as such a model should be chief among aspirations within the College’s institutional vision. Many individuals report fatigue with a number of new initiatives or changes within the organizations, systems, and procedures of the College. In attempting to respond to demographic and economic exigencies that threaten enrollments in the future, and acknowledging the partnerships that offer opportunities for greater stability and sustainability, there has been a sustained effort to locate and pursue the best direction for the institution on the part of the Board of Visitors and the College’s senior leadership. However, those most enduring constituents of the institution—the organizations, businesses, and families in the cities and counties that form the larger RBC community—do not currently have a formal voice in directing the programs of the institution.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The College should carefully consider forming a Program Advisory Board or similar committee comprised of thought leaders, industry leaders, Chamber of Commerce Presidents, partner/transfer institutions, higher education leaders, and College faculty to help direct the College’s programs with the clear directive to advance the liberal arts curriculum of the institution in ways that will contribute to cultivating the stated values of the College within the communities that surround RBC, within the Commonwealth, and beyond.

An advisory committee that included the Superintendent of Hopewell and Prince George County Schools existed before the College’s founding (McNeer 99), and a similar committee was first proposed to the William & Mary Board of Visitors after the College’s charter in 1963 for the purpose of “maintaining continued local support for the College” and with the idea that it was crucial to foster and formalize the connection with local leaders as an “integral part” of the College (McNeer 129). However, opposition

from the William & Mary Board of Visitors, who feared the committee could be “the first step toward separation from the parent institution”, a fear that James McNeer speculated resulted from “Recent unfavorable experiences with, [sic] advisory committees at Richmond Professional Institute and at the Norfolk Division of William and Mary” (130). As a result, a compromise was struck permitting informal consultation with local leaders. This compromise avoided more conflict between William & Mary’s Board of Visitors and Frank Ernst and other local supporters of the College, but McNeer suggests that this compromise was a consequential turning point in the College’s history:

It might be queried at this point if the principle of appointing an advisory committee had been approved by the Board, would Richard Bland have been in a better position to have obtained the necessary support from the State Council and General Assembly to have established a large scale vocational/technical component to compliment [sic] its strong liberal arts offering without having to become a part of the soon-to-be established Community College System? Further, would an area-wide advisory committee that met regularly with college officials and selected members of the Board have been able to forestall objections from the black community when Richard Bland made its move to achieve four-year status? In fact, could have (sic) such a body been instrumental in assisting the College in becoming a four-year institution in 1966 when the Community College System was formalized and before there would have been an organized local civil rights objection to such a move? There is no real answer to any of these questions, but in retrospect it appears that there would have been a distinct advantage in Richard Bland having been able to expand its base of support in 1963 if the College would have been allowed to appoint such a committee. It was the responsibility of the Board of Visitors to oversee the operations of William and Mary and its branch colleges, but except for Ernst and a few others at certain times, the Board as a whole, appeared primarily interested in promoting the welfare of the mother college. By the very fact that the branches had to appeal directly to the General Assembly for their financial support, is enough reason in itself to indicate that the Board of Visitors' priorities were well established. (McNeer 132-133)

This historical speculation is itself now four decades old, but Richard Bland continues to reckon with the consequences of the circumstances of its founding and the repercussions of these events. The Partnerships Subcommittee’s SWOT analysis of the RBC-William & Mary relationship suggests that significant benefits of the relationship have been balanced by significant limitations on the College’s autonomous development.

Since its founding in 1961 and the 1971 injunction against advancement to four-year status, Richard Bland College has advanced considerably as an institution that serves a diverse student body, such that the on-campus degree-seeking student population sometimes consists of a majority of students from ethnic minorities, mostly African American. Nevertheless, Richard Bland College has never had a Black or African American President, Provost, or Chief Academic Officer. As RBC’s Racial Justice and Equity Task Force has recently shown, despite major gains over the years and a strong record of many individuals dedicating themselves to equitable and inclusive practices on campus, damaging perceptions remain and policies, practices, and procedures that promote more inclusive and equitable practices must be and are being enacted under the leadership of President Sydow and her support of the Racial Justice & Equity Task Force and the newly founded Inclusive Excellence Committee under the leadership of Cassandra Standberry.

The formation of a local advisory committee that invites a diverse set of business, educational, political, and thought leaders to formally participate in directing the College's programs could more meaningfully advance the stated values and learner-focused mission of the College. It could provide input on the visions being advanced and proposed by the College President, the William & Mary Board of Visitors, and others.

Division of Academic Success Structure

In the Summer of 2020, there was a restructuring of the Academic units at RBC. Informed by preliminary findings of the LSL, and with new leadership in the Provost and Director of Academics positions, the traditional academic structure expanded to include offices on campus integral to the overall success of learners at RBC. The Division of Academic Success was thereby created to encompass the following areas:

- Academic Departments
- Counseling and ADA
- Library Services
- Student Success Center

All departments in the Division of Academic Success report through the Director of Academics. This restructuring allows for centralized communication and collaboration between areas deemed critical to a student's ability to be successful at RBC and beyond.

Academics

The three Academic Departments at RBC include: Languages & Humanities, Natural Sciences & Mathematics, and Social & Behavioral Sciences. The full-time and adjunct faculty in these departments report to the Chair of the Department. The primary goal of each Department Chair is to oversee the operations of their area inclusive of performing classroom and annual development reviews for faculty, fielding any student or faculty classroom concerns, oversight of reporting learning outcome assessment data for classes, and creating and managing all schedules for their department.

With the creation of the Division of Academic Success, Academics has started to expand their conversations to include the needs and requests of students that occur outside of the classroom. One of the major focuses here is data-informed decision-making regarding course schedule creation. As with many institutions of higher education, RBC expanded course mode offerings significantly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to include in-person, online synchronous, online asynchronous, blended, and hybrid classes. One of the primary goals of this unit is to now review the performance of certain student populations in each of these course modes to create annual schedules that offer students the opportunity to take classes in the course mode in which they are most likely to be successful based on institutional data. The goal is to determine the RBC teaching modes that support the diverse learning needs of our students and closely collaborate with the Student Success Center to ensure that these courses are being offered and students are being advised based on what we know about student performance in each teaching mode.

Counseling Services and ADA

Counseling Services and a robust ADA support program are essential to a student's success and overall college experience. At RBC, Counseling Services is led by the Director of Counseling who brings a wealth of professional and institutional experience to the role. Counseling Services also includes an ADA Coordinator focused on assessing and supporting the needs of students, as well as coordinating and

implementing ADA compliance activities for campus. Counseling Services offers individual and group therapy sessions for any student in need including but not limited to residential and commuter students, Dual Enrollment students, and Verto students. While this area is reported as being an extremely valuable resource to students, it has historically consisted of only one counselor; this staffing limitation has become challenging as students become more open about their mental health needs and those needs expand to include new challenges.

The overarching goal for Counseling Services going forward is to increase access. College counseling centers have notoriously been understaffed, and at RBC we recognize this challenge. With closer collaboration between the units of the Division of Academic Success there has been more dialogue about how students' mental health and psychosocial needs impact their academic performance, and a need for increased support has received overwhelming support. One of the primary goals of this unit is to establish a new telehealth platform at RBC designed specifically to meet the mental health and wellness needs of our students. This has and will continue to include change-focused dialogue with college administrators and the campus community at large to ensure that the function of telehealth on campus is understood and marketed to students appropriately. Ongoing assessment of this program, including student satisfaction and increased access goals, will be fundamental to the ongoing success of this initiative.

Library Services

Collegiate libraries are evolving rapidly across the higher education landscape to meet the needs of an evolving and dynamic student body, and RBC is no exception. Current leadership within Library Services is focused on modernizing the services offered and the physical Library space as well. The Library at RBC serves as a central cornerstone of the physical campus in that it sits at the center of campus and is connected to the dining hall, Parsons Café, and the campus store, The Grove. This design results in students seeing the library as a place not only for working on academics but also as a safe gathering space.

In the Spring of 2022, a significant renovation of this space will result in the development of the Academic Innovation Center (AIC), a multi-purpose space for students inclusive of traditional library services, podcasting and recording studios, a makerspace, and significantly increased space for gathering in group rooms. The Director of Library Services will work closely with the Director of Academics, Chief Operating Officer, and architects to provide guidance on the execution of the AIC project. Regarding the Division of Student Success reporting design, Library Services will collaborate closely with the needs of Academics, Counseling Services, and Student Success as this project gets underway. This project will result in a modern, centrally located space on campus that reflects the needs of our campus community and advances the goals of Guided Pathways at RBC.

Student Success

For details on the changes being considered and recommended for the Student Success Center, see "Chapter Two: Guided Pathways Reforms," in this report.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

FINDINGS

On June 2, 2020, President Debbie Sydow appointed a 14-member task force on Racial Justice and Equity (RJ&E) to determine instances in which persistent inequities and lack of inclusiveness may have been carried out within each College department's policies, procedures, and structures. It undertook a year-long campus study, gathering data from both current and former faculty, staff, and students of color through the use of listening sessions and the Training Our Campus Against Racism (TOCAR) instrument. This study examined whether learners of color feel equitably supported in the classroom and in their experiences of accessing and receiving academic support services. Finally, this study explored the impact on the retention and achievement of students of color these inequities might have had. The task force provided semesterly updates on its study to RBC stakeholders, and it composed a final report at the study's conclusion that contextualized the task force's work in the history of the college, summarized its operations, and provided recommendations that addressed the charges provided by President Sydow.

The study revealed a need to cultivate equity and inclusion on campus, operationally, culturally, pedagogically, and otherwise. Data indicated an underrepresentation of students of color on the Dean's and President's Lists and the overrepresentation of BIPOC students on the Academic Probation, Suspension, and campus incidents lists. Most faculty in the Department of Languages and Humanities could envision the implementation of a culturally inclusive pedagogy and curriculum. The Department of Science and Mathematics, however, found this implementation more challenging given the nature of their courses within their disciplines. The staff at RBC experienced tensions around employee treatment such as exclusion from advancement opportunities in the workplace.

The RJ&E Task Force proposed recommendations in three interrelated areas: employee training, college policies, and the College's operations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The RJ&E Task Force recommended progressive, expansive, and mandatory DEI training for all faculty and staff. Data from the campus study revealed a need for training in the areas of personal biases, inclusion, and equity for RBC employees on all institutional levels. Participants indicated an expectation of cultural competence from all College employees, with over 60% contending that culturally conscious professionals are equipped to advance equity and inclusion within the campus' academic structures through actions such as hiring faculty of color and offering additional courses focused on racial issues. 78% of participants indicated that increasing campus members' knowledge of the consequences of racism in the American society would inspire decisions and actions that promote their academic empowerment and resilience. Seventy-two percent of participants asserted that completing at least one workshop on dismantling racism was necessary as these forms of training would assist campus members with understanding racial/ethnic differences and supporting the community's growth and ability to discuss and analyze the various topics related to equity and inclusion within and beyond the classroom. RBC procured the iPondr DEI Training platform for its faculty and staff in Fall 2021 for implementation beginning in Spring 2022.

Anti-racist and equity-focused policies should be drafted and implemented at every level of college operation. Supported by Dr. Sydow and President’s Council, Cassandra Standberry, Director of Human Resources, convened the RBC Inclusive Excellence Committee on November 14. Extending the work of the RJ&E Task Force, this body is tasked to “encourage and support an inclusive environment that will become more diverse, equitable, and anti-racist” through the implementation of policies, practices, and programs that address the recommendations of the RJ&E campus study. Ms. Standberry has also composed an advertisement for a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer that will work to implement these policies (and manage the institutional shifts they will affect); the search for this position will be initiated after the advertisement’s final approval.

The Guided Pathways model as planned and implemented should be explicitly anti-racist and equity-focused.

McClenney (2019) locates a “passionate commitment to achieving equity in college access and outcomes for students” (87) at the heart of Guided Pathways reform. Bensimon (2017), however, underscores the model’s vulnerability to race neutral application which normalizes “all students” as “the experience of white students” (11). Thus, RBC should explicitly identify how its Guided Pathways reform will address racial disparities in student outcomes using the guiding questions posited by Bragg, Wetzstein, and Bauman (2019) as potential guides.

Clarifying the Path	
Diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does the college know about the backgrounds, experiences, and aspirations of diverse student groups? • What do we know about how program maps work for diverse student groups?
Inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are the values, norms, and dispositions of diverse student groups represented in chosen pathways? • How are diverse students, as well as diverse faculty and staff, engaged and empowered to participate in program mapping and pathway reforms?
Equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does the college know about how racially minoritized students enroll, transfer, and complete pathways? • Looking at specific pathways, what changes are being made to improve the outcomes of racially minoritized students?
Equity-Mindedness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are practitioners (re)framing to recognize the assets racially minoritized students bring to their college experience? • How are practitioners supporting racially minoritized groups to understand benefits they may experience by better understanding pathways?
Choosing the Path	
Diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does the college know about the communities (schools, social, cultural and faith-based organizations, and others) where diverse students live and work? • How fully do pathways reflect the aspirations, goals, and desired outcomes of diverse student groups?
Inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are the values, norms, and dispositions of diverse student groups represented in college and career advising about pathways?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How are diverse students, as well as diverse faculty and staff, empowered to support the pathway choices that diverse students make?
Equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do racially minoritized students enroll, transfer, and complete pathways? What changes will be made to improve racially minoritized students' success in navigating transfer pathways, both at the associate's and baccalaureate levels?
Equity-Mindedness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How will practitioners (re)frame their work with guided pathways so that racially minoritized students are recognized for their assets? How will practitioners who teach and support racially minoritized students advocate for their increased success?
Staying on the Path	
Diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent do the faculty and staff who are involved in advising reflect the demographics, backgrounds, and experiences of diverse student groups? What do diverse learners know about college majors, course-taking, and other aspects of the college experience, and how are advising processes being reformed to address these differences?
Inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How are the values, norms, and dispositions of diverse student groups represented in college and career advising? How does advising support the ways racially minoritized students need to be able to navigate pathways to achieve successful outcomes?
Equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How does the institution understand its role in improving completion according to patterns of enrollment by racially minoritized student groups (disaggregated by group) compared to the majority student group? How are reforms impacting racially minoritized student groups (disaggregated by group) compared to the majority student group?
Equity-Mindedness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are practitioners doing to actively support the guided pathway reforms to improve outcomes for racially minoritized student groups? How will practitioners who teach and support racially minoritized students advocate for their increased success?
Ensuring Learning	
Diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent do the pedagogical strategies resonate with the demographics, backgrounds, and experiences of diverse student groups How do diverse learners achieve in reformed classrooms?
Inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How is culturally responsive teaching and learning being deployed to meet the learning needs of diverse student groups? How are diverse faculty and staff engaged and empowered in culturally responsive teaching and learning and how is it impacting students inside and outside of classrooms?
Equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How is critical pedagogy being used to meet the learning needs of diverse student groups and making structural inequities visible? How are diverse faculty and staff empowered in critical pedagogy teaching and learning impacting students inside and outside of classrooms?

Equity-Mindedness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are practitioners dismantling curricular and instructional policies and practices that disadvantage racially minoritized students? • How are practitioners being trained to effectively lead and deal with issues of equity inside and outside of the classroom?
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Table 6.0 “Integrating Racial Equity into Guided Pathways,” Bragg, Wetzstein, and Bauman (2019)

Implementing these recommendations at Richard Bland College would embody assist in the College’s self-ascribed positioning as being “in the vanguard of learning-outcomes based liberal arts education” while buttressing its identity as “a model for testing and applying outcomes-driven solutions in higher education.” To embody an ethos of equity, RBC should institutionalize anti-racist action in its reforms.

Data and a Culture of Analysis

If one cares for something, one keeps track of it. Collecting data on performance is an expression of care for the students RBC serves, and it enables the College to routinely reflect on its student population and on its own practices, policies, and procedures with more information, gaining more insight into its institutional identity and outcomes. However, in an age when the quantity of available data has rapidly multiplied and institutions' resources have become increasingly strained, Richard Bland College finds itself among those institutions of higher education struggling to keep up with an analytics revolution. Nevertheless, there are places to begin that do not require massive investment. According to a 2017 ACE paper,

many of the campuses held up as exemplars for their analytics sophistication started modestly, and began by using analyses that examined retention, progression, credit accumulation, bottleneck courses, developmental coursework completion rates, excess credits, and degree pathways. (Yeado et al. 2014)

RBC can begin these modest recording practices by capitalizing on low-cost tools made available through existing technologies and employing them strategically and transparently across units.

