College, On Purpose 2.0

The updated guide to implementing the Purpose First strategy—a powerful approach to driving success in college and career by connecting students with their purpose in higher education.

COMPLETE COLLEGE AMERICA

PURPOSE FIRST

The barriers to college completion are complex and intertwined. No one educator, department, institution, or state can solve them. Without a simultaneous and intersectional approach, those barriers will continue to rob all of us—educators, advocates, and students alike—of the life-changing benefits of a complete college journey.

Complete College America (CCA) builds movements for scaled change and transforms institutions. Since its founding in 2009, CCA has paired bold, innovative thinking with practical actions that colleges and policymakers can implement across every level of higher education. CCA's work centers on researching and testing education reforms, providing coaching and support, and advocating for change. Across these areas, CCA uses data to identify barriers and design successful strategies; aligns policy, perspective, and practice so complex systems operate effectively; connects experts to amplify their insights; and builds shared accountability. The organization is at the center of the broad CCA Alliance, which is driving change that works for every leader, every campus, and every system.

COMPLETE COLLEGE AMERICA

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Table of Contents

3 Foreword

5 I. Introduction To Purpose First 2.0

6 Why Purpose *Still* Matters

8 A Renewed Vision For Purpose First

11 Summary Of Key Shifts

12 II. The Purpose First 2.0 Experience

13 Student Experience Overview

17 III. Implementation Guide

31 Institutional Culture & Strategy

32 Technology & Implementation Considerations

33 Measuring Progress

35 IV. Responding To Common Questions

37 V. Partners & Acknowledgements

39 Appendix

39 Institutional Policy Foundations for Purpose First Implementation

44 Research Links

45 Implementation Guide by Department/ Function

Foreword

From policymakers to practitioners to pundits, there is a growing narrative that colleges and universities are in irreversible decline. Critics are questioning the economic value of earning a degree, arguing that rising costs and stagnant wages make the payoff of a postsecondary education lower than it had been for previous generations. Add to this chorus the challenges brought on by a global pandemic, the politicization of higher education, and shifts in expectations around workplace norms, and you might be tempted to think that "going to college" has lost the clarity of purpose it once had.

So, what does a vision for college look like in 2025—and beyond?

At Complete College America, we believe postsecondary education *empowers students to discover and realize their own* ***purpose***. Since our first report on the role of purpose in student success, we have deepened our conviction that a clear sense of purpose is a necessary precursor to a student deriving value from their college experience. This conviction is shared by a growing number of institutional leaders, faculty, and staff who are doing more to help students clearly define how their college experience will further their personal, professional, economic, and civic goals.

The critics' concerns are not without merit. Our sector faces real challenges that we must address to ensure we live up to our mission. Across the country, leaders and practitioners are hard at work making college more affordable, creating innovative new approaches to teaching and learning, removing barriers that inhibit student success, and better preparing students for the demands of a rapidly changing world. These efforts align with a growing recognition that credentials must not only be attainable, but also lead to real value—measured in increased wages, upward mobility, and meaningful contributions to the workforce and society.

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Perhaps the most important shift taking place is the renewed focus on the individual student and a whatever-it-takes approach to ensuring their academic and career success. Colleges and universities are doing away with a "one-size-fits-most" model and replacing it with clearer pathways to degrees and credentials, greater levels of advising and support, stronger connections to communities and employers, and tech-enabled programs that personalize the college experience. This individualized approach also supports the development of broad competencies—ethical reasoning, critical thinking, and interdisciplinary insight—that prepare students not just for their first job, but for a lifetime of learning and leadership in a world transformed by AI and accelerating change.

Purpose must be at the center of each of these reforms. We believe that a deeper focus on helping students define their "why" means institutions are better able to tune every aspect of the experience towards helping students realize their goals. Students at Purpose First institutions report greater clarity and confidence, enabling them to persist through challenges and increasing the likelihood that they will not only earn more but also contribute more to their families, their communities, and society in general. In this way, Purpose First complements national efforts to build a more equitable and effective learning system—one where credentials are stepping stones to prosperity, and where states continue to serve as engines of scalable change.

Our hope is that this work will inspire a wave of purpose-focused initiatives at institutions across the country. In addition to helping more students achieve their goals, purpose has the potential to re-center the role of higher education as a valuable investment in the future of society.

— Complete College America

I. Introduction To Purpose First 2.0

Why Purpose *Still* Matters

Our first report on this topic – *College, On Purpose* – made the case that "beginning college with a clear sense of purpose is a critical step to ensuring an investment in higher education pays personal and financial dividends for a lifetime." At the time of the report, we were working with members of the CCA Alliance to address three connected challenges that gave us insight into the need for more clarity of purpose earlier in the college journey.

