PERI2 Qualitative Study | Final Report

Program Pathways Mapper's Value for Stakeholders and Students in the Transfer Network

June 2024

In recent decades, California institutions have demonstrated a strong commitment to fostering a transfer culture through a combination of strategic initiatives, dedicated counseling, and continuous efforts to optimize the transfer process. The transfer landscape between the California Community Colleges and four-year institutions, however, presents both ongoing opportunities and challenges for students seeking to advance their education.

"[The] number of students transferring from community colleges to four-year institutions remains low, hovering around 33% nationwide, and is particularly low in the state of California" *(Solanki, 2024, p. 2).*

To this end, it remains crucial to implement tools that not only address transfer and completion challenges directly but also **complement institutional leadership, align with educational objectives, and support equitable practices**–ensuring collaboration with existing initiatives rather than replacement of critical student services and programs.

The **Postsecondary Education Research and Implementation Institute** (PERI2) thus sought to evaluate the **Program Pathways Mapper** (PPM) as a promising and innovative solution to the transfer and completion deficit. The qualitative study was conducted with transfer stakeholders to assess how PPM addresses these persistent challenges, enhances transfer student success, and strengthens collaboration across California's public higher education systems–University of California (UC), California State University (CSU), and the California Community Colleges.

Objectives

1. Explore faculty and staff perceptions of transfer culture and transfer student support.
2. Illuminate how PPM streamlines transfer pathways and enhances faculty and staff roles in the process.
3. Identify how PPM fosters communication about the transfer process within and across institutions.

Testing Methods and Sample Overview

The evaluation focused on three institutions actively utilizing PPM: Bakersfield College, Merced College, and the University of California, Merced. Participants included 22 faculty and academic staff members, representing diverse disciplines such as STEM, social sciences, and humanities. The study sample consisted of:

- **Faculty members (64% of participants):** Professors and instructors directly engaged in teaching transfer-intending students
- **Academic staff (36% of participants):** Counselors, advisors, and administrators supporting transfer students
- **Institutional representation:** 73% of participants were from two-year colleges, while 27% were from UC Merced

Findings

1. **Faculty and Staff Perceptions of Institutional Transfer Culture and Support**

   The study revealed that participating community colleges demonstrate a strong commitment to fostering transfer culture through initiatives such as transfer workshops, dedicated counseling, and structured pathways. Faculty and counselors expressed that tools like the PPM–whether used as a central advising tool or a supplemental resource– provide clarity and transparency, empowering students to navigate the transfer process with confidence. Counselors noted: The PPM is a critical step forward in making transfer pathways more accessible and less overwhelming for students.

   However, the findings also highlighted a need for more robust alignment between two-year and four-year institutions. While the PPM supports collaboration by providing simplified, visual pathways with two-year and four-year maps, variations in terminology and processes between institutions can still create challenges for students transitioning to universities.

2. **The PPM's Role in Streamlining Transfer Pathways**

   The PPM tool has been praised for its ability to demystify transfer requirements through a visually intuitive interface that integrates color coding and course mapping. Participants noted its utility as a resource accessible to students 24/7, offering guidance even when in-person counseling is not available. Participants agreed: For students who can't always access a councelor, the PPM acts as a bridge, helping them make informed choices about courses and transfer requirements.

   Faculty and staff also acknowledged the PPM's potential to expand student awareness of transfer opportunities, especially to institutions they might not have considered, such as UCs. However, some participants emphasized that the tool works best when paired with personalized guidance from counselors, as it currently provides general overviews rather than fully individualized pathways.

3. **Strengthening Communications Within and Across Institutions**

   The PPM's development included collaborative intersegmental meetings, which opened up valuable lines of communication between faculty and staff at community colleges and four-year institutions. These convenings encouraged cross-institutional dialogue, aligning curriculum and transfer pathways. One participant noted:

   "It felt really valuable for me, and kind of eye-opening to see. What struck me is …when you bring people together like that, there's agreement that we really all want the same thing–good outcomes for our students"
   (Solanki, 2024, p. 15)

   That said, the findings underscored the need for greater participation from four year institution representatives to enhance the tool's relevance and ensure alignment with their requirements.

Perception of PPM

Participants widely praised the PPM for its user-friendly interface, streamlined course maps, and its ability to make the transfer process more transparent. Its accessibility as a publicly-available tool was noted as particularly beneficial, not only for students and post-secondary stakeholders but also for high school counselors and the parents who guide and support these students. Some faculty even noted how the PPM is an excellent recruitment tool for four-year institutions.

Despite its strengths, some participants suggested improvements, such as adding more customized pathways to address unique student circumstances and enhancing the career information section with diverse job options and updated salary data.

Overall, participants overwhelmingly agreed that the PPM complements, rather than replaces, the essential role of academic counseling.

Why Adopt the PPM?

The PPM stands as an astute solution for improving transfer outcomes across California. By adopting this tool, institutions can:

- **Streamline pathways:** Simplify the transfer process, helping students **save time and money** while achieving their goals
- **Promote equity:** Support diverse student populations by providing **transparent and accessible pathways** to four-year degrees
- **Foster collaboration:** Enhance partnerships between community colleges and universities, aligning transfer requirements and maps for **greater student success and workforce development**

How to Get Started

1. **Fill out the PPM** Interest Form to contact the PPM team, request a demo or get more information
2. **Meet with the PPM team** to discuss and reach an onboarding agreement
3. **Attend a Kickoff meeting** to review the onboarding process
4. **Conduct onboarding**, including fulfilling curriculum templates, gathering school data, and configuring the PPM tool
5. **Go live** and initiate schoolwide PPM implementation

For any questions or interested in scheduling a demo, please feel free to contact the PPM support team at PPM-support@foundationccc.org.

Eslami, M., Lopez-Salgado, X., Rozhenkova, V, Solanki, S. (2024). *California Community Colleges Program Pathway Mapper (CCC PPM) Qualitative Study Final Report*. Postsecondary Education Research & Implementation Institute.