FINDINGS

Richard Bland College has begun laying a foundation for data-informed decision-making via a number of steps. RBC recently employed an Acting Director of Data Analysis & Reporting and a Data Scientist/Statistician. These employees faced a demanding set of reporting requirements outlined by State and Federal mandates. As a result, institutional research and multiple data-gathering projects for purposes of institutional effectiveness could not always be prioritized equally. However, these data can have a tremendous impact on determining how well or poorly an institution is performing on key indicators and on how to go about delivering on its promises to students.

For instance, during the Community College Research Center's Summer Institute on Guided Pathways, RBC gathered the following data on the 2,405 students enrolled during the fall 2019 semester:

- **Program** (Degree Program or Dual Enrollment)
- **Degree Seeking Status** (First-Time, Transfer-in [non-first-time entering], Continuing/Returning, Non-Degree/Non-Certificate Seeking)
- **FT/PT Status** (Full-Time, Part-Time)
- **Gender** (Man, Woman)
- **Race** (American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic/Latino, Nonresident Alien, Two or more races, Race and Ethnicity Unknown, White)
- **Age** (Under 18, 18-24, 25-39, 40 and Above)
- **Pell Eligibility** (Yes, No [Missing FAFSA], No [Expected Family Contribution Criteria])
- **Dual Enrolment Prior to RBC** (Yes, No)

As a result of importing this anonymized data into a Microsoft Excel® template created by the CCRC, the information could be easily manipulated and visualized in pivot tables in order to make some generalizations about RBC’s student population and their performance at RBC. Figure 2.0 below, for example, reveals the proportion of Dual Enrollment students (1,446) compared to the next largest program at RBC in the fall of 2019, the Associate of Science degree (766).

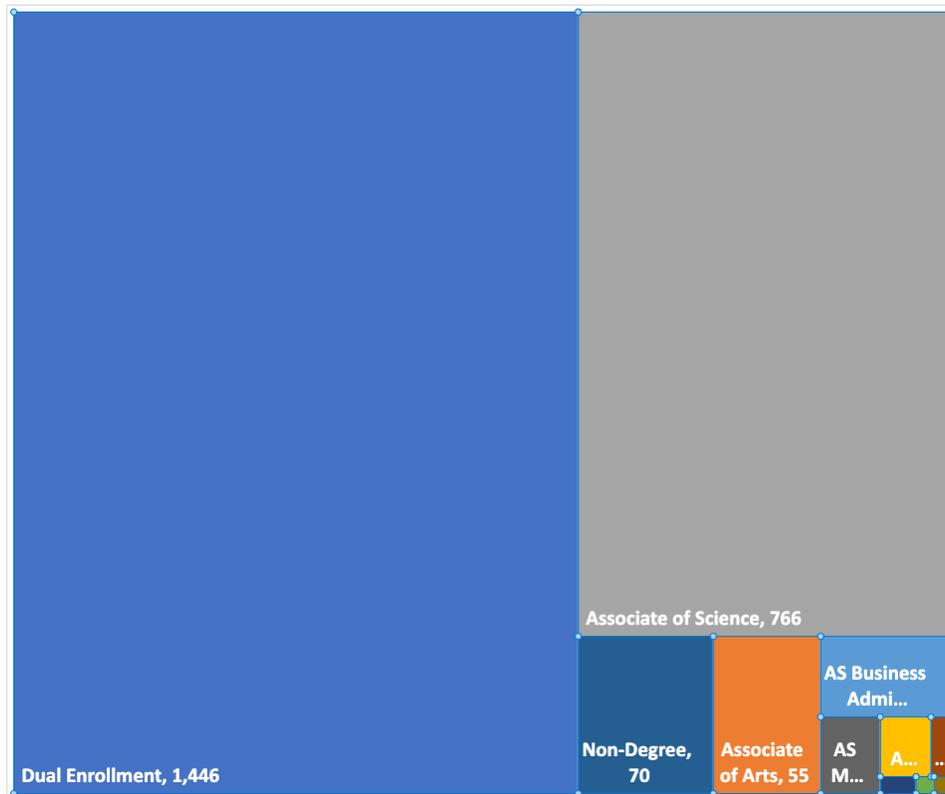


Figure 2.0 “Program Treemap,” RBC Data in Excel® Pivot Table, CCRC Summer Institute, 2021

In Figure 2.1 “Program Enrollment Within Categories,” one can easily view the number of first-time students according to their program category which shows only a modest branching out into degree programs other than the Associate of Science degree among returning students.

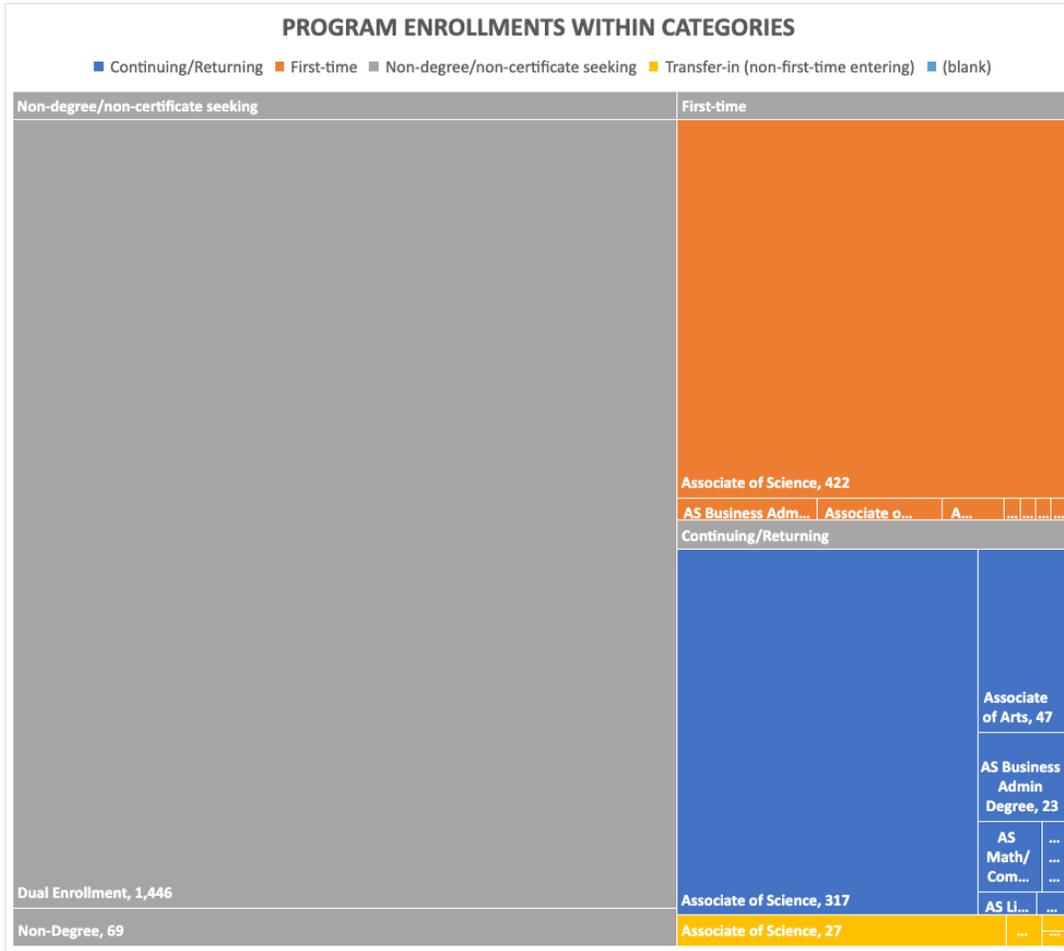


Figure 2.1 “Program Enrollment Within Categories” RBC Data in Excel© Pivot Table, CCRC Summer Institute, 2021

One can also visualize the characteristics of students within programs, as represented in Figure 2.2 “Top Programs by Student Characteristic,” which reveals that the majority of DE students (53%) were White whereas the largest racial/ethnic group among seekers of the Associate of Science Degree was Black or African American (48%) in the fall of 2019.

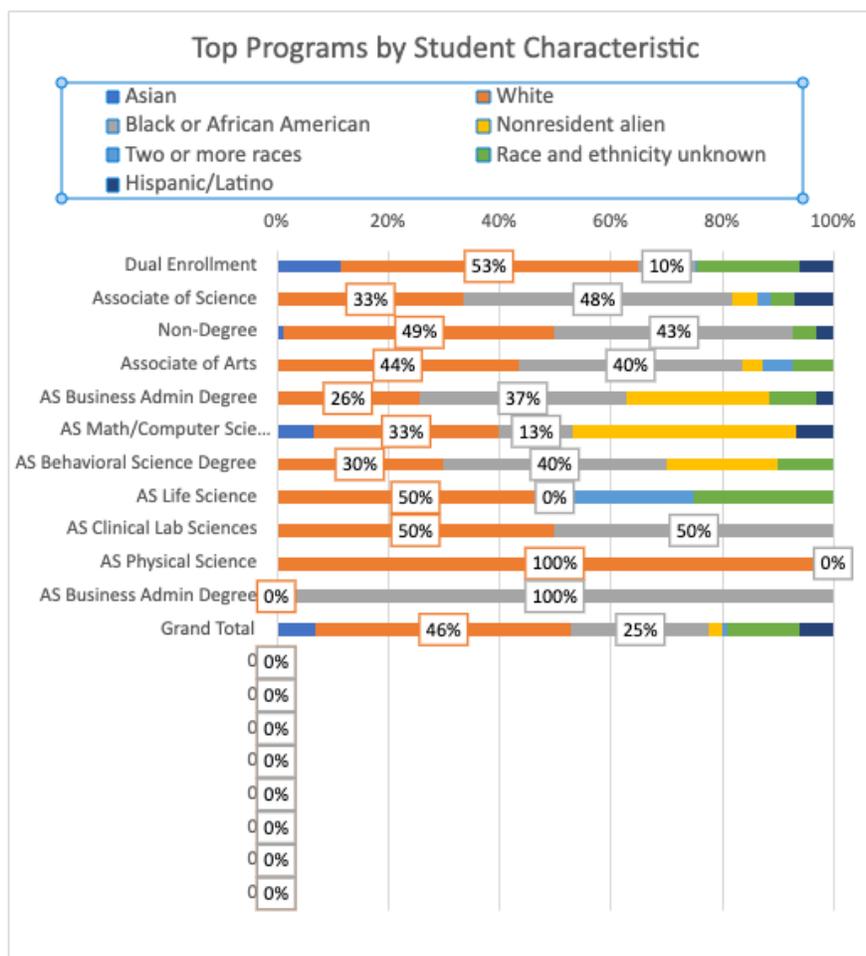


Figure 2.2 “Top Programs by Student Characteristic” RBC Data in Excel© Pivot Table, CCRC Summer Institute, 2021

By tracking such characteristics and indicators and adding some others, the College can accumulate data over time that will enable it to identify and better assess how it serves different populations and compare its outcomes and performance against other similar institutions nationally and within the Commonwealth of Virginia. Preliminary comparisons using data reported to IPEDS, SCHEV, and as represented in the [public Tableau tool developed by the CCRC](#), show that RBC performs well in some areas while standing to improve in others; however, RBC must improve its data gathering and analysis in order to be more certain and intentional about using this data to inform its decisions.

For instance, RBC’s Graduation Rate in 150% of the expected time to degree is 31% compared to a 33% average among US two-year colleges ([NCES RBC “Outcome Measures”](#) and [Undergraduate Retention and Graduation Rates](#)). RBC’s transfer-out rate is 21% compared to a US two-year college average of 14% ([NCES RBC “Retention and Graduation Rates”](#)). RBC’s retention rate is 55% from year one to year two, which is lower than the US two-year college average of 63% retention year-to-year ([NCES RBC “Outcome Measures”](#) and [Undergraduate Retention and Graduation Rates](#)). There are also some inequities in outcomes for students based on race and ethnicity. While more accurate data is needed over a longer time in order to be certain about the performance of various student groups and how RBC’s data compare to national and state statistics, preliminary comparison suggests that White

students perform better than the national average at RBC while Black and African American students and Hispanic and Latino students perform below the national average at RBC (cf. [“Indicator 23: Postsecondary Graduation Rates” Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups](#)).

One valuable tool for using IPEDS data to visualize some of these data is the Public Tableau tool created by John Fink. In Figure 3.0 below, one can easily view the “221 Awards Conferred in 2019-2020, Richard Bland College: What College Credentials are Students Completing?, by John Fink,” and can then quickly manipulate this data by year, race/ethnicity, sex, and institution in the same browser window in order look for trends among different variables.

221 Awards Conferred in 2019-20

State: Virginia, Institution: Richard Bland College, Race/Ethnicity: All, Sex: All



Figure 3.0 “221 Awards Conferred in 2019-2020, Richard Bland College: What College Credentials are Students Completing? by John Fink”

<https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/john.fink/viz/WhatCollegeCredentialsareStudentsCompleting/CompletionsbyProgram>

Separate from the data set used to create these pivot tables, the RBC also examined the “Top-Enrolled Courses Among A.S. Seekers in the Fall of 2019” (Table 7.0) among first-time degree-seeking students. By understanding which courses students take in the first semester and how well they do in these courses, the College can plan to effectively provide the right supports and capitalize on winning strategies and pedagogies that promote learning and successful outcomes in those courses, and that may accordingly create more momentum toward degree completion.

Course Title	Course ID	Number of Students	Rank by Enrollment
Rhetoric & Research I	ENGL 101	291	1

Public Speaking	COMM 101	164	2
General Psychology	PSY 201	124	3
	PSY 202	38	
Pre-Calculus I	MATH 121	112	4
Developmental Algebra	MATH 100	91	5
Social Problems	SOC 204	85	6
American History to 1865	HIST 201	78	7
Contemporary Mathematics	MATH 110	71	8
Writing & Research Studio-ALP	ENGL 099	71	8
Developmental English	ENGL 100	68	10
General Sociology	SOC 201	57	11
Comparative Religion	REL 209	53	12
Art Appreciation	ART 231	51	13
Music Appreciation	MUS 103	47	14
General Biology I (Lecture)	BIO 101	43	16
General Biology I (Lab)	BIO 101L	43	17
Introduction to Business	BUS 104	36	18
American Govt and Politics	GOVT 201	26	20
Western Civilization to 1715	HIST 101	27	21
Major World Regions	GEO 101	29	22

Table 7.0 “Top-Enrolled Courses Among A.S. Seekers in the Fall of 2019”

Finally, conventional, periodic updates on enrollment, admissions, tuition, program growth or decline, and other factors are primarily given through PowerPoint presentations or, less often, through handouts at meetings such as Faculty Assembly, President’s Council, or the staff meetings of various College units. However, these slide decks or documents are rarely shared and less often stored in an accessible way so that they can be accessed by individuals in other departments or units of the College for strategic purposes. Slides and data reporting could be shared through email and stored in accessible ways, and an increase in the cross-departmental use of SharePoint is facilitating more information sharing. However, sharing of relevant data that could be collected by one department and used to improve practices in another unit remains a large opportunity area. Again, this challenge is not unusual. According to a Higher Education Data Warehousing Forum Survey, “few institutional leaders believe they have sufficient access to data and resources to analyze and use to make better decisions” (McGuirt, Gagnon, and Meyer 2015) (qtd. in “The Data-Enabled Executive”). According to ACE, it is the case for institutions approaching data-informed decision making that, “At the institutional level, data are of varied quality, and often poorly connected across important functions (e.g., finance, academic affairs, personnel, facilities), making it difficult for many institutions to analyze program and service performance relative to cost” (“The Data-Enabled Executive” 1-2). Nevertheless, the Learner Success Lab has developed some modest recommendations that RBC could adopt quickly to make a difference in its data practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

More intentional and systematized collection and presentation of relevant data for specific goals can and should be prioritized in at least two additional ways:

1. The creation of a “Metrics that Matter Most Dashboard” that presents KPIs from RBC’s Strategic Plan (Table 8.0) *and* from this report’s recommended supplemental metrics (Table 9.0), and
2. Movement toward adoption of aspirational practices outlined by the Association of Institutional Research (AIR).