- **The Challenge of Choosing**: Students often select a major without fully understanding how it aligns with their interests, skills, and future goals, leading to a mismatch between their chosen field of study and desired outcomes. The choice can be overwhelming, and students often receive limited support to make an informed decision. More than half of students reported primarily relying on advice from informal social networks to help them choose a major.[1] While well-intentioned, this guidance can reflect personal biases or rely on outdated and incomplete information. Research indicates that an overabundance of options can lead to decision paralysis, poor choices, and dissatisfaction, even with seemingly positive outcomes.[2] In fact, recent data show that over one-third of U.S. college graduates would choose a different major if given the chance;[3] another poll has the number as high as 61%.[4]

- **Time Is the Enemy:**[5] When students change majors or take unnecessary courses before settling on a path, they often accumulate excess credits, which extends their time to degree completion. Research shows that prolonged time to graduation is linked to lower overall completion rates, with students dropping out after earning some college credit but not a degree or credential of value.

  For those who do manage to graduate, the additional time and costs can delay their ability to establish a stable financial foundation. Adding just one more year to earn a 4-year degree costs nearly $130,000 in lost income and retirement savings on average.[6]

- **College-Career Mismatch:** In 2018, a Gallup-Strada poll reported that 58% of students said getting a good job was their primary motivation for pursuing a postsecondary degree or credential. Around the same time, the Wall Street Journal reported that 43% of college graduates were underemployed in their first job; that number had risen to 52% by 2024.[7] There is also a growing mismatch between degrees and credentials with available jobs, especially in certain regions. According to Georgetown's Center for Education & the Workforce, "more than one quarter of middle-skills credentials (certificates and associate's degrees) are conferred in programs of study that do not have a direct occupational match."[8]

We summed it up this way in the original report: **"Too many students were spending too much time and money on a degree that doesn't align with their career aspirations or earning potential later in life."**

1 Gallup-Strada Education Network, 2017
2 Schwartz, 2004
3 U.S. Federal Reserve, 2022
4 BestColleges/YouGov
5 For more on this topic, see CCA's first-ever report, *Time Is The Enemy*. This report, now more than 10 years old, remains a clear description of the negative impact of "time to degree" on student outcomes.
6 Washington Post/NerdWallet, 2016
7 Burning Glass Institute/Strada Education Foundation, 2024
8 Georgetown CEW, 2024

Purpose First: The Missing Link

Complete College America (CCA) developed the Purpose First strategy as a way of connecting career choice to emerging reforms like meta-majors and guided pathways. Based on more than a decade of work, we knew that early momentum is key to a student's success. Our Momentum Pathway strategy defined critical first-year milestones such as earning 30 credit hours, completing essential math and English gateway courses, and choosing a meta-major.

But the meta-major choice is challenging without the right guidance. **Purpose First defines an intentional program for helping students make an informed choice by redesigning the recruiting, onboarding, admissions and first-year experiences – empowering students to identify their interests, explore possible careers, and understand important job market data relevant to their financial goals.**

Since we first released the report in 2019, we've seen a growing movement of colleges across the country committed to helping students define their purpose sooner and with more clarity. Our Purpose First coalition now includes more than 40 institutions in five Alliance states working on innovative new approaches that span the full student experience. Their work has deepened our belief in the important role institutions play in guiding students to discover and realize their purpose. This support is a powerful lever for closing the gap between the expectations and reality of an investment in college.

We also think we've just scratched the surface. Inspired by the outcomes we've seen and the corresponding shifts in campus culture, the Purpose First 2.0 framework offers a deeper and broader way of thinking about purpose that reaches every corner of the institution. It pushes beyond career and helps learners connect to personal and civic aspirations beyond their nine-to-fives. And it imagines a wider range of supports that extends past the first-year experience from coaching to experiential learning to redesigned syllabi, to ensure that students carry that early momentum to and through graduation.

And it couldn't come at a better time. The number of choices (including not attending college facing today's students is greater than it's ever been. Job market realities are changing quickly. And the challenges facing our communities require leaders and citizens who are contributing from a clearer sense of purpose.

A Renewed Vision For Purpose First

Shift 1: Broadening the Definition of Purpose

Career outcomes may be the primary motivation for pursuing a degree or credential, but they are far from the only motivations. When surveyed, students cite many reasons, including:

- **Pursuing a passion**
- **Learning to serve my community**
- **Making a positive impact in the world**
- **Becoming more engaged in civic life**
- **Pursuing learning and knowledge for its own sake**
- **Family or social expectations**
- **Creating a better future for myself/my family**

We believe separating career-focused motivations from broader aspects of a well-rounded liberal arts education creates a false dichotomy, especially when considering that most preferred competencies from employers (as evidenced by NACE's career competencies[9]) are closely aligned with liberal arts ideals. A well-rounded college experience will consider all of a student's motivations for pursuing higher education and offer them personalized support as they define and work to realize their goals. Structured experiences that support students in moving from a general sense of purpose towards specific goals with clear roadmaps can help ensure that students value their college experience.

