Putting SSIPP into Practice at Scale:

Questions to Ask as You Build Campus Systems for Holistic Student Support

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Introduction

As colleges rethink student support structures to increase equitable outcomes, "SSIPP" design principles offer a framework for developing a holistic approach at scale (see Figure 1).[1] Implementing "SSIPP-y"—**strategic, sustained, integrated, proactive, personalized**—support can ensure each student receives the information, assistance, and encouragement they need, when they need it, across their entire community college journey.

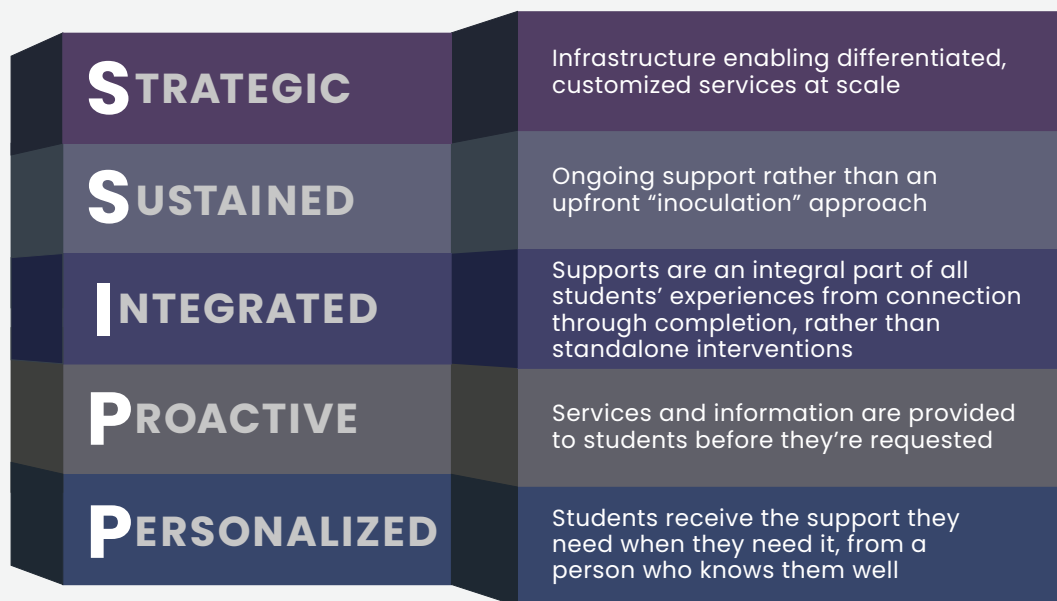This tool offers an introduction to the SSIPP framework, providing:

- A definition of each principle outlining its key characteristics

- Snapshots of these principles in practice at three colleges

- Guiding questions to assess or design your own support models in line with the framework

As you consider your current and planned systems, **this tool can help you identify which aspects of your support structures already align with the framework and which ones need further development.** Involving a diverse swath of student services staff and faculty, instructional faculty, and students in your reflection and discussion process can help your college create a more comprehensive and robust "SSIPP" ecosystem. This tool may be particularly useful for academic and student affairs leaders involved in guided pathways, advising, or student services redesign; departmental or program directors seeking to improve internal processes; and cross-functional college design teams wanting to align plans with best practices research.

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The SSIPP Framework Defined

The SSIPP framework (Figure 1) outlines the design principles or "building blocks" that can guide scaled support systems and approaches. The framework enables campuses to take an equity-minded[2] approach to student supports at scale, helping ensure that all students, especially those from disproportionately impacted groups (e.g., students of color; first-generation college-goers; parents and other caregivers; veterans; foster youth; people with disabilities; individuals with different sexual identities and gender orientations or expressions; students with low incomes) receive personalized, culturally-responsive support.