First, a “Metrics that Matter Most Dashboard” could display charts, graphs, tables, and/or other data visualizations pertaining to the Kept Promise Indicators (KPIs) from RBC’s Strategic Plan (Table 8.0 “Strategic Goals of *Seize Your Potential*”):

Strategic Goal 1: An Educational Product of High Value with Streamlined Pathways
A. Number of two-year credentials (degrees or certificates) achieved at RBC within three (3) years of start
B. Number of credentials achieved from any postsecondary institution (including a bachelor's degree) within six (6) years of starting at RBC
Strategic Goal 2: An Unmatched Student Experience
A. Fall to spring persistence in the first year, from semester one (1) to semester two (2)
B. Net Promoter Score for overall student satisfaction, measured on exit
Strategic Goal 3: Sustainability in Operation
A. The Composite Financial Index (CFI) is a benchmarking tool developed specifically for higher education and is a combination of several ratios involving primary reserve, net operating revenues, viability and return on net assets. Using the accepted baseline, Richard Bland College will gauge performance and implement strategies to maintain fiscal health.
B. 100% of all Richard Bland College administrative units will define, execute and evaluate an effectiveness assessment annually. Continuous improvement of all operational units is crucial for sustained growth, innovation and student satisfaction.

Table 8.0 “Strategic Goals of *Seize Your Potential*”

In addition to these KPIs, data-gathering practices consistent with effective and equitable Guided Pathways implementation indicate that RBC should also consistently track and make accessible to the College Community the following data in Table 5.0 “Equity, Effectiveness, and Early Momentum Metrics,” what can be referred to as “Triple-E” or “EEEM” Metrics. Some of these metrics are more easily and readily tracked than others, and some overlap with those required by federal and state reporting requirements and Strategic Plan KPIs, but others are novel or have not been tracked consistently at RBC.

Equity
A. Race and ethnicity
B. Sex and gender
C. Age

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> D. Pell eligibility E. First-generation college student F. Full-Time/Part-Time G. Workforce participation (Full-Time, Part-Time, Work-Study, Paid/Unpaid)
Effectiveness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Degree Program B. Meta-Major C. Student goal (measured at intake and exit: e.g., degree, transfer, non-degree, etc.) D. First-term coursetaking (including remedial) E. Course grades F. Grade Point Average G. Credits that transfer H. Credits that transfer within a major
Early Momentum (from the CCRC Research Brief “Early Momentum Metrics”)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. <u>Credit Momentum</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completed 6 or more college-level credits in the first semester (6 credits S1) • Completed 12 or more college-level credits in the first semester (12 credits S1) • Completed 15 or more college-level credits in the first year (15 credits Y1) • Completed 24 or more college-level credits in the first year (24 credits Y1) • Completed 30 or more college-level credits in the first year (30 credits Y1)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> B. <u>Gateway Course Momentum</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completed college-level English in the first year (English Y1) • Completed college-level math in the first year (Math Y1) • Completed both college-level English and math in the first year (English & math Y1) • Completed introductory college-level course in intended major in the first year (Y1)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> C. <u>Persistence Momentum</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fall to spring persistence in the first year (Persist S1 S2)

Table 9.0 “Equity, Effectiveness, and Early Momentum Metrics”

Tracking these data will enable RBC to identify potential equity and effectiveness issues, and the data could address concerns various departments and units may currently have about equity and effectiveness but for which little to no reliable or consistent information currently exists. Without tracking such data, trends that affect student outcomes in certain disciplines or courses, within certain departments or units, or because of certain initiatives or methods, will remain invisible or the subject of speculation that has no means of being proximately addressed or definitively resolved.

With regard to equity and inclusion, some institutions, such as Diablo Valley College, collect data in order to be able to identify and inform departments, programs, disciplines, and instructors on how students from various groups perform down to the level of the course. The CCRC team identified first-generation students, students of color, working students, and students from low socio-economic backgrounds as groups that may require attention and intervention. Mark Akiyama, Dean of Guided Pathways and Special Projects at Diablo Valley College and a Doctor of Psychology, discussed with the team how data and guided pathways reforms inherently align with equity initiatives. It is useful to the College and to instructors to know if certain groups tend to perform well or poorly in their courses over time, and then to be able to ask themselves, why is that? What elements of the course lend themselves

to success for some and not others? Ultimately, how can I adjust my courses to promote opportunities for more equitable outcomes where appropriate?

Secondly, beyond the transparency and accessibility offered by a “Metrics That Matter Most Dashboard,” effectiveness analytics should follow best practices recommended by the Association of Institutional Research (AIR) (qtd. in “The Data-Enabled Executive” 7):

- Activating a networked institutional research function
- Leveraging institutional research as a teacher of good data and analytics practices
- Providing data and analytics tools that activate data-informed decision making
- Offering campus-wide professional development of data-related skills and competencies
- Focusing on the student

The RBC Data Analytics and Reporting department created a SharePoint site to serve as a centralized data-sharing hub for members of the College community. This site, [Data Analysis & Reporting](#), can be used to share information deemed useful to members of other College departments or units. This is a good beginning, and an important step toward activating a “networked institutional research function” in which units and departments work together to coordinate and share the results of their own internal data-gathering practices. Periodic surveys on student satisfaction, results of attempts to poll alumni, high school guidance counselors, community partners, and other routine or novel data-gathering may reside with a few individuals or even a single person on campus. The results may or may not be communicated and dispersed, and the potential significance of these results may not always be recognized by those in other departments. It then follows that when this information may be relevant to a department or unit attempting to address an issue, it will be difficult, time-consuming, or even impossible to locate.

Because of an absence of networked institutional research functions, the procedure for attempting to locate relevant data is to create a data request through the RBC Service Desk, which creates discrete tickets to be filled by the Data Analytics and Reporting department. Therefore, instead of being able to focus on the routine reporting requirements for mandated reporting and institutional effectiveness described above, and instead of serving as a teacher and facilitator of data and analytics practices on campus, the department is instead overwhelmed by multiple data requests from various units that (1) may be redundant and (2) IR may or may not have the subject-matter expertise or hard data to properly fulfill. The creation of a centralized data warehouse or warehouses with policies and practices around data access, collection, creation, labeling, sorting, and use is a necessary precondition for data-enabled decision making and the development of an analytics culture at RBC.

Targeted Advising Interventions through Systems and Data

One data-informed advising system that is often held up as a model for emulation is Georgia State University’s Graduation and Progression System or GPS (unrelated to RBC’s Guided Pathways for Success program, GPS@RBC). GSU’s system tracks around 800 data points (behaviors, academic choices, etc.) that correlate with their students’ decisions to their end-pursuit of a degree. Targeted interventions from advisors that result from this tracking have resulted in gains for students: “Since Georgia State

initiated GPS Advising in 2012, freshman fall-to-spring retention rates have increased by five percentage points and graduating seniors are taking fewer excess courses in completing their degrees” (<https://success.gsu.edu/initiatives/gps-advising/>). In 2017, ACE researchers wrote that “Georgia State University (GSU) has increased its six-year graduation rate by over 20 percent, and doubled its number of Pell-eligible students over the course of the last decade.” As a result of its data-informed efforts, which included “freshman learning communities, supplemental instruction, retention grants, and the GPS system,” GSU has saved students “an estimated \$12 million in tuition by accelerating graduation. The university has also eliminated graduation rate gaps for low-income, first generation, and minority students” ([Gagliardi and Turk 8](#)).

Importantly, Gagliardi and Turk’s report emphasizes the findings of Martin Kurzweil and D. Derek Wu (2015) that “GSU has achieved its stunning aggregate results through the patient work of systematically accumulating smaller victories” ([Kurzweil & Wu](#), “Building a Pathway to Student Success at Georgia State University”). Indeed, they identify the following key factors for GSU’s development, over more than a decade, into its current data-savvy state:

- A systematic approach to problem solving
- A comprehensive data warehouse or comprehensive data warehouses
- A cross-functional organizational structure
- A commitment to the success of underserved students
- A demonstration of support for and long-term commitment to data analysis from university leadership

RBC has advanced toward a more data-informed vision of advising and faculty-learner mentor collaboration through the integration of Dropout Detective within Canvas. Dropout Detective is an APIREDU solution that produces a student “risk index” based on LMS data that includes but is not limited to the following:

- Timestamp for start date of course
- Timestamp for end date of course
- Timestamp for last time student logged into LMS
- Current grade for student in course
- Final grade for student in course
- Total assignments for student in course
- Total assignments turned in on time for student in course
- Total assignments missing for student in course
- Timestamp for last time student accessed the course
- Timestamp for last time student sent a message in course
- Timestamp for last time instructor sent a message to student in course
- Timestamp for post in discussion forum in LMS
- Timestamp for each submission in LMS ([What is Dropout Detective?](#))

When viewing a student’s Dropout Detective Risk Index in Canvas, an instructor sees a risk percentage, the current grade, the number of zeros, the number of missing assignments, the date of last access to

the course, and the date of the latest submission to the course. The instructor can create alerts and send a message to the student and the learner mentor directly from this page.

Dropout Detective and other analytics within Canvas have proven to be useful tools, but they have not yet resulted in the strong improvements in retention and graduation experienced by other Guided Pathways and data-enabled systems. Sustained habits and practices around data collection and sharing must become second nature across and among departments and units of the College for these kinds of benefits to be seen. Instructors must use their tools to communicate with advisors. Advisors must target interventions appropriately and have the capacity to perform these duties. Student Success should conduct entrance and exit interviews with students and survey students at regular intervals and share their information. Indeed, only when data from various areas of the College are collected systematically and then analyzed and shared widely for discussion and decision making can a culture of learner-centered analysis and continuous improvement take root.

RBC Website and Communications

FINDINGS

The RBC website currently provides assistance to prospective students through a Virtual Admissions One Stop (<https://www.rbc.edu/why-rbc/admissions-one-stop/>). The One Stop provides (1) an online application to the College, (2) the listing and hosting of articulation agreements to transfer institutions that students can view in order to plot their path through RBC to their intended four-year college or university (3) the ability to quickly and simply contact Admissions and register for a tour, and (4) a net price calculator with guidance on FAFSA application and important dates. The larger RBC website also functions as a hub for accessing and identifying important features of the College: its faculty and staff, departments, offices, units, policies, and procedures. It contains pages for library resources, Banner, Canvas, email, and other essential software and information for students. It advertises academic and athletic events and conveys other important messages to the campus community.

The website does not currently provide (1) interactive tools to assist students with academic/career exploration, meta-major/major selections, intuitive course/degree selection and planning that includes transfer institution selection and labor market data (despite the extremely useful addition of Degree Planner worksheets under the “Choose Your Degree” portion of the Admissions One Stop), nor does it provide (2) a portal for partners to become connected to academic and career communities within the institution.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Career and Pathway Exploration on the RBC Website

The possibilities for interactive tools on the RBC website to assist students with academic and career exploration are intimately related to the improvements required for data warehousing and collection. Interactive web tools were a recommendation of the “Exceptional Student Experience, Phase II Report 2016-2018.” As that report states:

Currently RBC has 42 articulation agreements with various college[s] for various programs. Each of those colleges has an average of 39 different majors. The combination of various colleges with each of their offered majors allows for nearly 1500 different paths a student can take for transfer. Each college can have various requirements for the majors that may differ, including prerequisite courses, entry tests, and GPA requirements. It is difficult for our Learner Mentors to be familiar with all of those paths, therefore, we try to equip the student to identify areas of interest, which can then lead to a major or career. Due to workforce limitations, the onus is on the student to do the research necessary to determine the best transfer college and major for their career. This has driven improvements to our website, both planned and implemented, so that students are equipped with information that is easily accessible and understandable.

Modifications are needed to make the transfer portion of the RBC website interactive, with the ability to provide “what if” scenarios based on multiple transfer schools and majors. (3)

Readers can refer to the previous chapter of this report on Data and a Culture of Analysis in order to read recommendations for the development of a comprehensive data warehouse and pursuing AIR practices. However, more interactive and smart web tools for advising on the website would also inform the sorts of data collection required to effectively assist students in choosing, beginning, sustaining, and completing their educational pathway. An automated process that incorporates results from career or skills inventories and a student's stated interests or goals that can provide students with a comprehensive Associate Degree Completion Plan at RBC and recommendations for suitable transfer locations should be a goal of data and website development (as broad as a meta-major and as specific as a particular major/program at a particular transfer institution).

One possible example of how this system might work for a two-year college can be found at Lord Fairfax Community College (soon to be Laurel Ridge Community College) in Virginia. Powered by Emsi Data, the LFCC website provides students a link to explore careers (<https://lfcc.edu/future-students/>). From the LFCC's virtual "Career Coach" site (<https://lfcc.emsicc.com/?radius=25%20miles®ion=Middletown%2C%20VA>), students can choose between three free career assessment options within the Career Coach web page (Quick Start: 6 questions, Standard: 30 questions, Detailed: 60 questions). Results from this assessment will provide students with their top three "career traits" (e.g., Investigative, Artistic, Social) and provide 16 career areas rated from highest to lowest percentage of match (e.g., Education and Training, Human Services, Business Management and Administration). One can then drill down on these career areas in order to see more information about specific careers and accompanying labor market information. For instance, for "Marketing Sales and Service," students could see the careers of Marketing Operations, Sales Operations, and Buying and Merchandising and see that their top match is "Public Relations Specialist", a career where one must "Promote or create an intended public image for individuals, groups, or organizations" and "May write or select material for release to various communications media" and "specialize in using social media." Students will see that the median US salary for the position is \$67,832 and that the top entry-level education for the position is a bachelor's degree for most, 92%, and a master's or professional degree for some, 8% (<https://lfcc.emsicc.com/browse-careers/14.3?region=Middletown,%20VA&radius=25%20miles>). When a student clicks on "Public Relations Specialist, they then see that the available program at LFCC is the "Communication Specialization" under the Associate of Arts and Sciences degree. Clicking on this program takes a student to a page presenting students with the option to further "Explore Careers and Job Outlook," "Transfer Statement," "Tuition and Funding Options," and finally, "Academic Plan, Course List, and Program Information." Clicking on this option provides a plan in the form of a list of suggested courses for all four semesters (60 credits) to complete the program. Students can even explore narratives of alumni who have chosen this major and toggle between local and national statistics on the salary, number of job openings, and number of individuals employed in that career.

Another possible web tool for career and program pathway exploration is the EAB-Navigate application (<https://www.vsu.edu/ace/eab-navigate-info.php>) employed by Virginia State University's "Academic Center for Excellence" (<https://www.vsu.edu/ace/index.php>). Beyond the exploration of careers and the ability to track progress toward degree program, students can use the app to make an appointment with and send messages to an academic advisor or tutor, set alerts and reminders on a to-do list, sync class and mobile calendars, and even start or join a study group.

Partner Portal for Involvement in Academic and Career Communities

The LSL Partnerships Committee recommends promoting partner involvement with academic and career-community events and employment/internship opportunities for students by creating a portal for community members (businesses, nonprofit organizations, professionals, alumni, and others) on the RBC website. Partners could sign up through the portal to be contacted by the appropriate program/meta-major coordinators on campus, and sign up there to be participate on the *Handshake* platform. The portal would involve partners filling out a short form in order to learn more about available opportunities and select or describe their interest in:

- Attending social/networking events aimed at exposing employers to aspiring professionals and connecting students to real-world practitioners who can talk about their career paths and experience.
- Sitting on a panel or making a presentation about their business/industry/organization, sharing what sort of education, training, and skills are needed in order to succeed, and hearing questions from today's students.
- Participating in career fairs and transfer fairs, opportunities for partners to showcase their school or business to attract talented young people with an interest in their field.
- Hiring an RBC student as an intern or employee by listing openings through a Handshake account, or by contacting RBC's Student Success Center.
- Becoming a Transfer, Dual Enrollment, or other Educational Partner in order to offer or have RBC offer services to students in an educational partnership.
- Becoming a performer, vendor, or participant in Pecan Festival activities and other events.
- Partnering with faculty, staff, or students in business or non-profit activities.

Depending on the answers given in the portal/form, an appropriate program manager would receive and follow up on the opportunity being sought by the partner.

By creating and keeping this portal perpetually available, it can be included as a link in promotional materials to existing partners and in new outreach to regional businesses, organizations, and alumni. It would promote involvement and exchange between the College and the community in expected and unexpected ways. In short, once these automated tools are developed, the Communications department can share and promote them widely. As a result, finding one's path as a student through RBC's Guided Pathways system, and partnering with RBC's academic and career communities as an employer or organization, would become even more seamless and intuitive.