A holistic definition of purpose creates a more cohesive vision for the future where more aspects of an individual's life are aligned and mutually reinforce one another. In addition to the foundational elements of skills, interests, and career choice, Purpose First institutions are including deeper explorations of values, passions, financial goals, and civic engagement in their programs and support.

At CCA, we are increasingly focused on the importance of Civic Learning & Democracy Education (CLDE). A meta-analysis by the American Association of Colleges and Universities found that participation in service learning, community-based engagement, and other civic-oriented high-impact practices (HIPs) is associated with increased likelihood of graduation, higher credit completion, and improved student retention rates.[10] Our recent report on CLDE highlights ways that purpose and civic engagement can improve outcomes for students.

9 NACE's career competencies
10 AACU, 2022

Shift 2: Extending the Reach of Purpose

Purpose First 1.0 initially focused on recruiting, admission, onboarding, and the first-year experience as the domain of purpose work. We initially saw an informed choice of major as the natural endpoint. Many of our institutional partners, however, quickly began to see opportunities for purpose to be infused into and through the attainment of a degree or credential of value.

The revised Purpose First framework includes programming and touchpoints at every phase of the student journey. Once purpose has been defined, it becomes a useful tool for ongoing academic advising and career exploration. It can clarify the search for a first job after graduation and strengthen resumes, applications, and interviews. Purpose also helps students connect with coursework more deeply; some institutions are taking the step of including career-aligned skills and civic learning objectives in their syllabi. Purpose First is also inspiring the creation of more experiential learning opportunities to give students a better sense of what life might look like in their career of choice and to reinforce the relevance of their coursework. And finally, purpose is showing up in co- and extracurricular experiences to keep student strongly connected to their "why."

Shift 3: Connecting Purpose to CCA's Pillars

Early in our Purpose First work, it was clear that the concept had been hiding in plain sight throughout our 4 Pillars of Institutional Transformation: Purpose, Structure, Momentum, and Support. We initially conceived of Purpose First with a narrower focus on creating first-year momentum and helping students make an informed choice around their meta-major. But purpose is critical to nearly all aspects of our work. Here are a few examples of the role purpose is playing across our other pillars and strategies:

- **Structure**
  - ***Academic Maps & Milestones*** – Giving students stronger connections between course sequences, electives, and career-aligned skill development.
  - ***Stackable Certificates & Credentials*** – Identifying in-demand credentials aligned to their purpose and building pathways to attainment.
- **Momentum**
  - ***Credit for Competency*** – Expanding the use of prior learning recognition to inform purpose, accelerating time to degree, and identifying targeted growth areas for purpose-aligned skills.
- **Support**
  - ***360° Coaching*** – Using purpose as a foundation for a broader range of coaching and support beyond academic advising.

Shift 4: Creating Flexibility for More Student Journeys

CCA built Purpose First 1.0 around clear milestones in a "typical" student journey. But no student is typical, especially given the rise of returning adult and non-traditional learners on college campuses. Instead of anchoring Purpose First in time-based milestones, the 2.0 framework is flexible to accommodate a broader range of student experiences, including students in two-year programs, transfer students, returning adult learners, and students who require more than four years to reach their goals. We balance flexibility with a continued focus on the importance of momentum, and we continue to urge students to pursue on-time graduation.

Shift 5: Seeing Purpose as a Skill

One thing has become clear through this work: cultivating purpose is not a one-and-done experience. While the opportunity to reflect on purpose once—through a freshman seminar or a new advising mode—is good, having multiple opportunities to explore and refine is better. We still believe that there are critical mile markers throughout the college experience that can close the "purpose gap." But we see the possibility of creating more opportunities for students to engage in conversations and experiences about purpose.

Students will continue to refine their sense of purpose throughout their lives. They will pursue careers and experiences that raise new questions about what they want and how they can make a difference. By equipping students to define and renew their purpose, we are preparing them to navigate a world of increasing choice and uncertainty.

Shift 6: Elevating the Importance of Campus Culture

We believe helping students define their purpose is everyone's responsibility. Our first framework led with a focus on Institutional Culture & Practice. Given our long history of supporting colleges and universities in their transformation efforts, we knew that even the best student success strategies were heavily dependent on institutional culture for their sustainability.

Over the past five years, the institutions that have seen the most benefit from Purpose First are those that include purpose in as many aspects of the student experience as possible. The strategy is no longer just the responsibility of advising or career services. Leading institutions acknowledge that the responsibility for putting purpose first must be shared across stakeholders—registrars, admissions officers, academic advisors, student affairs professionals, career services professionals, faculty members and employers—and bring these groups together to design and implement a cohesive student experience.