Figure 1: SSIPP Design Principles

STRATEGIC	Infrastructure enabling differentiated, customized services at scale
SUSTAINED	Ongoing support rather than an upfront "inoculation" approach
INTEGRATED	Supports are an integral part of all students' experiences from connection through completion, rather than standalone interventions
PROACTIVE	Services and information are provided to students before they're requested
PERSONALIZED	Students receive the support they need when they need it, from a person who knows them well

STRATEGIC

This principle encompasses the ways that the institution rethinks workflows and human resources to create an enabling architecture that supports the other four design principles.[3] The infrastructure can include communications processes and protocols, technology, data usage, hiring practices, triaging practices, and professional development activities. Notably, developing systems that allow for differentiated support to students based on their level of need means campuses can maximize staff, time, and resource capacity—and thereby facilitate scale while addressing the needs of different student populations. These systems may adapt pre-existing practices within equity programs (e.g., California's Extended Opportunities Programs and Services[4] (EOPS), Umoja Community,[5] and Puente Project)[6] to build on their successes at larger scale.

Key characteristics include:[7]

- Clear, coordinated communications across functions, departments, and staff, and with students

- Protocols and cadences to streamline work, student-facing engagement, and tailoring of support to students with different levels of need

- Cross-training of college personnel and redeployment of staff time

- "Refer-out" processes so instructional faculty, counselors and counseling faculty, and front-line staff know when and how to send students to other people, programs, or offices; those receiving students know what is needed and how to close the loop

- Use of data and technology for warnings, batch emailing, student differentiation, and case management, as well as streamlined student self-service opportunities and information

- Equity-minded approaches and hiring practices to ensure that scale does not mean a loss of attention to the unique backgrounds, lived experiences, and needs of racially-minoritized and poverty-impacted students

SUSTAINED

Students experience intentional, equity-minded support throughout their educational trajectories, from recruitment through completion and advancement. Students often receive a firehose of information upon entry—the majority of which might not be immediately relevant—and find themselves uncertain what to do or where to go for help just a semester or two into their journey. Further, students' lives and circumstances understandably evolve over time. Sustained support ensures that each student has structured access to counseling, advising,

and basic needs assistance across their entire collegiate careers in order to meet their changing needs.

Key characteristics include:

- Intentional student engagement past the first semester
- Reintroduction of resources at key touchpoints and milestones
- Ongoing monitoring of student progress
- Regular connection and community building among students, faculty, and staff
- Focused support as students reach goal completion and transition to additional higher education and the workplace

INTEGRATED

Students are connected to appropriate resources as a regular part of their journey such that customized supports are part of every students' experience, rather than voluntary or requiring students to seek them out on their own. Moreover, student supports are connected to one another and students' educational journeys, such that they are not siloed or decontextualized. This approach makes support unavoidable for students and helps normalize student use; reduces the likelihood that disproportionately impacted students fall through the cracks; and ensures that interconnected facets of education (e.g. career, academic, and racial identity) are experienced as such by students.

Key characteristics include:

- Connected academic, career, and non-academic support (holistic support)
- Mandatory student success courses and programming focused on the connections between career exploration, college planning, and postsecondary success skills
- Incorporating information on academic and nonacademic supports into course syllabi and learning management systems (e.g., Canvas, Blackboard)
- Integrating visits to tutoring, advising, or other supports into the course curriculum of key gateway or introductory courses
- Universal design whereby each student takes part in key activities such as Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion, scholarship applications, or benefits screenings as part of class or advising protocols

PROACTIVE

Students get what they need to maintain momentum toward their goals and receive support before they fall too far off path. Counselors, advisors, faculty, and other front-line staff reach out to students on a regular basis to see how they are doing, offer encouragement and advice, connect them to resources and services, and help strategize when they encounter challenges.