Faculty and Staff Support

The LSL Faculty and Staff Support subcommittee surveyed teaching faculty on the opportunities for professional development available to administrators, faculty, and staff, including development related to initiatives of the 2020-2025 Strategic Plan. The subcommittee also surveyed administrators, faculty, and staff about the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the employment model at the College. The findings and recommendations of this chapter consist of the data returned from these surveys and the conversations of the subcommittee members and co-chairs and the LSL leadership team.

FINDINGS

The LSL Faculty and Staff Support survey on Professional Development was conducted through a Formstack form to Teaching Faculty at RBC between October 1 and October 15, 2021. Regardless of their years of service, teaching faculty responded very similarly to the following questions on the Faculty Professional Development Survey. In response to the yes/no question, “Do you think the adoption of guided pathways will improve rates of persistence and completion?” twenty out of twenty-two teaching faculty responded affirmatively. The same teaching faculty responded to the yes/no question, “Do you think faculty need a more active role in advising students in the GPS model?” Seventeen answered yes, and five responded no. The same teaching faculty responded to the Likert-scale question, “How often do you feel more professional development opportunities would help you promote student success in the guided pathways system?” The majority responded that more development opportunities for guided pathways was needed (see Figures 4.0, 4.1, and 4.2 below).

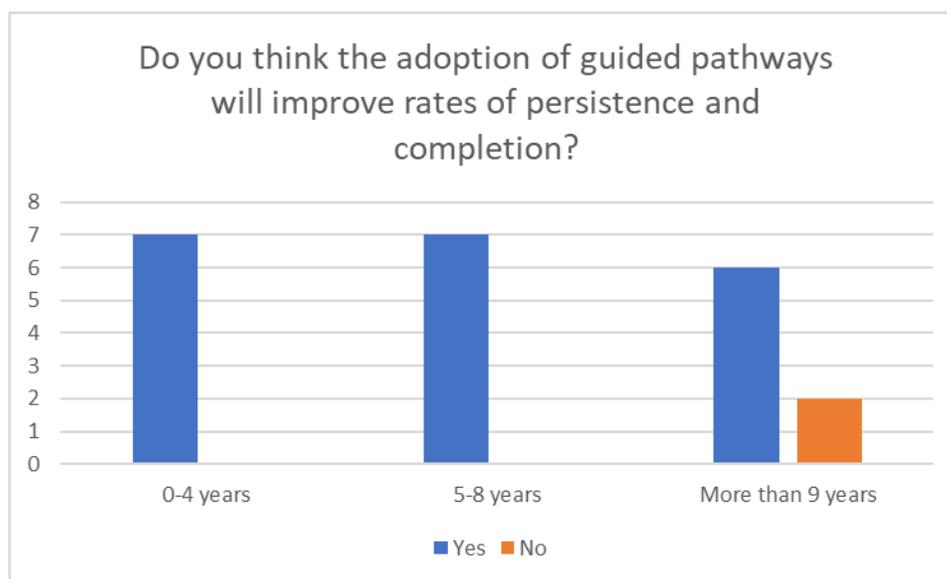


Figure 4.0 “Faculty Responses on Guided Pathways Improving Persistence/Completion by Faculty Member’s Years of Service”

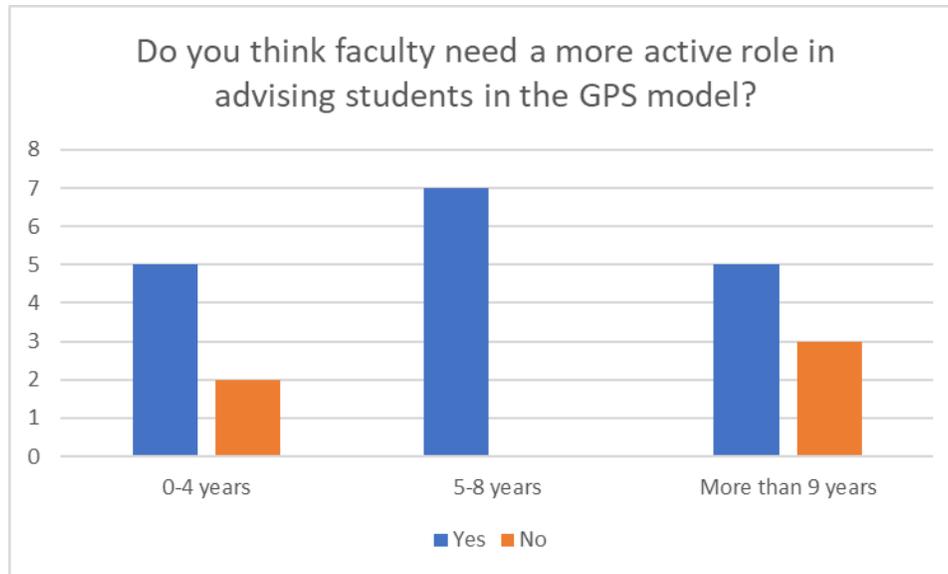


Figure 4.1 “Faculty Responses to Faculty Needing a more Active Role in Advising under GPS Model by Faculty Member’s Years of Service”

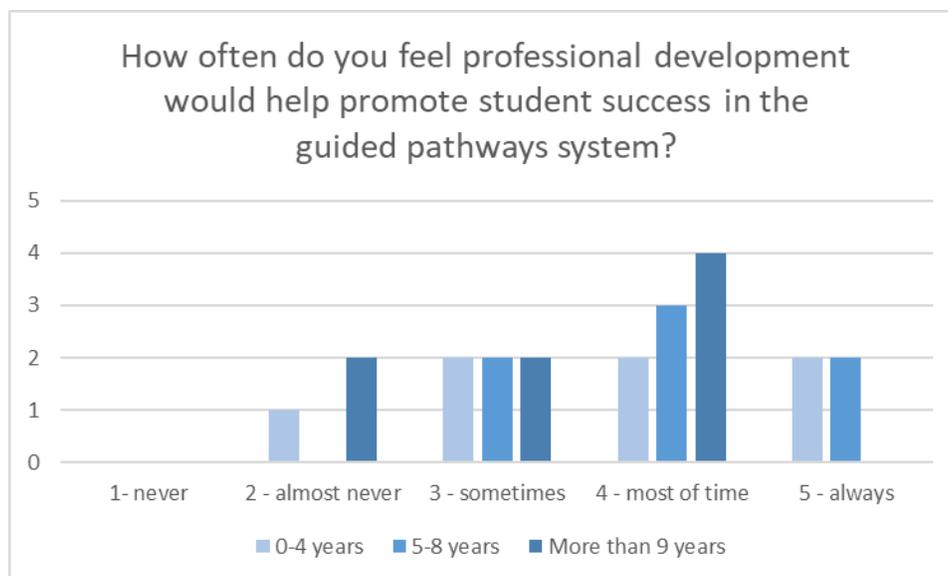


Figure 4.2 “Faculty Responses to Professional Development Helping to Promote Student Success in the Guided Pathways Model”

Answers indicate that part of the professional development required is cultivating a greater familiarity among faculty of the requirements for each RBC Degree program. When asked how frequently faculty felt familiar with the requirements for each RBC degree, the most popular answer was “sometimes,” and the next most popular answer was “almost never” (see Figure 4.3).

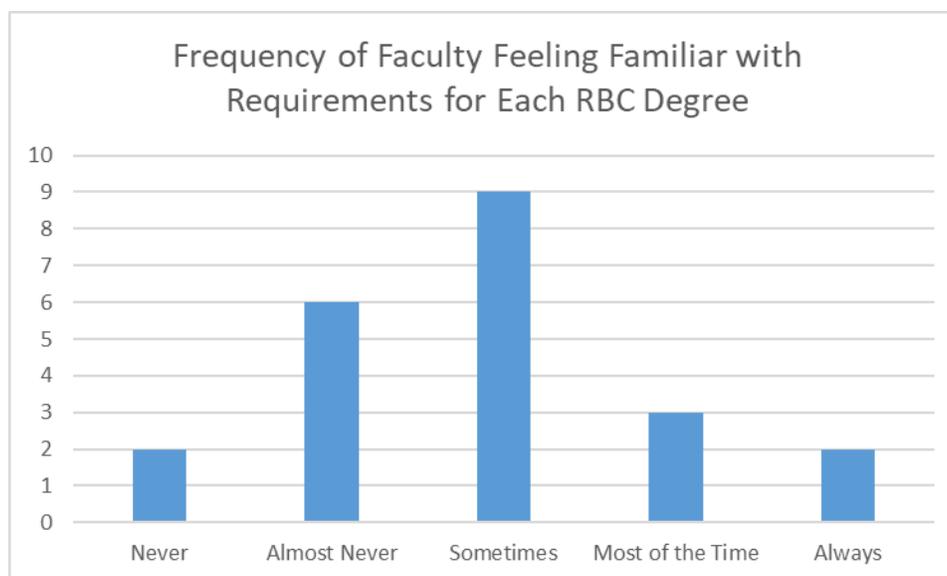


Figure 4.3 “Frequency of Faculty Feeling Familiar with Requirements for Each RBC Degree”

The faculty also reported periodically updating learning outcomes and implementing group projects and applied learning in the classroom, with the most common answers to questions on frequency being “sometimes.” Faculty reported that they most often or sometimes know where to find professional development opportunities, though not always, but more faculty members felt that they did not have time to look for professional development opportunities than those who felt they did have time. More faculty desired and believed they could benefit from continued pedagogical training and effective teaching practices than not by a ratio of seven to four.

Strong agreement among faculty emerged around new faculty going through a professional development workshop (seventeen, yes; four, no) and the idea that faculty should go through an online teaching professional development session (eighteen, yes; four, no). Although faculty generally know how to request professional development (fourteen, yes; eight, no), only nine of twenty-two report having received professional development in the last year and only two of twenty-two reported knowing how much money their department was allotted per academic year for professional development. Almost unanimously (twenty-one of twenty-two faculty), **faculty wish there were incentives to continue professional development such as award recognition, financial support, time for research, or other such incentives.** Regarding what types of professional development faculty would prefer, Table 10.0 itemizes and ranks forms of professional development from 1 (highest priority) to 10 (lowest priority).

Form of Professional Development	Ranking	Accumulated Rating Totals
Support for Developing a New Course	1	82
Enrollment in Single Courses, Seminars, Workshops	2	86
Presentations at Professional Conferences	3	90
Attendance at Professional Conferences	4	102
Pursuit of an Additional Degree Program	5	110
Reimbursement for teaching-/research-related materials	6	111
Maintaining Memberships in Professional Organizations	7	115

Support for Extensive Revision to an Existing Course	8	116
Offering Technology Training/Workshops	9	129
Bringing in Expert Speakers to Present to the Faculty	10	161

Table 10.0 “Faculty Prioritization of Preferred Forms of Professional Development”

Answering Likert scale questions—with options of Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral / No Opinion, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree (SA, A, N/NO, D, SD)—the majority of Teaching Faculty in all groups strongly agreed or agreed to the following statements:

1. “You would support the creation of ‘creativity contracts,’ under which faculty could obtain a course release to pursue an individualized scholarly assignment.” (14SA, 5A, 3N/NO)
2. “You would support the creation of a ‘teaching and learning center’ on campus that would provide professional development resources and pedagogical training for faculty.” (11SA, 7A, 2N/NO, 2D)

These answers may be in response to the sense of the support needed to address time and resource deficiencies. The majority of faculty strongly agreed or agreed with the statement “Your current teaching load prevents taking advantage of professional development opportunities” (7SA, 5A, 4N/NO, 2D, 4SD) and largely disagreed with the statement “You have sufficient time and resources to take advantage of professional development opportunities at RBC” (1SA, 2A, 6N/NO, 9D, 4SD). Although faculty reported feeling as if sufficient training for various online modes of instruction were afforded and taken advantage of, there is a sense among faculty that RBC could more adequately provide professional development opportunities and that opportunities have not noticeably improved or increased over the last 9 years or since their arrival at the College (see Appendix A for accompanying graphs).

The LSL Faculty and Staff Support Subcommittee’s Employment Model SWOT Survey (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) was conducted through a FormStack form to Teaching Faculty and Staff at RBC at the same date/time as the Faculty Professional Development Survey and resulted in the following data.

This survey revealed that faculty compensation is a continuing priority for faculty, specifically maintaining parity with comparable institutions, which most strongly agreed should be among the highest priorities of RBC (12SA, 8A, 2N/NO) along with reducing faculty workload (8SA, 7A, 3N/NO, 3D, 1SD). The results underscore that the faculty workload combined with a sense that compensation is not commensurate with workload leads to feelings of burnout. For instance, in questions about load distribution for faculty, the majority of faculty who expressed an opinion **disagreed** with the following statements:

- My workload, including courses and all other work-related duties, positively impacts my personal life.
- My workload, including courses and all other work-related duties, allows me to engage in extracurricular activities of the College as much as I would like.
- My workload, including courses and all other work-related duties, improves my teaching effectiveness.

- My workload, including courses and all other work-related duties, is commensurate with the workload of faculty in my discipline at comparable institutions.

Meanwhile, the majority of faculty who expressed an opinion **agreed** with the following statements:

- My workload, including courses and all other work-related duties, precludes me from participating in community organizations and activities outside of the College as much as I would like.
- My workload, including courses and all other work-related duties, delays and/or negatively affects the quality of my feedback to my students on their work.

General workload is also a concern for staff, though in different ways than for faculty; it should be noted that staff responses to the survey were less numerically representative of the entire staff and less uniform in their responses than those of faculty. In responding to Likert Scale questions with responses of Never, Almost Never, Sometimes, Most of the Time, or Always (N, AN, S, MT, A), most staff reported feeling that they can almost never or can only sometimes say no to a new project/task if their workload is already maxed (5AN, 3S, 3MT), but a strong majority stated that RBC supports a positive work/life balance and that they feel they are able to complete assigned duties throughout normal business hours. The majority report almost never or only sometimes needing to complete tasks/duties that fall outside of their job description or having to either stay after hours or take work home regularly, with some notable exceptions. All responses to these load distribution questions for staff appear in Figure 4.4 below.