Summary Of Key Shifts

PURPOSE FIRST 1.0	PURPOSE FIRST 2.0
Focused on Skills, Interests & Career	Deeper Exploration Includes Values, Civic Engagement & Financial Planning
Admissions, Onboarding & First Year	To & Through Graduation
A Stand-Alone CCA Pillar	Connected to All Four Pillars of Transformation
Moments in Time	Flexible Milestones
One-and-Done	Ongoing Exploration & Reflection
Owned by Limited Functions	Shared Across the Institution

II. The Purpose First 2.0 Experience

Student Experience Overview

CCA is focused on addressing *institutional performance gaps* that impede graduation. In our view, the onus of ensuring student success falls on those engaging students in any capacity across the institution. That said, the work of the institution creates a particular experience for students through programs, touchpoints, campus services, and communications. Our overview focuses on the critical milestones that students *experience*. Later in this report, our implementation guide highlights the institutional actions that bring this experience to life for students.

The expanded Purpose First 2.0 student experience timeline and milestones separate the student journey into six phases encompassing a student's entire academic career. For reference, the graphic overview on the following page indicates when each of these phases should take place in more traditional two- and four-year academic journeys. However, this model accounts for the reality that students come to higher education at different times in their lives, have different experiences while pursuing higher education, and require varying amounts of time to complete their degrees. The milestones and supports outlined in this framework are designed to be applied to any student, academic program, and institution, regardless of age, program focus, or duration of study. They also reflect the development of purpose as an iterative process, including continuous reflection and reevaluation.

At certain points in the journey, students should be encouraged to think critically about their vision and whether it has changed because of experiences; these points are built into the journey to support reflection and alignment of academic and career pursuits with a student's interests and vision.

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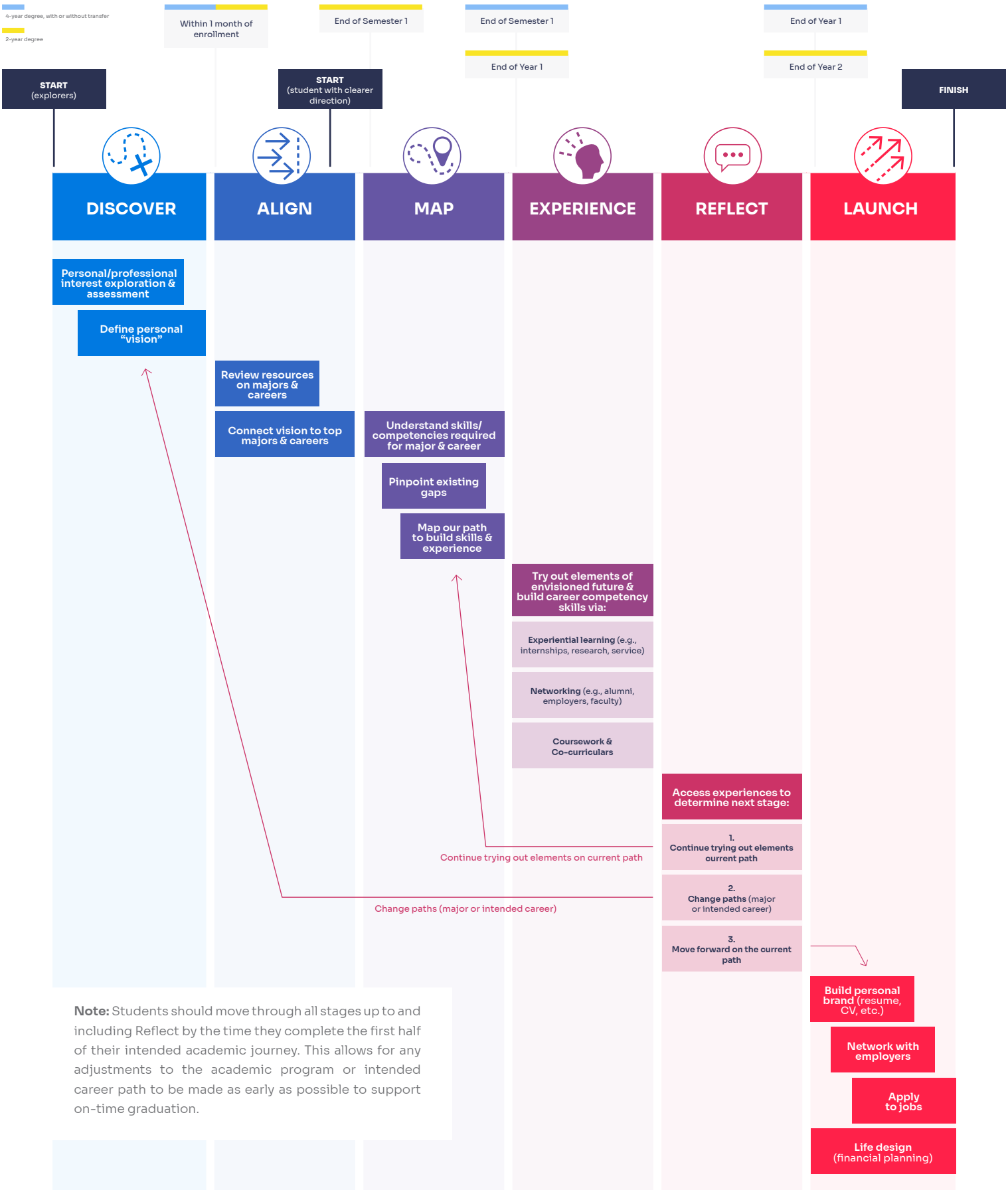
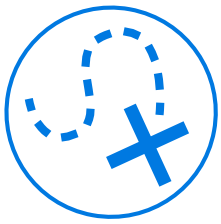


Note: Students should move through all stages up to and including Reflect by the time they complete the first half of their intended academic journey. This allows for any adjustments to the academic program or intended career path to be made as early as possible to support on-time graduation.



