

# FEATURED ARTICLE

## Spotlight on Guided Pathways at Renton Technical College



**Camille Pomeroy**



**Laura Knight**

Guided Pathways has grown in momentum and popularity throughout the country at 2-year colleges. The Washington State community and technical colleges have joined this movement, and in an effort to learn more about this educational model and its implications for our members, the WAESOL Educator Publication Committee interviewed two Guided Pathways professionals from Renton Technical College (RTC) in Renton, WA via email. These are their responses, edited for clarity and length.

### ***Tell us about yourself. What was your pathway to your current position?***

My name is Camille Pomeroy. I am an instructor for the High School Completion program at RTC called HS21+. I am also the interim Guided Pathways Coordinator. I became a teacher after dreaming of being one and teaching my younger brothers to read. I then changed my mind several times and got a degree in Spanish with a focus on Latin American Literature and a minor in Communications. After teaching EFL for many years across the globe, I continued my studies in Education with a focus on Learning Development. I became the Guided Pathways' Coordinator by appointment. I was appointed by a selection group who noticed that I had a great deal of interest in changing our college systems to include the students in the High School Completion courses as well as those learning English as another language.

My name is Laura Knight. I am a counselor for the students at RTC who are taking classes that aren't in a specific program and plan on transferring to a university once they graduate. I also advise students who are in our Accounting, Early Childhood Education, and Business programs at RTC. I have always wanted to help people and studied Business with a minor in Spanish so I could work in Human Resources and create a welcoming and supporting environment for employees. I started my career working in hotels, and then transitioned to working in colleges and universities so I could work with students. I applied for the Guided Pathways Coordinator position because I believe it is very important that the systems at our college are centered around our students.

## **What are guided pathways? How do they compare to other educational models?**

Guided Pathways is a very comprehensive model. It requires that many people who work in the education system look at the complex practices of how the system works and find ways to make sure that the way it works creates smooth pathways for students. It requires a lot of high-level thinking, strategic planning and reflection as well as a great amount of student feedback about their experiences throughout their time at the college.

Guided Pathways is a research-based approach that simplifies choices for students. It is divided into four areas, which are called pillars.

Pillar 1 is called “Mapping the Path”. Courses are grouped together to form clear paths through college and into careers, whether students enter those careers directly after graduation or transfer to a university for more study in their chosen fields. Pillar 2 is focused on helping students choose the right pathway, Pillar 3 is about giving students intensive, targeted advising to stay on their path through college, and Pillar 4 is making sure that students learn what they need to know and graduate.

In Washington state, our Guided Pathways efforts are focused on helping more of our students — especially low-income, first-generation students and students of color — earn credentials to prepare them for entry into higher-paying, high-demand fields with value in the labor market.

## **How recent is the guided pathways movement and what is driving this shift?**

Guided Pathways is a national movement that started in 2015, when a book called *Redesigning America's Community Colleges* was written by community college researchers. They introduced the idea that started Guided Pathways - that community colleges can improve the design of their systems to better support student in being successful and graduating. The American Association of Community Colleges started a national pathways project in 2016 and Washington State started a state-wide Guided Pathways project that same year. Renton Technical College started working on Guided Pathways in 2019.

## **What does this look like at Renton Technical College, and how does it compare to other schools you're aware of? Is there anything you've done or seen at RTC that you're especially proud of?**

RTC has chosen to focus on the process of how this work is done first. Another way to say this is to focus on the “how” before the what. The “how” we have addressed in a mental model of an architecture as the frameworks or foundations. This sets the foundation to how all the work is done. Another part of Guided Pathways, also part of the mental model of “architecture” are called the Pillars. The Pillars are what the work is - making it clear what the pathways or options are in the college, helping students choose their career and pathway, supporting students through graduation, and making sure that students are learning what they need to know. We are very proud of how engaged our faculty and staff have been in the process. We are also very proud of the important roles English teaching faculty have played.

## **How do guided pathways promote equity and inclusion?**

Any process, without thoughtful, reflection, cannot be successful at promoting equity. Therefore, Guided Pathways at RTC is striving to engage adjunct, ELA, and off-campus faculty, staff, and students to make sure their voices, not normally considered in institutional decision making, are heard. It is also striving to create collective agreements, through the frameworks, that ensure that in all public spaces where Guided Pathways planning is taking place, people have decided how to listen to each other and honor one another's vantage points based on the experiences they have had.

## **How will guided pathways be evaluated?**

Guided Pathways is really big and complex work. Therefore, it is really difficult to evaluate. Keeping that in mind, it is a grant, and most grants are evaluated by certain measurements that are indicators that the money that has been awarded is being utilized properly. Guided pathways is measured through what it called the Essential Practices which every college has to implement, develop a way to define how to do it for all students, and then scale it, making sure that every student of the college has an equal experience.

***How can instructional staff support guided pathways?***

Instructional staff are an important part of Guided Pathways. It involves everyone across the college's campus, including students, teachers, and everyone who works at the college. Instructors can get involved with the Guided Pathways movement at their college, helping out with the work that is being done and getting their students involved as well.

***What does guided pathways mean for both ELLs and their educators?***

For ELL students and ELL educators, Guided Pathways means thinking about a student's overall pathway and mapping out how ELL fits into their plans and future goals. Guided Pathways is about developing the systems at the college to support students in exploring their goals and planning out how to get there.

***Are there any specific implications for or connections to the K-12 environment?***

Guided Pathways is a Community and Technical College initiative. K-12, has a different management body that both funds and provides oversight, or management for initiatives. Therefore, K-12 will have its own version of creating pathways for students, such as the Road Map project.

***Do you have any thoughts or messages for other colleges, faculty, and/or students?***

Guided Pathways work strives to look at the college system as a whole. This can be overwhelming but is so important. As we improve on what we do in our own classrooms or for our own services, we can often run up again systemic problems. These problems are being addressed and explored, at least in part, by Guided Pathways.