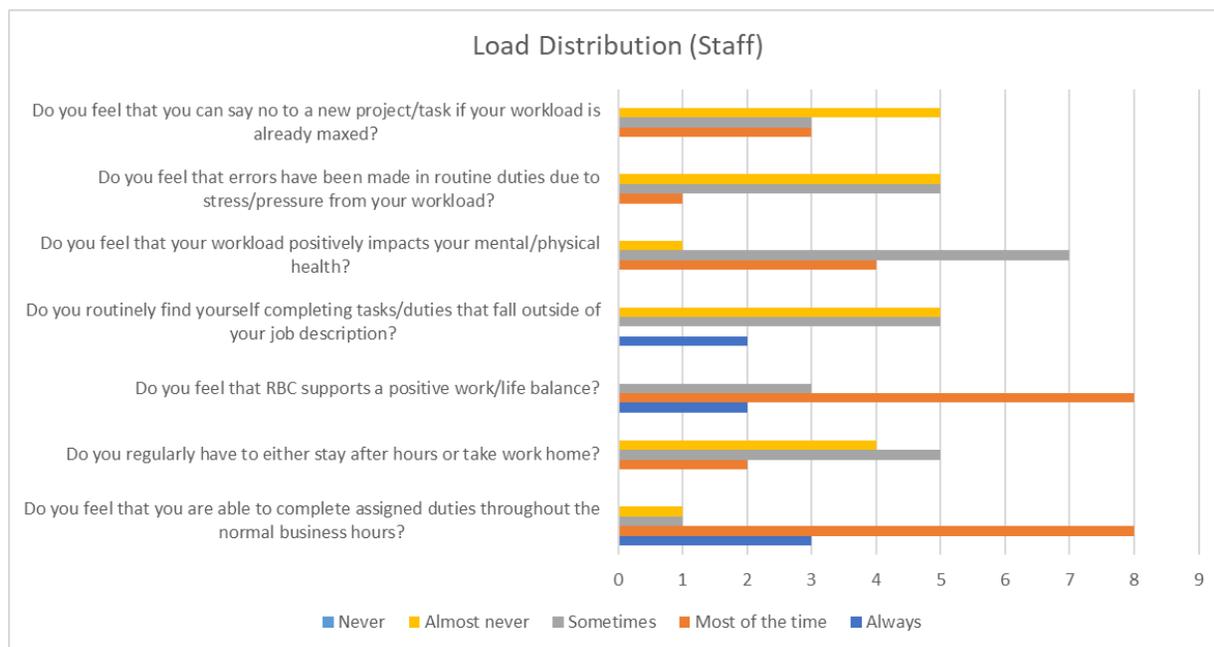


Figure 4.4 “Staff Responses to Load Distribution Questions”

RECOMMENDATIONS

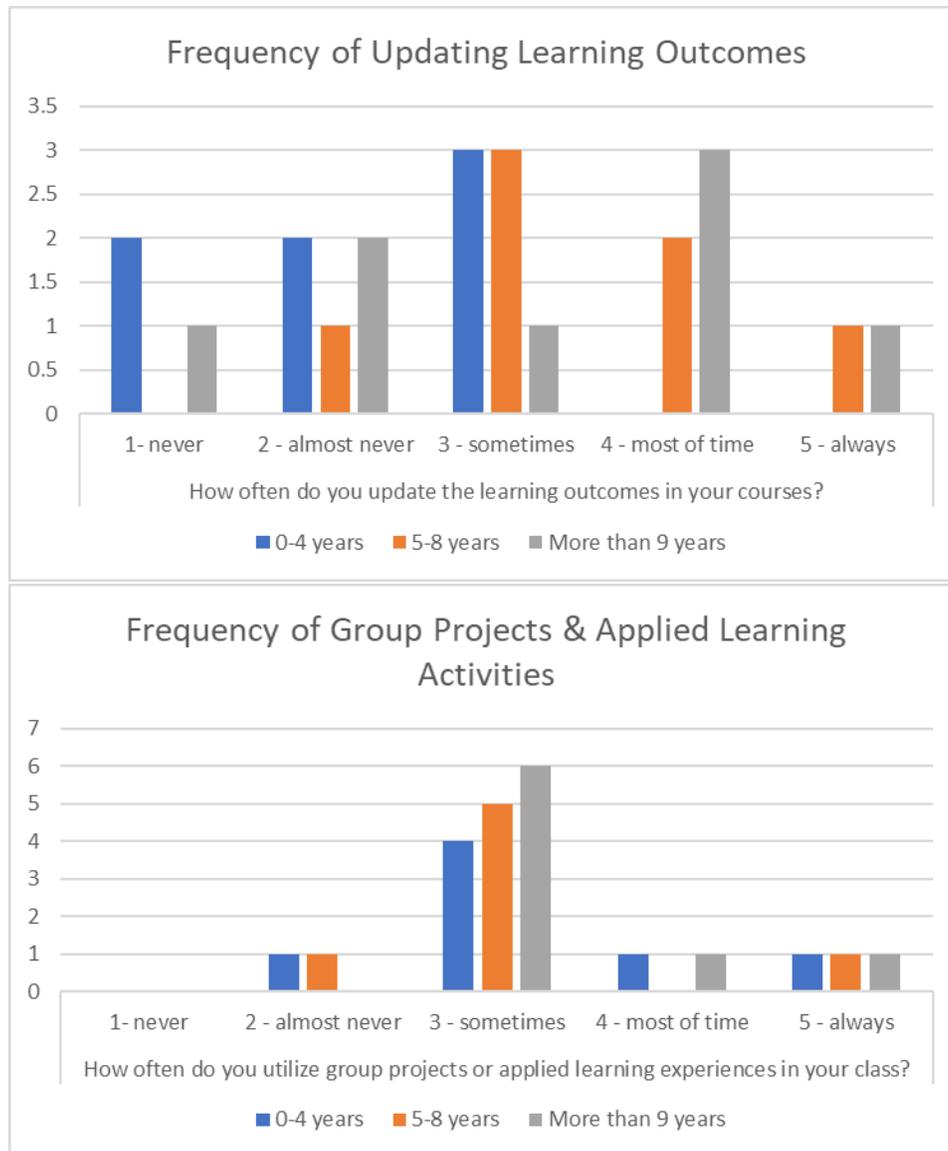
The LSL supports ongoing conversations between the Faculty Affairs Committee and Administration and within Academic Departments toward the proposal of a faculty employment model that would reduce faculty workload and that has built on the “Research on Faculty Model” document produced by Dr. Adam Zucconi in the spring of 2020. As part of these conversations, the LSL supports continued investigation of “creative contracts,” “faculty development plans,” or “flexible workplace agreements” as mechanisms for accomplishing a number of important goals for faculty relevant to the implementation of guided pathways reforms, the reduction of workload, and the avoidance of burnout:

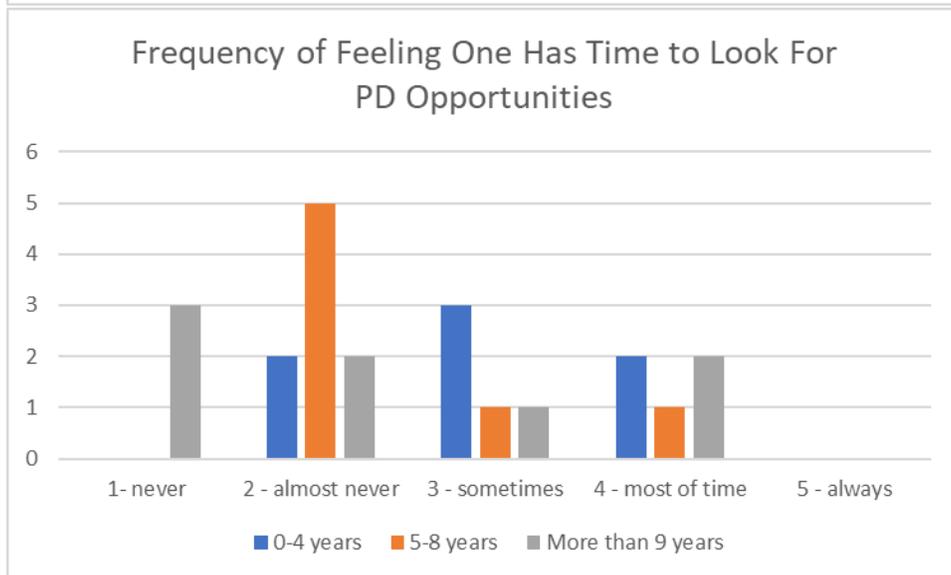
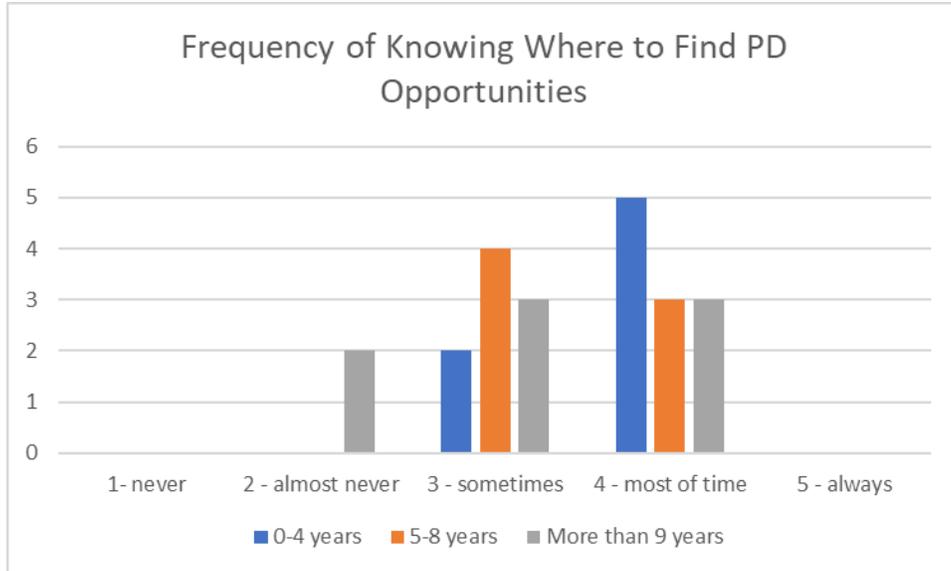
- Faculty becoming organizers for academic and career communities around the six meta-majors (to involve activities, clubs, events, meetings, partnerships, trips, volunteerism, and other active learning opportunities)
- Faculty teaching, co-teaching, and organizing of First-Year Experience Courses and increasing experiential learning and light-the-fire experiences within existing courses
- Faculty taking on the role of advisor/mentor after students develop a plan of study
- Individualized incentives for PD opportunities that support the Strategic Plan, Quality Enhancement Plan, and/or the RBC Mission (creative, intellectual/scholarly, financial, pedagogical, or institutional/administrative)

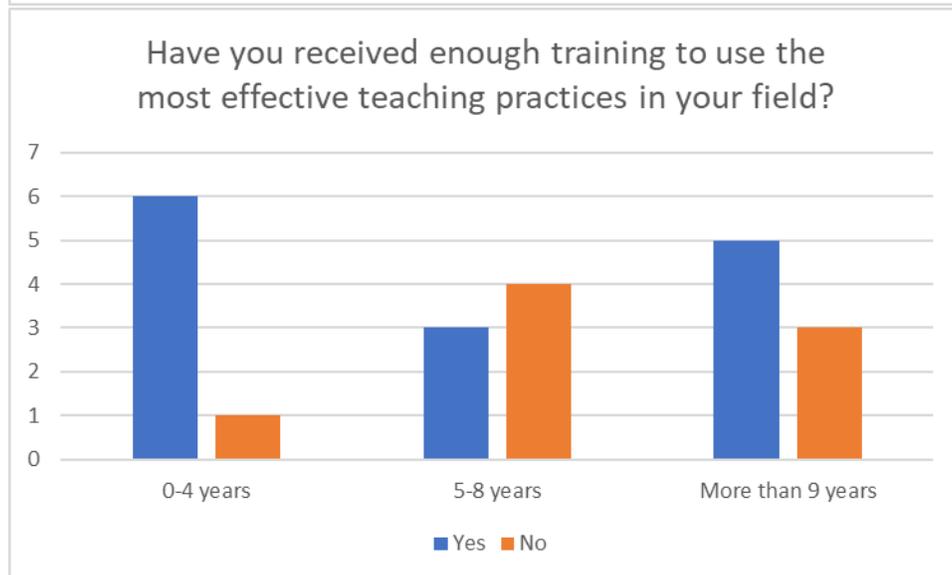
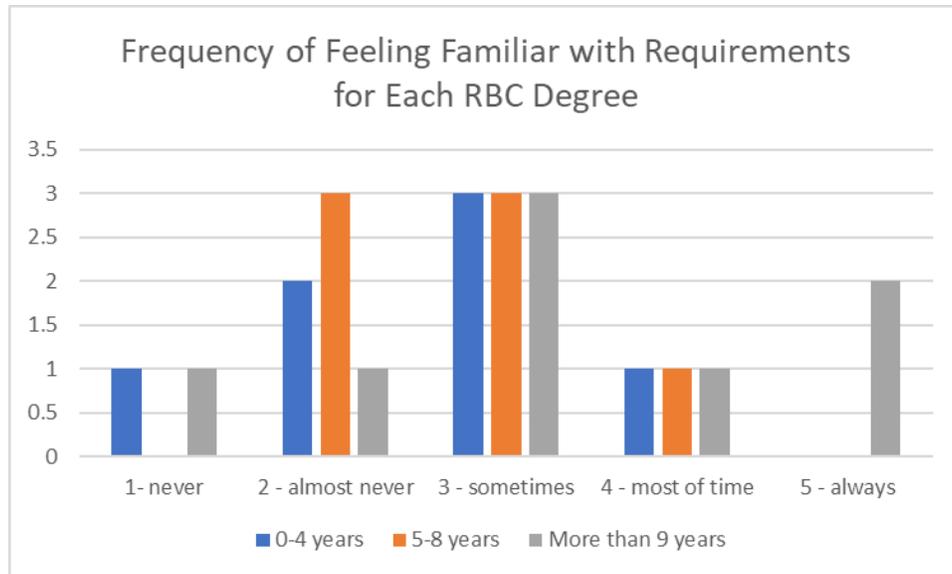
The LSL supports refinements to the RBC Faculty Handbook, Faculty Development Reports, faculty contracts, and all other relevant materials and documents that could allow the faculty role to better align with guided pathways work and student success work while also supporting the individualized goals of a faculty member’s development plan as formulated in consultation with their Academic Department Chair. Such refinements could include clearer metrics for achieving promotion and/or tenure, the salary increase and other benefit expected for such an achievement, as well as the metrics or rationales that would result in the awarding of an increase in salary for merit or of a monetary award for exceptional service to students and the College. The LSL team believes such practices are in keeping with the ethos displayed by Human Resources in conducting ongoing audits of faculty salary to examine issues of equity and parity with similar institutions and part of a comprehensive design to promote the hiring and retention of excellent faculty in the service of fulfilling RBC’s core mission and vision.

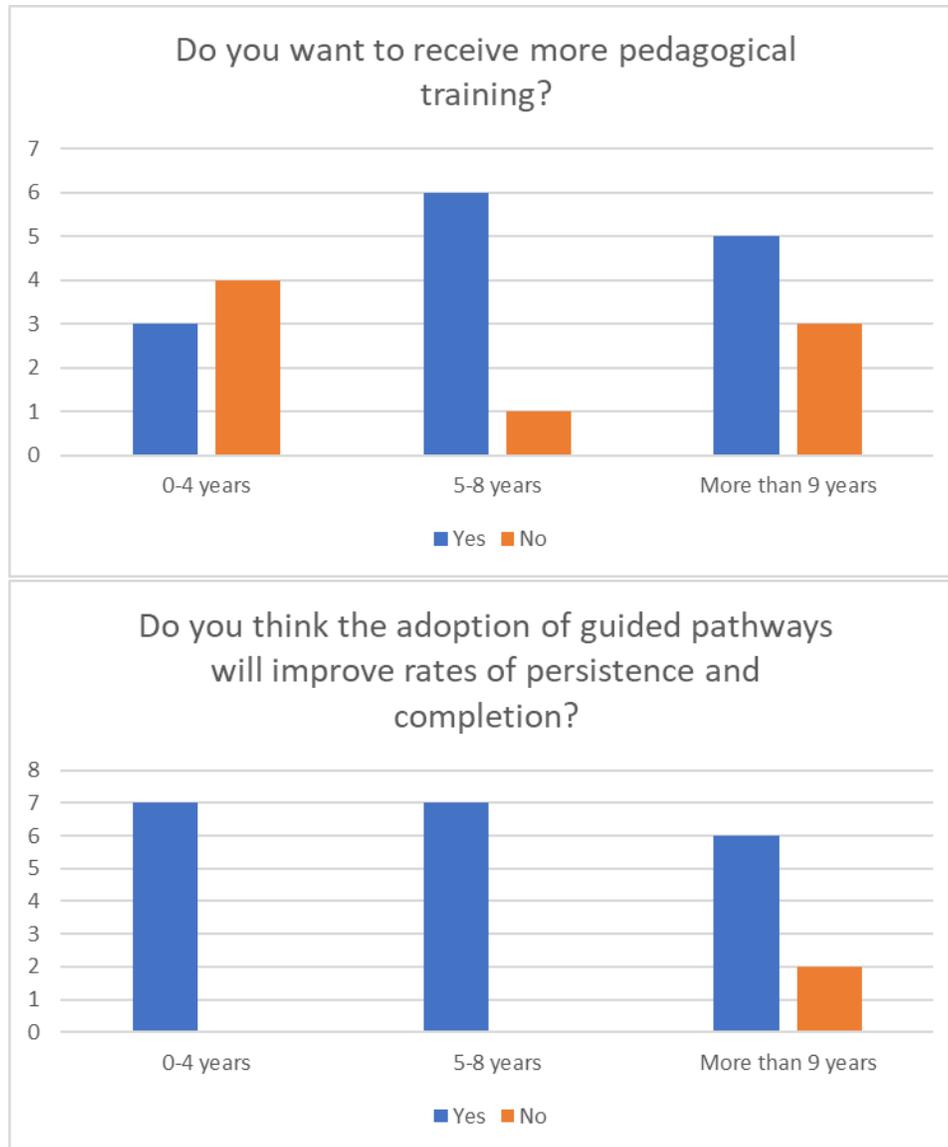
Similarly, the LSL supports Human Resources efforts like those of the Workplace Enrichment Initiative, which used workplace climate surveys and other instruments and solicitations of feedback in order to identify those aspects of the RBC workplace that produce and maintain high levels of worker satisfaction and those that require support. Even in those faculty and staff responses that received a primarily positive response, negative responses included in written comments spoke to perceived inequities or systemic difficulties that call for solutions in order to avoid dissatisfaction and turnover in crucial positions.