Discover

The Discover phase coincides with the beginning of a student's engagement with an institution and includes milestones that mirror those in the original Purpose First framework. As early as the admissions process, the student begins completing interest assessments and engaging in personal and professional exploration using resources and guidance provided by the institution. These activities continue through the onboarding process and first-year experience, with the exact timeframe likely to vary based on the student's enrollment status (part-time or full-time) and the length of the academic program. The Discover phase culminates in the student possessing a more concrete sense of their vision for the future.

Align

After outlining their vision, the student moves into the Align phase, where they take steps to align that vision with academic and career opportunities. In this phase, the student reviews resources provided by the institution and engages in ongoing conversations with faculty and advisors, helping them identify top majors and career paths of interest.

Map

In the Map phase, the student strengthens their understanding of the skills and competencies required for success in their chosen meta-major, major(s) and career path(s). They use this understanding to pinpoint gaps or areas for growth in their knowledge and experience and, with support from advisors, map out steps to achieve career readiness.

Some students may enter their school or program with a more clearly defined academic and career direction. While these students should still be encouraged to engage in the activities outlined in the Discover and Align phases, they may be ready to begin the Map phase sooner in their academic trajectories. Institutions can prepare to accommodate students at varying points of this journey by employing the flexible strategies outlined in this report.

Experience

In the Experience phase, the student engages in targeted learning activities in accordance with their plan. This phase is an opportunity for the student to test out elements of the future they envision for themself by participating in internships and other field experiences, networking with professionals in their chosen field(s), and pursuing coursework and co-curricular activities aligned with their academic and career goals. While this phase should begin by around the halfway point of the student's academic journey, they will continue to engage in these experiences throughout the remainder of their academic trajectory.

Reflect

The Reflect phase serves as an inflection point in the student journey, during which the student assesses their experiences and evaluates whether they align with their ultimate vision. For some students, adjustments like a change in major may be a necessary step toward better aligning their academic and career pursuits with their sense of purpose. Purpose First strategies, including decision-making in the Reflect phase, are designed to help the student identify necessary changes as early as possible to support on-time graduation and the best use of personal resources.

In addition, other CCA strategies like meta-majors and math pathways help support students' ability to reflect without significantly impacting time to graduation. Like the Experience phase, the Reflect phase includes ongoing experiences that will continue throughout the rest of the student's academic journey.

Launch

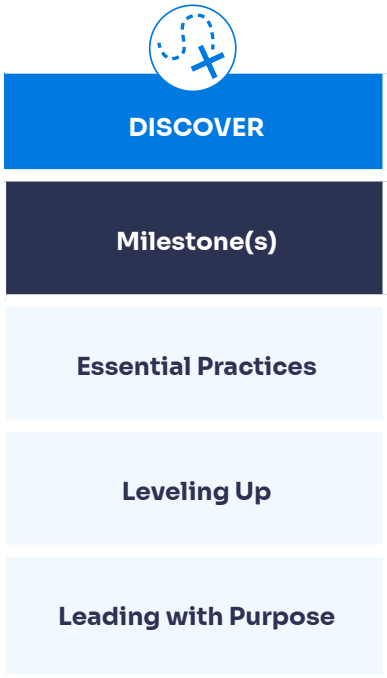
Once a student has confirmed a chosen major and associated career path(s) through experiential learning, coursework, and networking, they enter the Launch phase. In this phase, the student takes concrete steps toward post-graduation outcomes by developing materials associated with their personal brand (including a resume/CV and related documents), networking with potential employers, and applying to jobs. For students in 2-year programs planning to transfer to 4-year institutions, this phase includes targeted support for choosing the best next program of study. The Launch phase may also involve additional elements to prepare students for life after graduation, such as financial planning.

III. Implementation Guide

The following guide is designed to support institutional leaders as they work to implement the Purpose First strategy. We present the implementation guide by phase of the student experience, noting the institutional functions involved in each strategy's implementation. The appendix of this report also presents this implementation guide as a checklist for each institutional department.