Key characteristics include:

- Mechanisms for monitoring students prior to mid-term or end-of-term grades and flagging those in need of assistance, especially in courses with high drop/fail/withdrawal rates

- Structures, systems, and incentives to ensure that instructional faculty engage in early alert systems and other forms of proactive engagement with students and student services staff

- Mechanisms for identifying students doing well in order to celebrate their success and connect them to opportunities (e.g., scholarships, internships, undergraduate research)

- Systems for reaching out to students, connecting them to resources to address their needs and affinity groups to build connectedness, and closing the loop

- Development of trusting relationships so students will respond to connection and outreach when they begin to experience challenges and/ or disengage from the college

- Just-in-time communication

PERSONALIZED

Students receive equity-minded support from someone who knows them well and can tailor this support to their aspirations, needs, and identities. Students encounter minimal "hand offs" so that they can build relationships with one or two people over time, rather than meeting with new staff and faculty each time they need assistance and reiterating their story and experience. Hand-offs that do occur are "warm," meaning students are guided to the next office and introduced to someone there, and personnel are provided enough context to pick up the interaction where the previous staff member left off.

Key characteristics include:

- A student-facing "point person" who is both known to the student and who knows them

- Minimal and warm hand-offs between people, programs, and offices
- Intentional connections across functional areas and among instructional and student services staff, to support effective hand-offs
- Mechanisms to build relationships and trust early and over time, enabling meaningful one-on-one engagement
- Equity-minded customization of support along the general path so that students get what they need, when they need it

The SSIPP design principles grew out of research identifying common features of support programs that had demonstrable impact on student success.[8] Many of these programs explicitly focused on low-income, racially minoritized, and/or first-generation students. However, most were small in scale, and so while efficacious for those enrolled, they were unable to serve large numbers of eligible students. In turn, the SSIPP framework was developed as a way to take what we learned from these programs and bring their approaches to larger numbers, while being attentive to the resource and cultural constraints faced by most community colleges. These design principles also align with what students themselves say they need to achieve their goals through large studies like the Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges' Student Support (Re)defined project[9] and the Community College Survey of Student Engagement.[10]

Ultimately, the framework recommends a strategic, streamlined system that is inclusive of academic and non-academic supports; personal rather than transactional; coordinated rather than chaotic; and culturally-responsive for all, not only those in enrolled in equity and affinity programs such as EOPS, TRIO,[11] Puente, and Umoja. It connects to and supplements—not replaces—such programming. In doing so, it seeks to broaden access to key aspects of these successful approaches so that those who are not eligible or who cannot participate due to college resource limitations also get sustained, tailored support. If enacted at scale, the above principles ensure that each student believes individuals across all parts and levels of the college are invested in their success and receives structured, long-term support from a person who knows them and meets their individual needs.

The SSIPP Framework in Practice

The beauty of design principles is that they allow for customization. There is no one way to enact the SSIPP framework, which means it can be adapted to individual campus cultures and constraints (see Figure 2 for examples of strategies to address each design principle). Certainly, SSIPP is a work in progress on all campuses working to embrace this framework, and most campuses are activating some principles more fully than others. Transforming a campus from the standard ad hoc support approach to one aligned with SSIPP at scale typically takes years and requires iteration over time—a process made further complex by the interconnectedness of the principles.

Figure 2: SSIPP as a Toolbox of Approaches

STRATEGIC — Use of analytics to curate outreach; use of group advising and technology for less-nuanced tasks; intake triage

SUSTAINED — Assigned advisors; long-term coaches

INTEGRATED — Shared case notes or student profiles; connections between offices

PROACTIVE — Early alert systems; advisors empowered to reach out to students

PERSONALIZED — Assigned or embedded advisors; coaches; shared case notes

The following snapshots describe how three campuses are approaching long-term student support redesign, highlighting the SSIPP principles they are currently developing and the ways they reinforce one another.