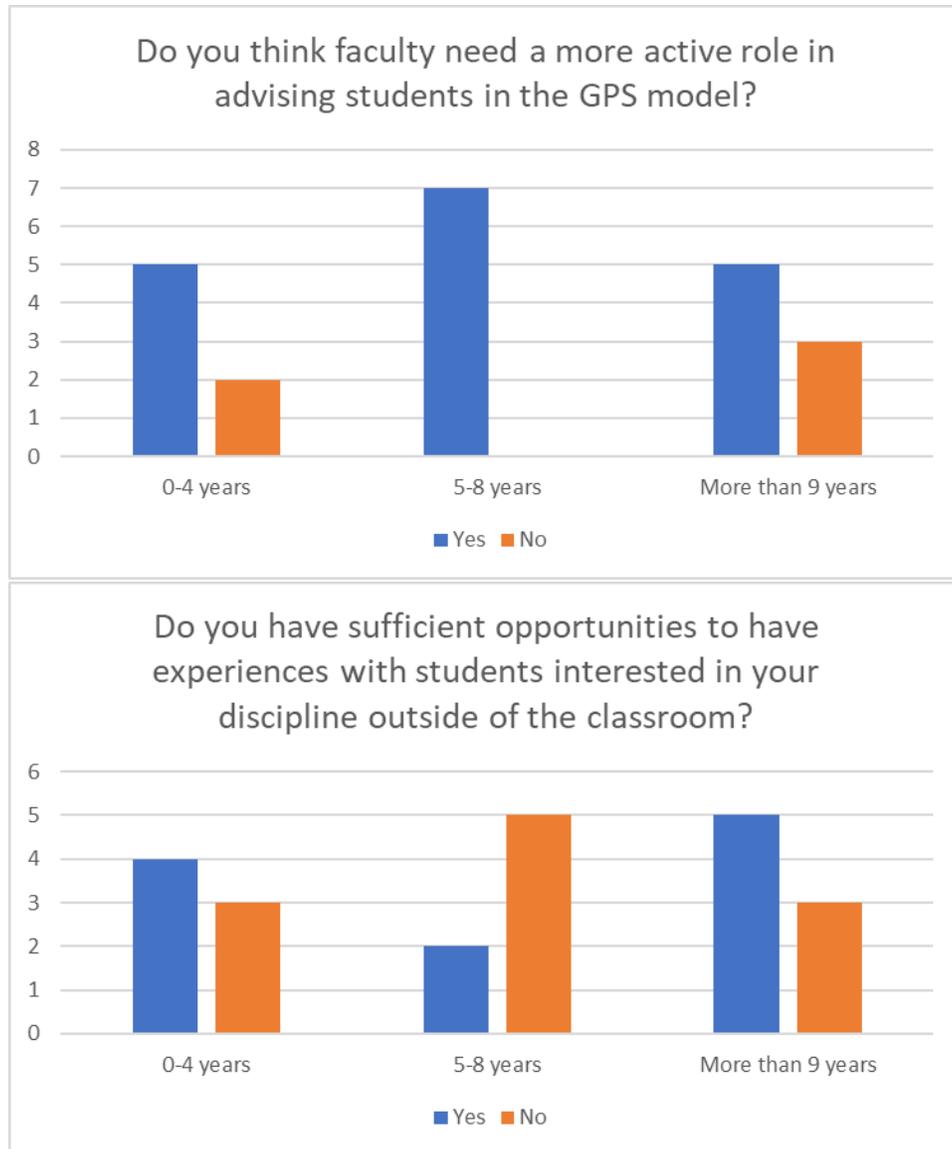
Appendix A: Additional Faculty Professional Development Survey Graphs

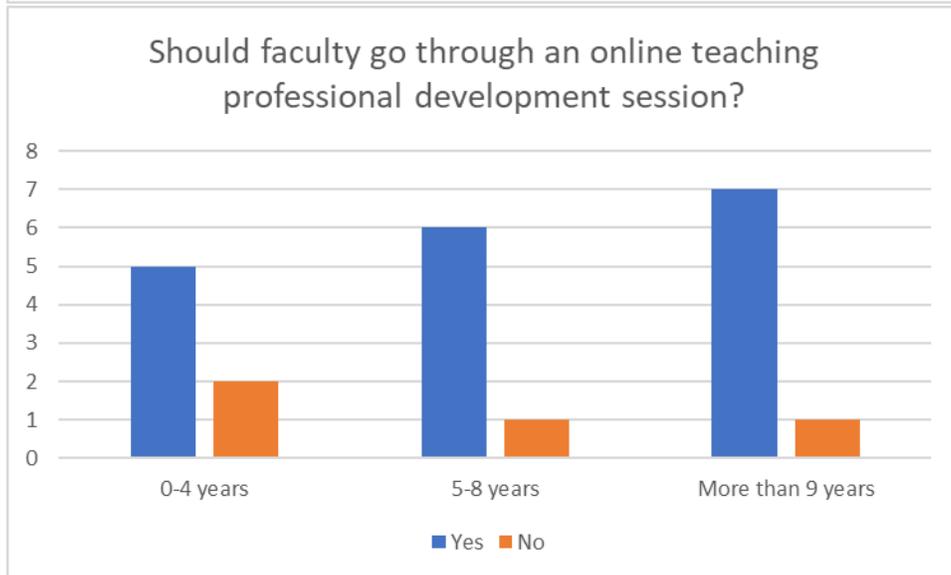
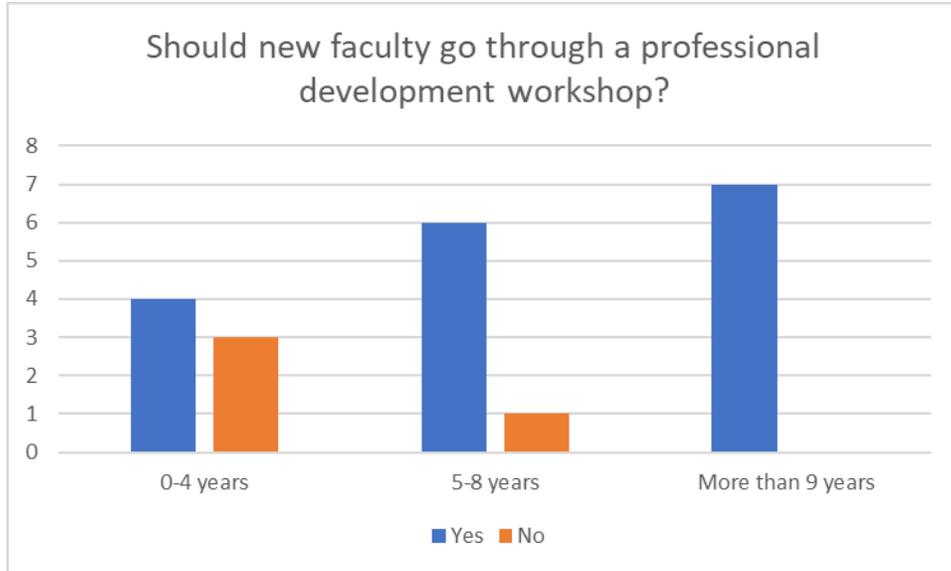


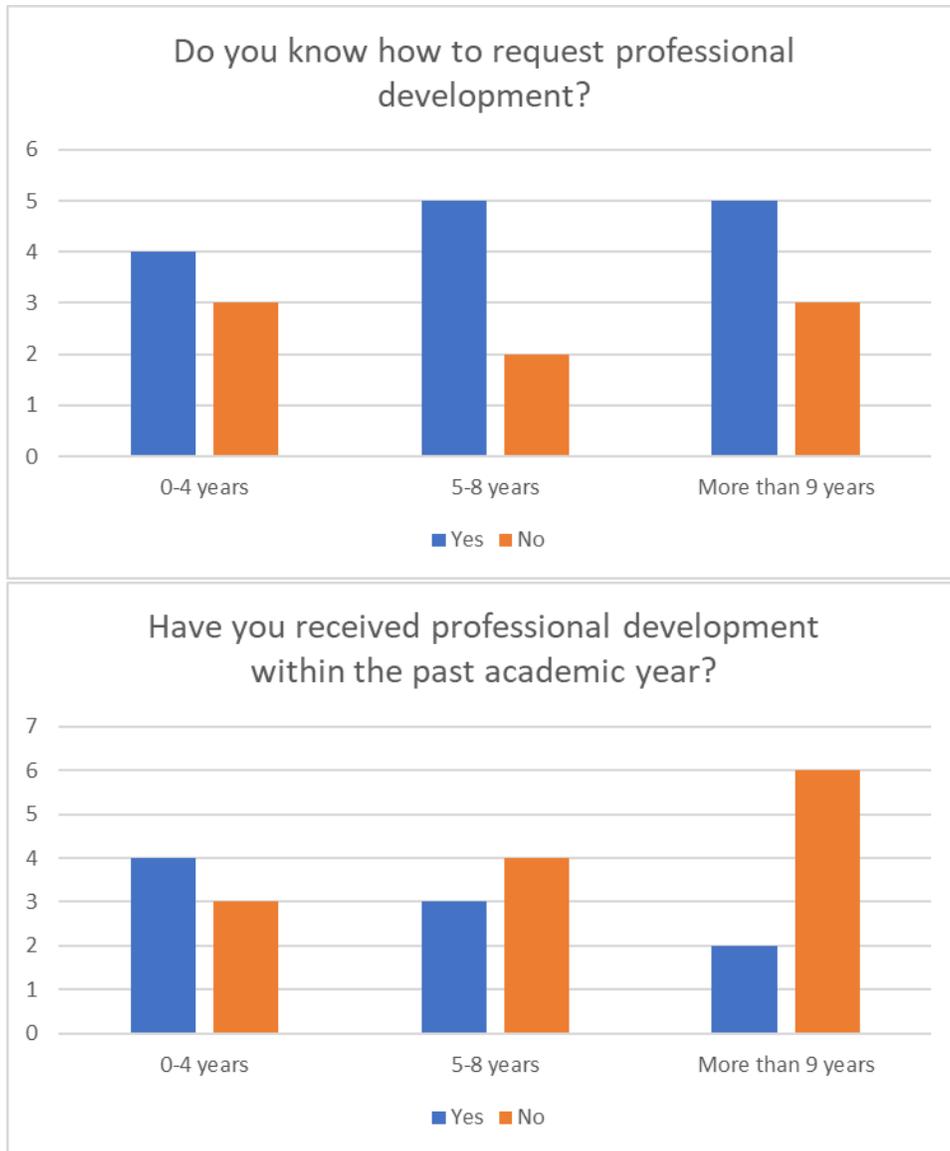


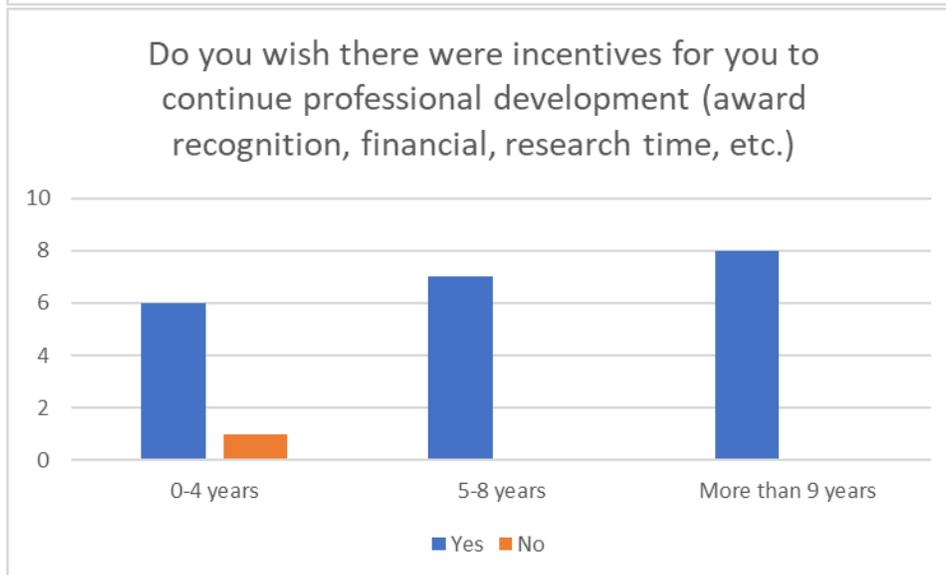
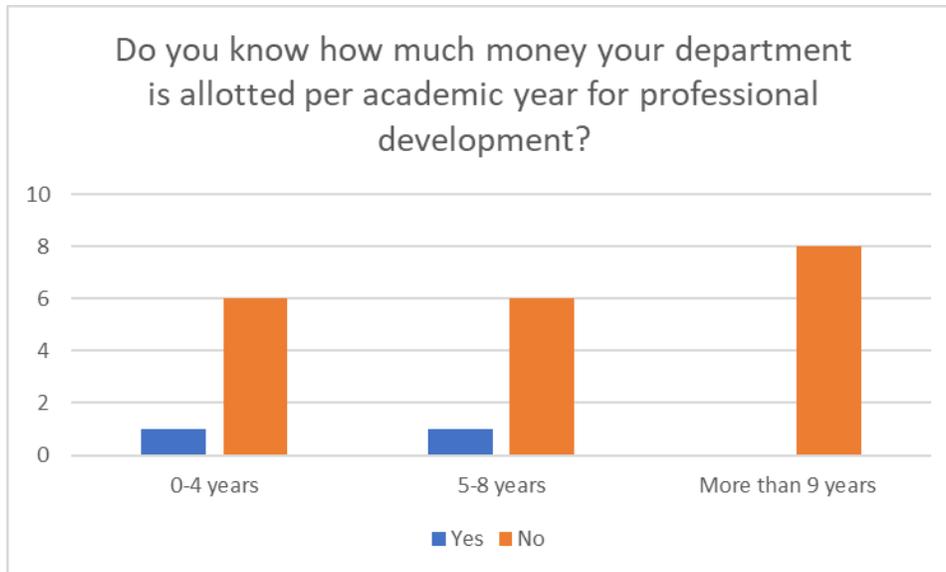