Each phase of the student experience includes the following:

- **Milestones:** These are the critical achievements that indicate students' successful completion of each phase of the Purpose First experience.
- **Implementation Tasks:** These are the institutional actions and programs that, when implemented, support the student in achieving each milestone. In each phase, these tasks are separated into three categories:
  - *Essential Practices:* These are the foundational requirements for institutional support at each phase of the Purpose First experience.
  - *Leveling Up:* These are intermediate-level activities that deepen the Purpose First experience.
  - *Leading with Purpose:* These activities indicate full institutional commitment and investment in the Purpose First strategy with a focus on infusing purpose throughout the student experience.



Supportive content included:

- **Technology Enablers:** Technology plays a crucial role in helping institutions implement and scale Purpose First strategies. Rather than viewing technology as a solution in itself, institutions should consider how digital tools and platforms can enhance and extend their ability to support students throughout their academic journeys. These suggested applications of technology can help create more personalized, accessible, and effective support systems that reach students at scale while maintaining the human connection essential to purpose development.
- **Additional Resources & Examples:** Numerous institutions nationwide are already implementing Purpose First strategies and tools with their students. These examples can serve as tangible models of Purpose First implementation and provide inspiration and resources for other institutions.

DISCOVER

Milestone
Student completes a personal and professional interest and skills assessment.

Essential Practices

Integrate a comprehensive interest assessment into the admissions and application process.

Follow up with students about their assessment results and share relevant information about majors and careers.

Include career exploration activities during new student orientation.

Connect incoming students with mentors and alumni in their areas of interest.

Leveling Up

Incorporate meta-majors in the application process to better introduce and develop each student's initial interests and goals.

Provide opportunities during new student orientation for students to discuss their personal and academic interests and explore the connection between major selection and career options.

Develop career-focused summer bridge programs.

Leading with Purpose

Enroll all incoming students in a Purpose First/Student Success course that includes career exploration assessments and an introduction to career and life design frameworks to identify their personal "vision."

Support students in creating a comprehensive Purpose profile (included in student records).

Encourage students to identify civic engagement goals (CLDE connection) in the Purpose Profile.

Create early industry mentorship programs.

Academic Advising · Academic Departments/Faculty · Admission/Enrollment · Career Services · Student Affairs

Technology Enablers:

In the Discover phase, technology can help institutions create more engaging and accessible career exploration experiences. Digital assessment tools can provide students with immediate insights about their interests, skills, and potential career paths. These early insights can be particularly valuable for students who might not otherwise seek out career guidance. Advanced systems can now adapt to student responses, providing increasingly relevant suggestions and information based on student engagement patterns. This technology-enabled exploration can happen before students even step foot on campus, helping them arrive better prepared to engage in purposeful academic planning.

Additional Resources:

- The Strong Interest Inventory helps students reflect on their interests and connect them to possible academic and career opportunities. The Strong Interest Inventory and other similar tools (MyMajors, Lightcast, Steppingblocks, YouScience, and Agile Work Profiler, to name a few) can be embedded into the admissions and onboarding processes to jump-start student vision-setting.
- Hazard Community and Technical College (HCTC) maps out each program's curriculum, detailing attainable credentials, career pathways, average salaries, and types of job roles students can pursue post-graduation. These guides also provide admission guidelines and success tips, giving students a clear, upfront understanding of the requirements and steps needed to achieve their academic and career goals.
- Georgia State University's College to Career helps students build their career path through career assessment tools, market forecasting, experiential learning programs, and various in-person fairs.
- AlamoINSTITUTES at the Alamo Colleges District help students align their interests with academic pathways by providing structured guidance in choosing their institute and programs based on career goals.

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ALIGN

Milestones

Student registers in a meta-major.

Student completes career-aligned math pathway and English requirements.

Essential Practices

Develop program-specific career guides.

Create career-aligned math pathways.

Connect all students with an academic advisor to explore academic and career paths prior to selecting a major or specific area of study.

Support students in selecting an academic program or major aligned with their personal vision by the end of their first academic year.

Share career assessment responses and personal inventory information with academic advisors and career services professionals.

Leveling Up

Engage all students following their major selection by providing them with relevant career-related information (associated skills, competencies, education requirements, labor market data, job demand, salary and benefits).

Implement degree planning tools with career outcomes data (preferably alumni data).

Design major-specific career preparation courses.

Guide students through personal financial planning aligned with possible career pathways.

Leading with Purpose

Host major and career fairs designed to facilitate exploration of career opportunities and a greater understanding of how coursework aligns with potential careers.

Create cross-disciplinary career exploration programs.

Develop industry-informed curriculum maps.

Host networking events with regional employers and alumni to showcase potential career outcomes and opportunities associated with various academic tracks.

Academic Advising · Academic Departments/Faculty · Admission/Enrollment · Career Services · Student Affairs

Technology Enablers:

As students move into the Align phase, integrated systems can help connect career exploration results with academic programs and potential career paths. Modern platforms can show students how their interests and skills map to various academic programs, helping them make more informed decisions about their educational journey. These systems can provide real-time labor market data, salary information, and career progression patterns, giving students a clearer picture of how their academic choices connect to future opportunities.