SIERRA COLLEGE (CA)

Over the past three years, Sierra has established success teams to support each of the college's nine Interest Areas (metamajors). This model leverages and builds on the successful work of Sierra's equity-focused programs. During the onboarding process, students engage in career exploration activities that help them pick an Interest Area if they are not yet ready to select a major. Additionally, eligible students are introduced to a variety of equity-focused support programs (e.g., TRIO, EOPS) through orientation, widening their awareness of these opportunities and ensuring all students are engaged with either special support programming or supports in their Interest Area, depending on their identity and needs. Once they select an Interest Area or support program, students are connected to their Success Team (both support programs and Interest Area supports take a team approach). Success Teams are comprised of a counseling faculty member and a support specialist, who then provide their students with academic, career, and personal counseling assistance for their duration at the college. Success Team members build relationships with their caseload, providing assistance and support if and where needed when students fall off path. Appropriate team members respond to flags raised by faculty and other staff regarding academic and non-academic concerns. In addition to flags, staff meet the unique needs of their students through the relationships that are built over students' educational journey and by connecting them to additional supports, such as emergency aid or tutoring.

strategic, sustained, integrated, proactive

AMERICAN RIVER COLLEGE (CA)

HomeBase Pathway Communities (metamajors) facilitate intensive support across students' time at American River. All students are assigned a team within their HomeBase Pathway Community, which serves as their support from entry to completion. Students have access to a counselor, coach, faculty liaison, and peer mentor, all of whom work together to provide transactional, relational, and holistic support. HomeBase Pathway Communities also provide videos on practical topics such as course registration, community-building activities, and

dedicated physical space on campus. The teams case manage their students to provide proactive assistance and connections to other offices and support options, faculty, and peers. HomeBase Pathway Communities seek to create an all-encompassing feeling of connection, belonging, and care that helps students feel like they have a team of college personnel invested in their success. Students stay with these communities throughout their entire time at the college. Campus administrators have worked to ensure that, though they are at scale and are for all students, HomeBase Pathway Communities address the needs of poverty-impacted, racially minoritized, or otherwise structurally disadvantaged students by infusing equity strategies into their activities—thinking carefully about who is represented, how activities are framed, and the needs they meet. The college is also providing all HomeBase faculty and staff with training in equity-minded pedagogies and culturally-minded strategies.

strategic, sustained, proactive, personalized

INDIAN RIVER STATE COLLEGE (FL)

Indian River has spent over 10 years iterating and refining their student support system. The college uses "benchmark advising" where students are assigned professional advisors upon matriculation, with whom they then meet at regular intervals (e.g., earning 50% of required credits) to discuss academic planning, career goals, transfer, and academic challenges—all the way through to completion. Each meeting has a focus (e.g. "get to know you," "career exploration") as well as general advising content. Students' assigned advisors are their key point person, and the sustained relationship enables advisors to personalize support. At the same time, caseloads are strategically managed so advisors focus on a subset of their assigned student group at any given time, rather than trying to register every student, every semester. Advisors also use templates to focus communications in a streamlined manner, and a retention management system for early alerts and proactive outreach to students in need of support between benchmark meetings. Faculty connect with this system by raising early alert flags and supporting the development of standard academic plans for their programs of study.

strategic, sustained, integrated, proactive, personalized

SSIPP Support on Your Campus

The questions below provide a starting point for (1) reflecting on how students experience your support ecosystem, and (2) examining the ways that your institutional structures enable you to intentionally help students get on an academic path and remain on it until they complete. Rather than an exhaustive checklist or rubric, these prompts can help you start assessing the degree to which your campus systems align with the SSIPP principles. In the spirit of continuous improvement, we hope that they help you pinpoint next steps and give you ideas for iteration.

STRATEGIC

- To what extent have you articulated an approach for guiding each student along their entire educational pathway, and the role that student services staff, counselors, counseling faculty, and instructional faculty play within this approach?
  - What protocols and practices do you provide to guide interactions with students and define critical activities across key milestones?
  - How are these protocols and practices communicated to all stakeholders?
  - What percentage of all faculty and staff understand and can articulate how the student support ecosystem is structured?

- How do you use technology to streamline communication, target interventions, and engage with students around their needs?

- How do you systematically segment students so that you can address their needs, interests, affinity groups, and identities?

- How do your practices and procedures guide the depth of engagement required to meet each student's needs? For example, how do you know which students need light-touch support and which need deeper engagement?