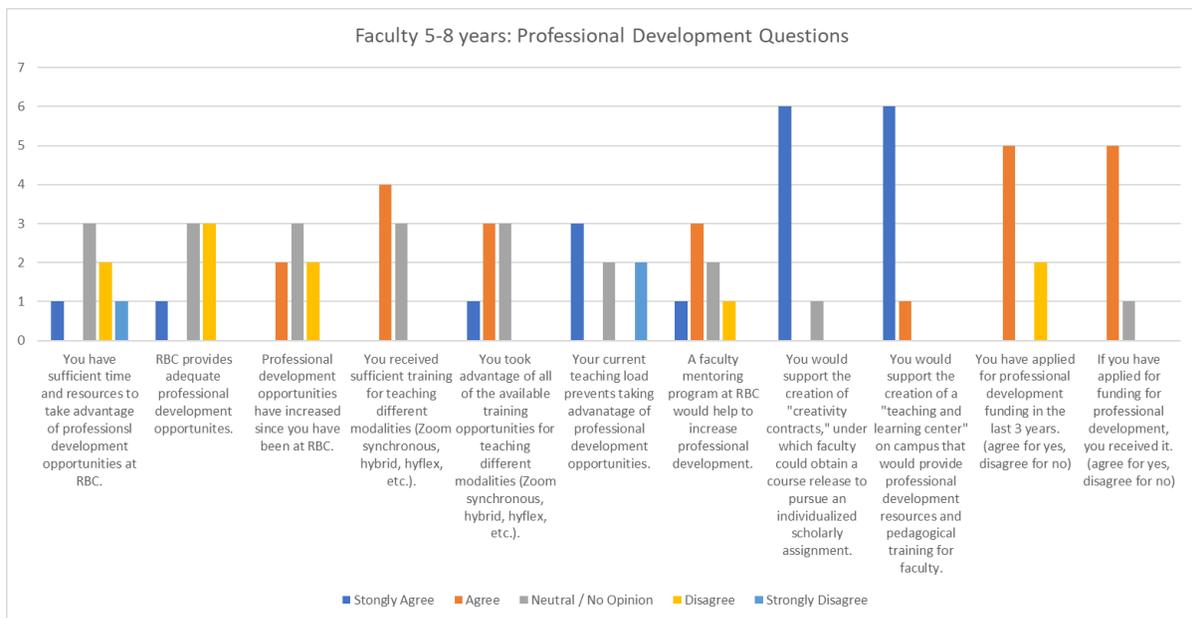
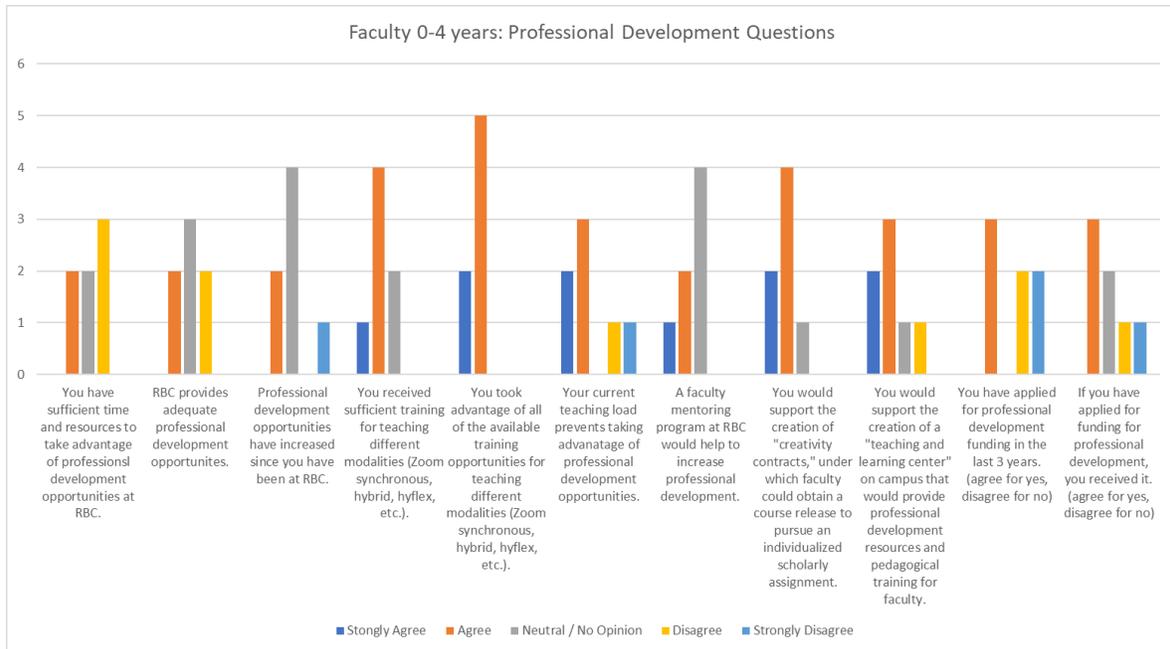


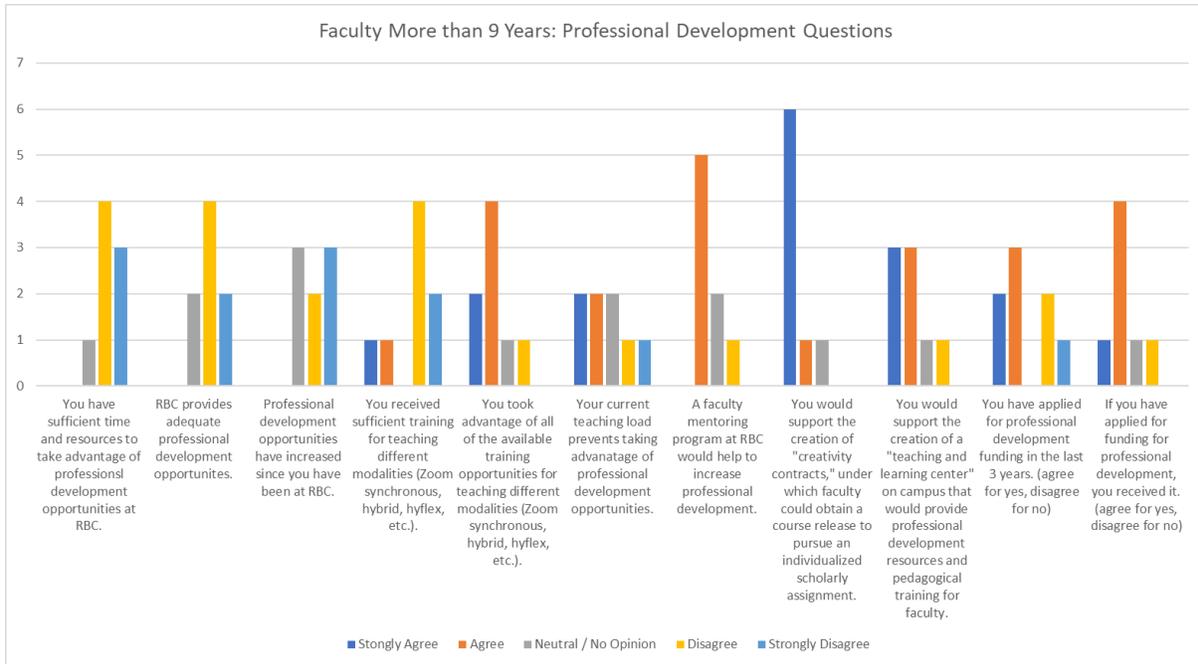














PEER REVIEW REPORT FOR RICHARD BLAND COLLEGE OF WILLIAM & MARY

AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EDUCATION LEARNER SUCCESS LABORATORY

FEBRUARY 2022

PEER REVIEW TEAM

- Lindsey Myers, Director, Learner Success Lab, American Council on Education
- Erin Baldwin, Associate Director, Programs and Global Initiatives, American Council on Education
- Amy Brown, Research Associate, Community College Research Center
- John Weinstein, Provost and Vice President, Bard College at Simon's Rock

Peer Review Conducted January 11, 2022

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Richard Bland College of William & Mary (RBC) began its participation in the American Council on Education (ACE) Learner Success Laboratory (LSL) in September 2020. The LSL is a cohort-based program, undertaken as an institution-wide effort that includes a facilitated self-assessment and strategic planning process to improve learner success in a comprehensive way. Despite changes to the Lab leadership team and the ongoing demands of the COVID-19 pandemic, the RBC team consistently engaged faculty, staff, and students to deliver findings and recommendations focused on Guided Pathways reforms; mission, vision, and college identity; the new Division of Academic Success structure; diversity, equity, and inclusion; data and creating a culture of analysis; the RBC website and communications; and faculty and staff support. This review provides peer responses to how RBC can move forward their work in these areas. The peer review team confirms that centering learner success is more essential than ever to the work of this unique college. In this regard, it finds that:

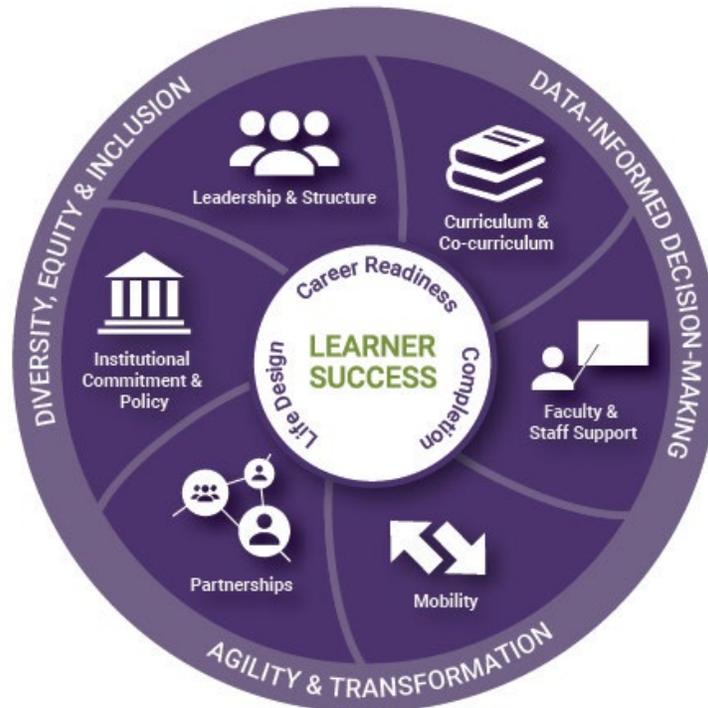
1. Richard Bland College has long-standing and distinctive student success strengths
2. New strengths and opportunities have emerged
3. Much can be gained by mobilizing these strengths and articulating experiential learning as a defining characteristic of an RBC degree

INTRODUCTION

The ACE Model for Comprehensive Learner Success was developed to help institutions redesign and/or better align their activities, systems, and processes in order to equitably improve the learning experience. The model is intended to illustrate that student success is no longer the province of a single office or a few disciplines, no longer just for those students who seek it out. It is key to the democratic promise of higher education. The

core of this model and its underlying research are particularly relevant to RBC, as centering career readiness and life design in addition to completion can provide a holistic framework for the student experience that more fully integrates advising and career services.

ACE Model for Comprehensive Learner Success



One practical application of the core concept of career readiness is experiential learning, which is actually a cluster of high-impact practices. Experiential learning lies at the intersection of liberal arts and professional education and represents a meaningful way to harness the best aspects of both since experiential learning requires both practice and critical reflection. These high-impact practices include collaborative learning, service-learning, undergraduate research, internships, capstone projects, and learning communities. At minimum, these practices all require substantial and meaningful interactions between faculty and students and learning inside and outside of the classroom. Multiple research studies, as well as the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE), have found positive links between student participation in high-impact practices and greater gains in learning, personal development, and persistence. Despite these positive impacts, survey research suggests access to high-impact practices is still inequitably distributed along racial lines. Therefore, it is imperative that these opportunities be made an inherent part of the student experience that benefits all learners. Implementing aspects of life design represents a comprehensive way of doing so.

Life design is a broad term that integrates a variety of approaches, strategies, and programs that postsecondary institutions can use to help students develop a life and career plan while in college. Specifically, these strategies and programs focus on helping students understand the world and work, explore their values and strengths in relation to career options, choose a major, and reflect on how education fits into their life course. When students become involved in life-design programs, they can develop personal agency by taking an active role in their own learning and engaging in self-reflection on life, academic, and career decisions. This approach dovetails nicely with RBC's ongoing work to implement Guided Pathways reforms in its advising model,

curriculum, and co-curriculum. Implementing a life design approach also resonates with faculty, staff, and students' image of RBC as instrumental in helping them figure out what's next as their "launch pad." While some of these activities are already happening at various levels of development at the college, there is much to be gained by articulating and fully integrating experiential learning and life design as features of the Guided Pathways for Success at RBC experience.¹

LAB PROCESS

In September 2020, at the invitation of the American Council on Education (ACE), Richard Bland College of William & Mary (RBC) joined the pilot cohort of the ACE Learner Success Laboratory (LSL), which engages a select group of colleges and universities in assessing their current student success activities and considering how they might move forward with such work in the future. The RBC Lab leadership team worked throughout the remainder of academic year 2020–21 to build an inclusive LSL steering committee and subcommittees, as well as to plan for implementation of the LSL self-study assessment tool to examine RBC's strengths and weaknesses in relation to the ACE Model for Comprehensive Learner Success. RBC's LSL steering committee was composed of faculty, staff, and administrators from across the college and included four subcommittees aligned to ACE's model.

The RBC Lab leadership team was co-chaired by Eric Earnhardt (Chair, English and Humanities), Thom Addington (Director of Student Success), and Tiffany Birdsong (Director of Academics), with prior participation from Celia Brockway (former Director of Student Success), Carly Baskerville (former Head Librarian), and Teona Henderson (former Learner Mentor). In addition to their on-campus work, the Lab leaders attended four Cohort 1 milestone meetings virtually. The Lab leaders also participated in periodic LSL webinars and frequent calls with the institution's ACE co-advisers, Lindsey Myers and Erin Baldwin, who visited RBC virtually over several weeks in January 2021 and returned for another virtual visit with a team of peer reviewers on January 11, 2022.

Like so much of our work in recent years, RBC's LSL engagement was punctuated with COVID-19 pandemic disruptions to on-campus learning, course delivery, financial models, health and safety protocols, and many other standard institutional practices. Concurrent, widespread social action demanding racial and social justice made urgent the need for renewed work on issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion. At RBC, as at most colleges and universities, these conditions laid bare existing systemic inequities. As institutions also experienced sudden hits to their budgets, they were forced to rethink their goals and practices. These past few years have sparked a transformative era of higher education, from which no college or university will emerge unchanged.

RBC's senior leadership team have embraced this reality and have been working to align the college's activities, systems, and processes with student and other stakeholder needs. Most notably, RBC's strategic plan for 2020–25, "Seize Your Potential," seeks to implement aspects of the Guided Pathways model to increase student retention and completion. RBC's work in the LSL focused on this charge of implementing Guided Pathways for Success, as well as six other important themes emerging from subcommittee findings. As such, the RBC Lab leadership team produced a draft of *Learner Success at Richard Bland College of William & Mary: A Report of the Learner Success Laboratory's Comprehensive Self-Assessment, 2021-2022* for the peer review visit, with a chapter dedicated to each of the following critical areas:

1. Guided Pathways Reforms
2. Mission and Vision and College Identity
3. Division of Academic Success Structure

4. Diversity Equity and Inclusion
5. Data and a Culture of Analysis
6. RBC Website and Communications
7. Faculty and Staff Support

Comprehensively examining and planning around these key themes will shape how the college moves forward equitably and with agility in a future where the changes addressed herein will continue to accelerate. RBC's ability to weather the disruptions of the ongoing pandemic both testifies to its strong foundation in student success work and bodes well for future disruptions.

PEER REVIEW: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The peer review team enthusiastically embraced its role as thought partners to aid Richard Bland College in considering implementation of its Learner Success plan. This report constitutes our response to the possibilities under discussion concerning the role of Learner Success in RBC's future. Its goal is to provide comparative context and collegial feedback for the college to consider in conversations on learner success that are yet to come.

Given the on-going pandemic, this review was conducted virtually. The peer review team participated in eight videoconferences, meeting with key faculty and administrators, including the President, members of the RBC Lab leadership team, and others (see Appendix 1). Reviewers were also supplied with a draft of *Learner Success at Richard Bland College of William & Mary: A Report of the Learner Success Laboratory's Comprehensive Self-Assessment, 2021–2022*, as well as links to key information on RBC's student success activities.

This report is a **confidential** document for Richard Bland College, designed to assist the institution with its learner success efforts. In spite of the ample information provided to the peer review team, we must emphasize that this document can only be a snapshot of the college's efforts, not a full portrait, because the review lasted only a short time. The contents will not be published or made public unless Richard Bland chooses to do so or gives ACE permission to do so. We encourage internal distribution of this document, however, so that it can assist the RBC community in its continued student success work and planning.

THE PEER REVIEW TEAM'S OVERALL CONCLUSION: RBC'S MISSION AS THE FULCRUM FOR BALANCING PAST AND FUTURE

Richard Bland has unique strengths and ongoing student success work including Guided Pathways reforms that can be aligned under a life design approach and enhanced with additional scaffolding to connect academic and professional skills such as experiential learning opportunities.

- ESE 101/RBC 101/GPS 101—As outlined in the steering committee final report, each of these courses had good elements, but course redesign should include a standardized curriculum for first-year experience courses (GPS 101) that supports the ACIP model of onboarding and advising within meta-major communities. The meta-majors have promise as an effective way to group students while still allowing for flexibility, given that students' precise academic and career plans may shift during their AA degree years.

