

# PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR THE “HOW” OF STUDENT SUCCESS TEAMS

## #5 IN THE *BREAKING IT ALL DOWN* SERIES

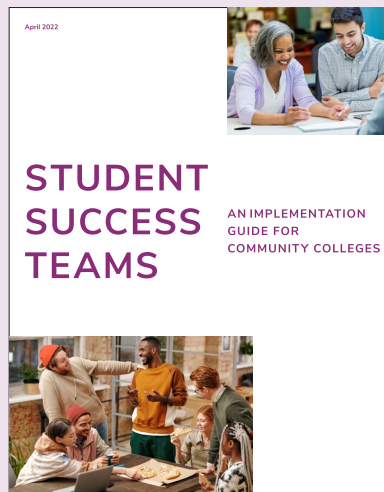
This is a companion to [Student Success Teams: An Implementation Guide for Community Colleges](#), which is based on over 80 interviews at nine colleges in three states.

This document draws on examples and composites from our original dataset to illustrate important considerations related to SST design.

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# THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING CONTINUUM

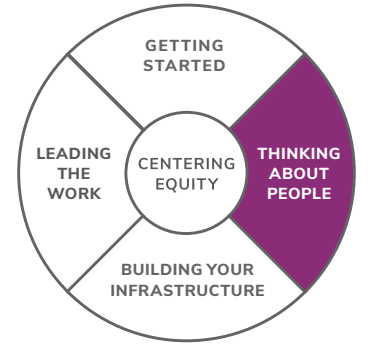
The transition to SSTs requires practitioners to engage in new workflows, connect with each other in different ways, and take on revised responsibilities. Professional learning structures can support individuals as they strive to meet the new expectations created by SSTs.<sup>1</sup> Importantly, the target audience and content of professional learning shifts over time. During the reflection and design planning phases, sessions for the broader college audience focus on the “why” of SSTs (e.g., case-making), often supported by external partners. Internally-led sessions for team members follow during implementation planning and launch, with a focus on the “how” of SSTs. Importantly, **professional learning needs to be a constant factor that evolves over time** as the nature and work of the team evolve.

In our conversations with colleges, SST members shared an abundance of professional learning opportunities related to the “why” of SSTs but expressed a **profound gap and thirst for knowledge for professional learning related to the “how.”** One college’s team shared that they had been marketed to students as experts, but the newness of the structure, the breadth of the metamajor served by the SST, and the lack of training led team members to feel far from expert. They noted: “We’re helping students, but we’re confused ourselves. There’s quite a learning curve.”

This document provides an overview of the possible content areas for professional learning for the “how,” shares delivery mechanisms used by the colleges in our study to support it, and provides a glimpse of what this looks like in action.

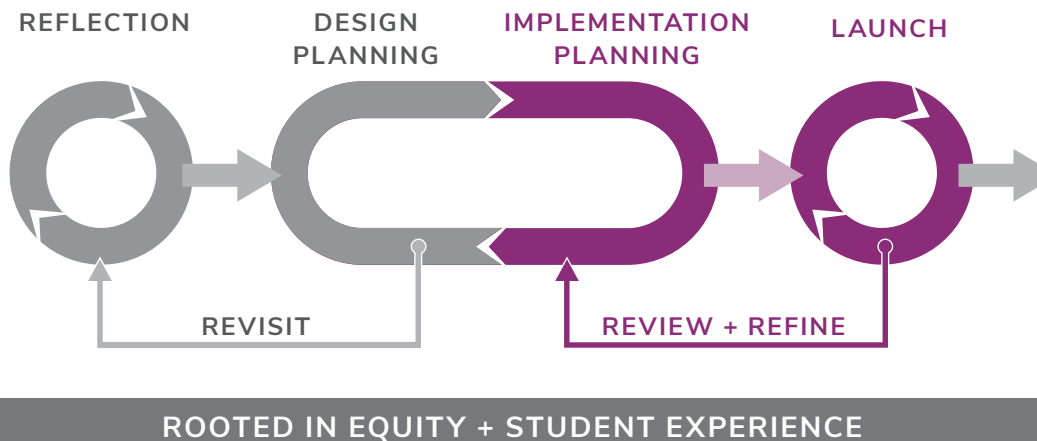
Learning for the “how” entails three overarching concepts:

- **Shifting mindsets** from advising-as-registration to advising-as-shepherding-students-to-completion.
- **Building skills** related to revised roles, workflows, and technology.
- **Working cross-functionally** through understanding the functions and professional scopes of other departments and members of the team.



<sup>1</sup> See our [Implementation Guide](#) (p. 27-28) for additional insight on using professional learning to ensure people can be successful SST members.

## Learning for the “How”: You Are Here



# DEVELOPING LEARNING FOR THE “HOW”

The three categories below provide examples of the types of professional learning for the “how” that we heard about in our interviews. In addition to these ideas, **remember to ask those who know what they need best — the team members themselves!** Use their answers to build learning opportunities to support the transition to the SST structure.

## Shifting Mindsets

To support the shift from advising-as-registration to advising-as-shepherding-students-to-completion, consider:

**Equity-forward learning:** To interrogate and understand how policies, practices, and personnel-student interactions can elevate or hinder success for key groups of students.

**Holistic Student Support learning:** To understand the ways in which students’ needs beyond the classroom play a role in their ability to be effective learners, and to identify ways the college can take an integrated approach to supporting students’ academic, social, personal, financial, and professional goals and needs.

**Standard-of-care learning:** To collaboratively understand the student experience and define what the roles and team structure mean to team members, what success would look like, and brainstorm strategies for enacting new expectations.

## Building Skills

To support revised roles, workflows, and technology, consider:

**Role-driven learning:** To dive into what SST roles look like in action beyond the job description, and understand how to balance and evolve core responsibilities with responsibilities on the team.