- How do you hire, train, and deploy staff who understand and seek to operationalize personalized, proactive, and equity-minded holistic support?

SUSTAINED

- How much of your support efforts are focused on first-semester students, first-year students, probationary, continuing students, and students close to completion, transfer, and/or workforce entry?

- How many individuals are students "handed off" to during their educational journey?
    - How many of these hand-offs are "warm"—meaning they are structured, communicated, and personalized—and how many are "bounces," meaning students are sent to another office without an introduction or clear set of instructions?
- Who keeps an eye on each student throughout their educational journey? Does every student have a person and/or team monitoring them and their progress?
- How does the college help build community between students and their peers, members of similar affinity groups, faculty, and student support professionals in an ongoing way?
- In what ways is student feedback solicited, acted upon, and communicated back to the students to feel a greater sense of citizenship within the college community?

INTEGRATED

- When and where do students receive the opportunity to explore the relationship between their career and academic goals?
- In what ways and how do you make sure that programs, services, and co-curricular activities are inescapable in order to ensure equitable access? To what extent are supports opt-in rather than opt-out?
    - How are students regularly screened for and connected to nonacademic supports throughout their college journey, including basic needs and financial stability services?
    - How do classroom activities help students learn about supports, resources, and co-curricular opportunities?
- How are equity programs (e.g. EOPS, Umoja, Puente) connected to broader support services?
    - How are non-equity program support staff (e.g. those not working in equity programs) supported in providing culturally-responsive, equity-minded supports to the students with whom they work?
- How does the campus community perceive the provision of sustained student support—as a program or an approach?

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PROACTIVE

- What prompts you to reach out to students?
  - What data or personal knowledge do you leverage?
  - How do you know if a student is off path or struggling in a course? What happens once this is discovered?
  - How do you celebrate when a student reaches key milestones?

- To what extent do students receive case management, through which their progress is monitored and they receive timely, customized intervention as necessary?
  - Who receives case management?

- How often do college faculty and staff explore underlying causes for a student's challenge in order to connect them to additional resources that could prevent further issues down the line (e.g. connections to food assistance or federal benefits)?

- What is the balance between student-initiated and support staff-initiated contact on your campus?

PERSONALIZED

- How does your college structure relationships between students and one or two key support staff, starting early in their college experience and fostering these relationships over time?

- How would the average student describe your system?

- How likely are students to indicate that they feel known, valued, and supported individually irrespective of their lived experience?

- If you asked, would students be able to name "their person" or know where to go for help?

- How likely are students to indicate that support staff understand and are able to recognize and address the needs of students with varying identities?
  - How are counselors/advisors, staff, and faculty trained and supported to tailor their student supports to individual needs, including racially minoritized, poverty-impacted, and first-generation students?

Acknowledgments

Endnotes

1. The Community College Research Center originally identified a version of these evidence-based design principles in 2013. The principles have evolved with additional examination of holistic student support through guided pathways development and other institutional transformation efforts.

2. For the purposes of this resource, we point to the University of Southern California Center for Urban Education definition for "equity-mindedness," which emphasizes the institutional and individual acknowledgment that higher education policies and practices were not designed for racial equity, and thus need to be redesigned. For more information, visit https://cue.usc.edu/about/equity/equity-mindedness/.

3. Note that this principle is usually listed second, but we opted to list it first given its role as an enabler of the others. For example, developing strategic triage protocols enables proactive and personalized outreach.

4. https://www.cccco.edu/About-Us/Chancellors-Office/Divisions/Educational-Services-and-Support/Student-Service/What-we-do/Extended-Opportunity-Programs-and-Services

5. https://umojacommunity.org/

6. https://www.cccco.edu/About-Us/Chancellors-Office/Divisions/Educational-Services-and-Support/What-we-do/Curriculum-and-Instruction-Unit/Puente-Project

7. Note that throughout, examples are not exhaustive.

8. Karp, M.M. (2011)

9. www.rpgroup.org/Student-Support

10. https://cccse.org/publications-resources/reports

11. https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/trio/index.html