- Seize Your Potential/GPS—RBC should be commended for its substantial work in shifting from its Exceptional Student Experience model to Guided Pathways for Success. The peer review team recognizes all of the challenges that come along with putting this new model into practice and appreciate the vision and planning RBC demonstrated prior to partnering with ACE and CCRC on implementation.
- Division of Academic Success—The team leading the charge to improve student success must have the authority and resources to implement and sustain comprehensive change. The peer review team believes reorganizing the student success team and reimagining their role to transcend the Student Success Center (SSC) and have a tighter alignment with academics is moving the institution in the right direction. Continuing to elevate and strategically refine the purview of this team will yield additional improvements to pre- and post-graduation learner outcomes.
- Faculty—Many of the full-time faculty the peer review team met with were interested in and knowledgeable about pedagogy/andragogy, high impact practices, transfer issues, and career guidance. They understood their critical role in either delivering these services to students or connecting students to them in addition to instruction. Given the 5-5 teaching load, faculty do not have extensive time for interacting with students outside of class time. Activities promoting faculty/student connectivity can be done during or outside of class time, and providing training time to develop such activities would be beneficial. Continuing to support faculty in their own development and ability to design more effective and equitable learning experiences will also yield additional improvements to pre- and post-graduation learner outcomes.
- Staff—The staff who the peer review team met with were equally dedicated to doing what was in the best interest of students. Staff will benefit from additional decision support in the form of commonly accessible student data and a “metrics that matter most” dashboard as recommended in the Steering Committee’s final report.
- Student Pipeline—RBC has several important partnerships through dual enrollment programs and transfer agreements with local universities. These relationships should continue to be carefully managed and considered holistically and strategically as the institution forges its identity for the coming decades. The timing is opportune to build partnerships beyond the immediate geographic region.
- Curriculum—RBC offers a high-quality liberal arts curriculum with particular attention to critical thinking, academic rigor, writing and communication, creativity, teamwork, and habits of lifelong learning. RBC should continue to enhance the transferability of its curriculum and further incorporate experiential learning and life design concepts. The stated goal of establishing two-year course schedules and making them available to students would be helpful.
- Strategic Partnerships—RBC has numerous valuable stakeholder partnerships and should continue to nurture existing and added partnerships that can inform program content, as well as provide additional experiential learning, funding, and other opportunities. RBC will benefit from continuing to formally evaluate partnerships against strategic priorities as was done during the LSL self-study and by implementing the subcommittee’s recommendation for a formal mechanism to collaborate with partners, such as program advisory boards.

Some interesting new student success strengths have emerged from the challenges of the pandemic and renewed calls for social justice.

Engaging with the work of the Learner Success Lab during this challenging time has added new strengths to RBC's resources and approaches to student success, among which the following seem particularly important.

- Increased faculty experience with online teaching and learning
- Development of creative solutions for faculty workload concerns
- Recognition and exploration of the value of and new approaches to student success among and across units
- The work of the Racial Justice and Equity Task Force has become institutionalized in the form of the Inclusive Excellence Committee
- Expanded partnership with VSU to offer bachelor's degrees

These strengths can be mobilized to advance Richard Bland more generally.

The strengths just listed, both old and new, have potential to play a significant role not only in advancing student success, but also in the more general decisions and strategies Richard Bland College will consider as it emerges from the pandemic. This potential rests on clearly linking RBC's mission, strategy, and activities to its definition of learner success. Experiential learning helps bridge perceived liberal arts/career skills divides. ACE believes articulating the importance of experiential learning for all, recognizing it as a distinction for RBC, and using life design to build even greater interconnectivity among its component parts is an effective way to do this work of aligning mission, strategy, practices, and resources. Articulating experiential learning as a signature feature of the RBC student experience could attract both students and funding. It also relates directly to the equally important steps the college is taking in diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Richard Bland College is in a unique position and should embrace it to build an equally unique institutional value proposition. Peer review meetings elucidated continued concerns about the college trying to be "everything for everyone" and potentially encountering difficulties as the college mission is extended in multiple directions (e.g., tensions about serving a large proportion of dual enrollment students while maintaining a transfer-focused two-year liberal arts core mission). However, we did hear compelling articulations of RBC's value proposition, including visions of the college as a safety net and a launching pad, the value that full-time faculty and small class sizes bring to the student experience, the importance of providing this type of educational opportunity in a rural region, and close relationships between faculty and with students. Faculty and staff pointed out that students are having meaningful learning experiences but that there remains a need to identify when and how these experiences are facilitated and create structures so that they occur more consistently, and in particular for students who are currently not reached.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

Richard Bland already has a unique set of student success strengths that can be mobilized for even greater student learning and institutional advantage. The peer review team particularly endorses the following ideas that came up during our discussions with Richard Bland faculty, staff, and administrators. Appendix 2 provides readings relevant to many of these.

Core: Completion, Life Design, Career Readiness

- Continue to implement curricular and structural changes introduced in RBC’s “Seize Your Potential” strategic plan and during the college’s engagement with the ACE Learner Success Lab and the Community College Research Center.
 - Findings from the self-study assessment identify several aspects of RBC’s Exceptional Student Experience model that should be retained, but the peer review team believes this shift toward the Guided Pathways for Success model will result in improved pre- and post-graduation learner outcomes.
 - Fully implement Handshake software to support student networking, career exploration, and experiential learning opportunities.
- Loudly proclaim life design and experiential learning as unifying aspects of GPS@RBC.
 - More fully articulate how integrating a life design approach and experiential learning can bring together changes in curricular pathways and co-curricular student development programming, develop language and a narrative that captures this, and promulgate this idea as part of RBC’s promise, brand, recruiting tools, and funding pitches.
 - Make experiential learning more visible in student recruiting, orientation, the college catalogue, program materials, and on the website.
 - Consider where and how experiential learning might be more intentionally integrated into institutional strategic planning efforts.
 - Showcase successes at RBC to make experiential learning and life design more visible (such as in artwork, posters, and signs across campus).

Target Area: Institutional Commitment and Policy

- Reinforce the message of how RBC will deliver on its mission in current and future conditions.
 - Liberal arts and career-focused education and supports need not be at odds. Finding meaningful ways to blend these such as experiential learning will inject a new relevance into the curriculum that will improve both pre- and post-graduation outcomes.
 - RBC is an important space for students to develop self-confidence and self-awareness, while building both liberal arts and career-focused skills.
- Revise admissions policies around declaring a major to align with CCRC’s ACIP model
- Connect learner success efforts to promotion, tenure, and merit processes.
 - In promotion/tenure/merit processes, teaching learning skills within classes should be rewarded as an element of strong teaching, in addition to the teaching of subject-related content.
 - If advising and meta-major community leadership is part of faculty loads, it should also be reflected in the promotion/tenure/merit processes.

Target Area: Leadership and Structure

- Move Academic, Career, and Transfer (ACT) Center under the Division of Academic Success to continue integrating these services with academics.
- Continue to refine and enhance the support structures for student success programs at Richard Bland College.
 - Raise the position of Director of Academics to a cabinet or similar level, thereby enabling student success perspectives to surface more fully in campus discussions.
 - With the director of academics taking on a more strategic role, we also recommend that someone be charged with implementing LSL recommendations and coordinating this work going forward (likely a director-level position). RBC's work in the LSL over the past year and a half has highlighted faculty and staff on campus, especially among the LSL leadership team, who have the skills, experience, institutional knowledge, and influence on campus to be highly effective in this role.
- Improve services for dual enrollment students.
 - Design, promote, and regularly provide information to dual enrollment students about pathways.
 - Develop an online in-depth orientation program that would help dual enrollment students better understand their options, covering topics such as: Academic advising and how to best use it, early course-taking as a way to explore programs and fields of interest, expectations in the college classroom and how to understand what is required, and examples of academic misconduct.
 - Establish a "one stop center" at RBC to provide holistic support to students: healthcare, housing, transportation, employment, and other referral services.
 - Establish a mandatory orientation and first-year experience courses. Whatever is designed for degree students would ideally also be available to dual enrollment students, and required for those taking significant dual enrollment credit loads.
- Further clarify staff and faculty roles.
 - Clarify faculty advising and meta-major community organizing expectations.
 - Draft updated adviser/learner mentor/pathways navigator job descriptions.
 - Review all job descriptions and clarify expectations around learner success functions.
- Consider creating a cabinet-level chief diversity officer position.
 - Diversity, equity, and inclusion, like student success, are the purview of everyone on campus and not just one individual or office. However, it is helpful to have a position with broad authority across institutional areas to coordinate developing and executing this work. This position should support campus teams including communications, human resources, admissions, as well as faculty in creating a more inclusive and equitable RBC experience.
 - We recommend this be a full-time position distinct (but certainly not isolated) from other campus roles.

Target Area: Curriculum and Co-curriculum

- Continue to assess and improve the curriculum.
 - Align curriculum redesign efforts with Transfer Virginia to improve transferability.
 - Integrate career exploration and life design themes into course outcomes and assessment measures.
 - Given the focus on the residential experience as a key element sought by many RBC students, develop co-curricular instruction on residential college living, either on its own or as an element in first-year experience courses.
 - Provide professional development for all faculty, including part-time faculty, on effective instructional practices and career guidance. Instructional practices should include embedding building learning skills and, if possible, socio-emotional skills into courses directly, given the institutional focus on students who need more skills development before attending a four-year college.
 - Continue to examine how embedding opportunities to earn microcredentials into courses and programs, especially low-earning programs, can provide additional opportunities for students to develop and document transferable skills.
 - Institutionalize formal program review process to include a review of course/program outcome alignment (curriculum mapping), student outcomes (retention, progress, graduation), and overall program mix at the college.

Target Area: Faculty and Staff Support

- Provide additional faculty and staff professional development to better support guided pathways and student success work.
 - Clarify faculty and staff expectations related to guided pathways and student success more generally and create supports for new functions (or existing functions not being met).
 - Continue to develop creative contracts to incentivize faculty to engage in the work of implementing guided pathways and student success more generally.
 - Review the faculty handbook and clarify sections related to advising and student success roles.
 - Promotion and tenure (see points above on incorporating success with teaching learning skills, and advising, into promotion and tenure).
 - Review hiring processes and job descriptions for opportunities to hire for the inclusive culture being built.

Target Area: Mobility

- Dual enrollment pipeline.
 - Clarify the intended proportion of dual enrollment students who continue at RBC versus those who enroll elsewhere, and determine the appropriate balance of institutional resources going to dual enrollment students unlikely to continue at RBC.
 - Clarify the purpose of dual enrollment programs in meeting RBC's institutional mission.

- Explore additional articulation agreements.
 - For RBC students who continue to want a small, supportive environment, transfer agreements with colleges with small, personalized BA programs such as Bard College at Simon's Rock, among others, would be beneficial for student mobility. Given enrollment issues faced by small colleges from the pandemic, the timing is right to develop such agreements, given that small colleges will be looking to form such relationships.

Target Area: Partnerships

- Investigate additional possibilities for partnering with local employers and community organizations to develop experiential learning opportunities for Richard Bland students. Be strategic about selecting partners. Potential partnerships should be assessed against their alignment to RBC's strategic priorities.
- Program advisory boards are a good opportunity to both improve the curriculum, as well as to identify experiential learning and funding opportunities.

Strategic Lens: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

- Task the Inclusive Excellence Committee with recommending additional structural changes that make experiential learning and life design opportunities to all RBC students.
- Direct attention to building engagement among all Richard Bland students, creating an open-minded, globally diverse, and inclusive campus culture.
 - Assess campus climate, especially as it relates to perceptions and interactions between.
 - Spread the idea that building a global community on campus requires not just students to adapt, but *everyone*, as well as campus systems and practices. Much depends on developing this in a collaborative manner.
 - Create programs that bring diverse students together to work on common projects. This could be among RBC students or between RBC students and learners at other institutions (such as virtual exchange/collaborative international online learning).

Strategic Lens: Data-Informed Decision-Making

- Create a dashboard to share progress on key metrics.
 - Sharing data in this way allows for data-informed decision-making and allows institutional research staff to reduce the number of ad hoc data requests.
 - Provide clear expectations for how the dashboard should be used, as well as adequate training to do so.
- The availability of data to answer self-study assessment questions indicates that RBC may need to hire additional IR staff to support the developing culture of data.

Strategic Lens: Agility and Transformation

- Continue to be persistent and intentional in your work to cultivate RBC's learning-centric, inclusive, and data-informed culture.
 - Communicate this frequently and via different media in order to tell RBC's story and reinforce its values.

- Faculty have much expertise to add here. Creating formal opportunities (such as creative contracts) for them to contribute to institutional research and strategic planning to harness RBC's considerable faculty expertise.
- Identify redundant/unnecessary tasks
 - The work of institutional transformation must make way to let go of tasks or functions that do not ultimately add value to the student experience.
 - An opportunity to examine additional shared service agreements exists here.
- Examine automation and self-services to reduce faculty and staff workloads
 - The adviser team recognizes the effort put into moving to a model of self-registration for students and how this fundamentally reshaped the learner mentor role. Continue to examine what functions make sense to students with the proper supports can undertake themselves.
 - Automating routine activities can create additional capacity for faculty and staff to engage in advising, course/program design, forging partnerships, mentoring, etc.

ENDNOTES

1. Experiential learning and life design are effective means to drive positive learner outcomes because they increase engagement and relevance. Launched in 2016, the Strada-Gallup Education Consumer Survey has collected data from close to 350,000 respondents living in the United States in order to better understand perceptions of the value of higher education to people's careers and lives. A key finding of this work has been the connection between the perceived relevance of individuals' higher education experiences and the perceived value of higher education. Data from the survey suggest that people value their higher education experiences more when they see a strong connection among their education, careers, and day-to-day lives. The greatest impact could be gained by helping students reflect upon and explore their interests, passions, and goals; connecting those interests, passions, and goals to an academic program or field of study; ensuring that the curriculum is engaging and blends liberal arts and career preparation to prepare students across fields of study to be successful in navigating transfer, the labor market, and life more broadly; and making sure students have the supports needed to complete their programs of study.

APPENDIX 1: PEER REVIEW VISIT AGENDA



Richard Bland College

of WILLIAM & MARY

LEARNER SUCCESS LAB
PEER REVIEW VISIT AGENDA
JANUARY 10–12, 2022

Monday, January 10

8:00 a.m. **Pre-visit Meeting** to include RBC's LSL leadership team, LSL coordinators, and peer review team
Zoom: <https://zoom.us/j/91371333597>

Tuesday, January 11

9:00 a.m. **Welcome Back and Introduction** of our guests and what expertise they bring to RBC:
Amy E. Brown, Community College Research Center (columbia.edu)
Lindsey Myers, American Council on Education (acenet.edu)
Erin Baldwin, American Council on Education (acenet.edu)
John B. Weinstein, Bard College at Simon's Rock (simons-rock.edu)
Zoom: <https://richardbland.zoom.us/j/93050607475>

10:00 a.m. **Open LSL Steering Committee Meeting** to include subcommittee co-chairs and other LSL leaders/members (Victor Branch, Stacey Sokol, Linda Pittman, Dan Zelinski, Ashley Fuller, etc.)
Zoom: <https://richardbland.zoom.us/j/96775595307>

11:00 a.m. **Division of Academic Success Meeting** (Department Chairs, Library, Student Success, Racial Justice and Equity Taskforce Chairs)
Zoom: <https://richardbland.zoom.us/j/95901332899>

12:00 p.m. **Peer Reviewer Meeting with Dr. Sydow**
Zoom: <https://richardbland.zoom.us/j/99010865712>

1:00 p.m. **Faculty Town Hall**—Drs. Zucconi and Rohrbach as faculty leader moderators
Zoom: <https://richardbland.zoom.us/j/95731446550>

2:00 a.m. President's Cabinet—Dr. Debbie Sydow (College President), Lashrecese Aird (Chief of Staff), Tyler Hart (Provost), Jeff Brown (Director of Special Projects and Operations), Paul Edwards (Chief Business Officer), Eric Kondzielawa (Director of Operations and Capital Assets), Jesse Vaughan (Chief Communications and Marketing Officer), Ramona Taylor (College Counsel)

Zoom: <https://richardbland.zoom.us/j/95818460843>

Wednesday, January 12

TBD Post-visit Meeting to include RBC's LSL leadership team, LSL coordinators, and peer review team

Zoom: <https://zoom.us/j/94619762842>

APPENDIX 2: RELEVANT READINGS

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- Coburn. 2003. "Rethinking Scale: Moving Beyond Numbers to Deep and Lasting Change." *Education Researcher* 32 (6), 3-12.
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- Kezar, Adrianna J. 2013. "Understanding Sensemaking/Sensegiving in Transformational Change Processes from the Bottom Up." *Higher Education* 65 (6), 761–780. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23481596>.
- Kuh, George D. 2008. *High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.

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Strada Education Network and Gallup. 2018. *From College to Life: Relevance and the Value of Higher Education*. Indianapolis, IN and Washington, DC: Strada Education Network and Gallup.

Taylor, Steven C., and Catherine Haras. 2020. *Beyond Classroom Borders: Linking Learning and Work Through Career-Relevant Instruction*. Washington, DC: American Council on Education.

The Phyllis M. Taylor Center for Social Innovation and Design Thinking, Tulane University. 2020. Life Design Education. <https://taylor.tulane.edu/life-design/#learningfromleaders>.