Additional Resources:

- As part of its "First-time Undergraduate Experience," the University of Baltimore created a Student Success Team integrating academic advising and career coaching into technology, including the Student Success Hub. The school also requires all incoming students to enroll in a first-year seminar that includes an interest assessment and long-term vision planning.
- Lee College (TX) hosts various social events throughout the year (BBQ, Trunk or Treat, fish fry, etc.) for businesses to learn more about the programs and support relationships between the school, employers, and current students.
- The University of Delaware displays employment, career outcomes, continuing education, jobs, and salaries for its alumni by programs.
- The University of Miami hosts in-person and virtual "Career Crawls" that immerse students in a work environment, allowing them to explore career paths and connect with alumni across the globe.
- Diablo Valley College (CA) has developed Student Centers organized by meta-majors to provide integrated support services, including tutoring, counseling, library support, career guidance, and community spaces, all in one location, breaking down traditional institutional silos to create a more student-centered support system.

Allison Shelley/Complete College Photo Library

MAP

Milestones:

Student declares major aligned with purpose.

Student collects artifacts demonstrating proficiency in skills and competencies associated with course of study.

Essential Practices

Ensure all students work with their advisor to choose a major aligned with their purpose.

Create a student-facing curriculum map showing the progression of career-related skills and competencies from first semester to degree completion, and support students in using this map to track their progress.

Early in their academic trajectory, provide students with an overview of specific career milestones across a student journey and resources for tracking their progress.

Crosswalk learning outcomes to career competencies and skills in course syllabi.

Leveling Up

Provide all students with an introduction to a career competency framework during their first year.

Include extracurricular activities in the student-facing curriculum map.

Provide all students with opportunities to engage in ongoing career and life design through continued seminar courses and/or routine advising.

Leading with Purpose

Create career-integrated capstone experiences in every academic program.

Build comprehensive e-portfolio systems.

Provide tools for students to compile a Comprehensive Learner Record (CLR) or e-Portfolio to connect their learning with career skills.

Academic Advising | Academic Departments/Faculty | Admission/Enrollment | Career Services | Student Affairs

Technology Enablers:

During the Map phase, technology can help students visualize the connections between academic programs and career readiness. Digital platforms can show students how individual courses build specific skills and competencies valued by employers. These tools can help students track their progress toward career-ready skills, identifying gaps and suggesting specific courses or experiences to build needed competencies. Some institutions are using artificial intelligence to help suggest personalized learning pathways based on student goals and progress.

Additional Resources:

- Stanford's Life Design Lab helps students "think like designers" to reflect on their experiences and chart a future aligned with their passions. The Life Design Lab offers resources and training for educators and students.
- By being more transparent in the relevance of coursework and purpose of activities, students at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas indicated increases in academic confidence, sense of belonging and perceived mastery of employer-valued skills were indeed followed by greater persistence.
- Career competency frameworks like Kentucky's 10 Essential Employability Skills and the NACE Career Readiness Competencies can help draw clear connections between educational experiences and professional skills.

Allison Shelley/Complete College Photo Library

EXPERIENCE

Milestone

Student completes at least one purpose-aligned experience as part of their program.

Essential Practices	Leveling Up	Leading with Purpose
Centralize resources for students to support them in identifying experiential learning (internships, work-study, service learning, research).	Support faculty in utilizing a career competency framework to make connections between career-related skills and learning outcomes for students.	Establish a dedicated career services liaison for each academic department to help faculty connect classroom learning to careers.
Encourage and support faculty to integrate internships and/or experiential learning into coursework by designing career-related assignments and/or requiring students to visit the Career Center for support.	Provide faculty with major- and career-related information and data (e.g., first destination survey data) specific to their academic departments as well as guidance on using these resources to inform classroom discussions.	Encourage faculty to create advisory committees with industry-specific experts to generate opportunities for cross-collaboration and provide guidance on how to do so.
	Provide resources to faculty to help students regularly reflect on competencies learned in coursework and their alignment with career readiness.	Provide opportunities throughout the student journey for civic engagement (e.g., service learning) to help develop purpose through community connection.
	Dedicate time and space to connect classroom learning to industry trends and career opportunities.	Create ongoing opportunities (workshops, seminars, etc.) for students to deepen elements of their personal purpose.
	Support students in building social capital through networking opportunities with faculty, alumni, employers, and community leaders.	

Academic Advising · Academic Departments/Faculty · Admission/Enrollment · Career Services · Student Affairs

Technology Enablers:

The Experience phase benefits from technology that can help match students with relevant opportunities. Platforms can connect students with internships, service learning opportunities, and professional networks aligned with their interests and goals. Virtual reality and simulation technologies are creating new ways for students to experience potential career paths and practice professional skills in safe, supportive environments. These tools are particularly valuable for students who might have limited access to in-person professional experiences due to location or scheduling constraints.