**Workflow-driven learning:** To brainstorm, create, and refine new workflows that allow the team to best support students, and move beyond changing structures towards changing processes.

**Technology-driven learning:** To learn new technology systems, ensure they work in the ways needed by team members, work out kinks in the system, and provide supported roll-out and utilization assistance.

## Working Cross-Functionally

To support understanding the functions and professional scopes of other departments and team members, consider:

**Relationship building:** To nurture the “team” aspect of SSTs and the new working relationships between team members, across teams, and with the larger college community.

**Knowledge development:** To equip team members to be key knowledge brokers and connections to resources for their student cohort, through both cross-functional engagement and structured knowledge sharing.

**Centering students:** To focus on a common purpose in breaking down silos, building bridges, and collaborating across the proverbial aisle.

# DELIVERING LEARNING FOR THE “HOW”

In addition to identifying content areas to address in professional learning for the “how,” colleges discussed the need to identify appropriate mechanisms for delivering the professional learning. As mentioned earlier, **internal structures are particularly well-positioned to nurture a culture of learning and sustain “learning for the how.”** Internal structures are those created and managed by the college that leverage existing or re-imagined time and space — and importantly, internal expertise.

Our interviewees shared strategies that were anchored in the following areas:

## Centering Equity

- Hosting anti-racism training to explore systemic barriers to student success
- Creating equity coaches to support teams and departments in their use of disaggregated data
- Leveraging Title V funds for cultural relevance trainings
- Creating brave spaces within team meetings to discuss current events and share equity-forward learning opportunities

## Dedicating Time

- Holding SST orientation in August to onboard teams
- Dedicating half of each SST meeting to professional learning
- Designating collaboration and learning time in adjunct<sup>1</sup> and full-time counselor schedules
- Hosting semesterly campus-wide professional development days
- Offering intensive summer institutes

## Encouraging Peer-to-Peer Learning

- Coordinating presentations by different departments
- Developing online repositories of information and resources
- Creating a phone-a-friend culture
- Hosting roundtables, workshops, and/or peer-share opportunities
- Facilitating site visits to other colleges, or via Zoom

## Partnering with Campus Stakeholders

- Holding a student panel to learn about their experiences, and identify strengths and areas of improvement for the SST approach
- Partnering with the Center for Teaching and Learning to host faculty workshops
- Working with leadership, human resources and collective bargaining to maximize participation

<sup>1</sup> Many colleges rely on adjunct counselors and advisors to expand the capacity of their teams. Finding time and space to develop their expertise is critical but many adjunct interviewees reported only informal opportunities to meet their professional learning needs. They shared challenges navigating processes across different colleges, trying to review online training resources on their own time, and/or not having protected time in their schedules to attend important SST meetings and PD opportunities. Integrating adjuncts into professional learning structures would greatly benefit both them and the students they serve.

# PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Throughout their transition to SSTs, Southern California CC has leveraged internal expertise to offer professional learning for the “how” and is continuing to evolve the way they support SST members.

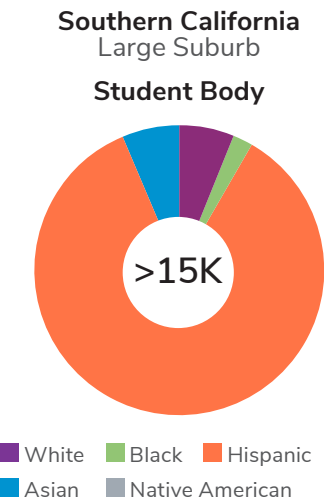
## Southern California CC

Early in the design process, Southern California CC dedicated time to an all-college meeting focused on identifying core equity-forward holistic support structures and practices. At the meeting, existing cohort-based equity programs, student support offices, and student services staff and faculty met to center equity and encourage peer-to-peer learning via a gallery walk. Equity program personnel shared how they provide culturally relevant and personalized support to students in their cohorts, which allowed activity participants to understand approaches to equity and team-based standards of care. Cross-functional groups of participants also worked to develop draft Student Success Team approaches, and their ideas were later integrated into the college’s final SST design.

Now that SSTs are launched, the college dedicates time in August to hold an orientation to onboard SST members. Experienced SST members use an “SST roles document” to support a presentation about logistics and role-specific responsibilities. Presentations and printed resources center the student experience, highlighting that SSTs are intended to provide a community of support and sense of belonging for students by fostering relationships, engaging students, and facilitating their progress towards completion. By its nature, orientation creates time and space for SST members to begin building relationships with each other.

The college leans on a variety of other strategies to foster learning for “how” in day-to-day work. For example, Student Success Coaches dedicate time weekly, even if just for thirty minutes, for peer-to-peer learning around shared goals, ideas, and cross-SST connections. In addition, the lead dean developed agenda templates and worksheets for other deans to use during SST meetings, thereby providing an important resource to support the new workflows created by SSTs. Several interviewees noted that, though these concrete resources are much appreciated, team members at all levels could benefit from additional support to help them translate ideas “on paper” into action. This was a common theme across colleges in our study.

Thus, Southern California CC continues to reflect on and evolve their approach to building cross-SST learning and cross-functional knowledge. SST leaders are identifying ways to formalize additional peer learning opportunities across departments and divisions. They are also still working to find the “sweet spot” of broader cross-SST sharing to build bridges between SSTs in order to learn and grow from what is (and isn’t) working. They currently meet on an “as needed” basis, though some hope to see this evolve into a more regular meeting schedule.



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This project was generously funded by The College Futures Foundation.

Want to learn more? Visit [www.phasetwoadvisory.com/sst-guide](http://www.phasetwoadvisory.com/sst-guide)

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