Additional Resources:

- Berea College's (KY) service-learning program integrates collaborative community service projects with students' academic work. Through these projects, students gain an understanding of community needs while strengthening their knowledge of course content.
- Trenholm State (AL) includes work-based learning in all Associate in Applied Science (AAS) programs by incorporating at least one course required for graduation. These courses are co-op courses or internship courses. Students are paired with a local employer to experience the field in which they are studying and use the skills that they have learned during the program.
- The University of Cincinnati offers multiple types of cooperative education projects to address the needs of students and the workforce. The school also requires a capstone experience for every student to demonstrate mastery in relevant areas of the college experience.
- The City Colleges of Chicago implemented a comprehensive work-based learning strategy that focuses on high-demand industry sectors through "centers of excellence." Each year, students participate in work-based learning opportunities ranging from 10-week micro-internships to 2-year apprenticeships. The system has developed a framework to deliver consistent work-based learning experiences across all colleges, integrating these opportunities with mentorship, classroom reflection, and wraparound support services.

Allison Shelley/Complete College Photo Library

REFLECT

Milestones

Student engage with their college experience to monitor progress towards purpose and discuss next steps.

Students meet with advisor and mentor to discuss alignment with their goals.

Essential Practices

Schedule regular career coaching sessions to help students reflect on their college experience and assess their progress toward career-ready skills and post-graduation goals.

Create reflection assignments in major courses that link coursework to career competencies and help students identify gaps in their skill development.

Develop structured ways for students to document their learning journey.

Leveling Up

Provide opportunities for deep reflection (facilitated by advisors, student support services, faculty advisors and mentors, etc.) each semester.

Implement peer career mentoring programs.

Design career competency assessment tools that incorporate both self-reflection and external feedback.

Develop reflection prompts that connect academic work to practical application.

Leading with Purpose

Support students with Comprehensive 360° coaching that examines more aspects of their lives to support their purpose.

Design comprehensive career coaching models.

Create interdisciplinary reflection experiences that mirror workplace complexity.

Academic Advising | Academic Departments/Faculty | Admission/Enrollment | Career Services | Student Affairs

Technology Enablers:

Technology supports the Reflect phase by providing structured ways for students to document and analyze their experiences. Digital portfolios and reflection tools help students capture their learning journey and connect different experiences to their developing sense of purpose. Analytics can help advisors identify students who might need additional support or guidance, enabling more proactive and targeted interventions. Some institutions are using artificial intelligence to analyze student reflections and provide preliminary guidance, helping advisors focus their time on deeper conversations with students.

Additional Resources:

- Portland State University has implemented a comprehensive career development roadmap emphasizing ongoing reflection. Their program includes structured checkpoints at each academic level where students engage in guided reflection about their career development.

- The University of Minnesota's Career Integration Initiative demonstrates a comprehensive approach to student reflection and career development. Faculty receive training and resources to incorporate career reflection into courses, helping students connect classroom learning with career competencies. The initiative includes regular "Career Course Checkpoints" for student reflection and feedback.

- The University of Iowa's Career Communities program integrates regular reflection through its "Guided Reflection on Work" (GROW) system. This structured approach helps students reflect and bridge their learnings from their campus jobs to their classroom experiences.

Allison Shelley/Complete College Photo Library

LAUNCH

Milestone
Student has identified purpose-aligned next step (job, additional learning, etc.) by graduation.

Essential Practices

Ensure all students meet with a career advisor no later than their 2nd-to-last semester of enrollment.

Provide multiple opportunities for students to participate in:

- *Resume and application preparation*
- *Career fairs*
- *Networking events*
- *Job searching*
- *Interview preparation*

Leveling Up

Require students to attend career readiness sessions (or embed in the curriculum as a capstone project) to create their professional brand, prepare for experiential learning opportunities such as career-relevant internships, and start building their network.

Host opportunities for students to meet student/professional organizations and faculty members aligned with their chosen major and associated careers (workshops, classroom presentations, meet and greets, etc.).

Develop alumni mentoring networks.

Offer employer-in-residence programs.

Leading with Purpose

Provide first-year career transition coaching.

Offer post-graduation support programs.

Develop career launch incubators.

Use first destination survey data to help inform practices, trends, and additional support needed.

Academic Advising Academic Departments/Faculty Admission/Enrollment Career Services Student Affairs

Technology Enablers:

In the Launch phase, technology can help students prepare for and connect with post-graduation opportunities. Modern platforms can help students develop professional materials, practice interview skills, and connect with potential employers. For students planning to transfer, technology can help them identify optimal transfer pathways and understand how their credits will apply to different programs. These tools can also help institutions track post-graduation outcomes, providing valuable data to inform program improvements.

Additional Resources:

- Denmark Technical College's (SC) Perpetual Pathways program provides comprehensive post-graduation support for up to seven years, allowing alumni to access career services, academic guidance, and professional development resources. The program maintains a strong connection with graduates through continuous support services, including career counseling, financial literacy training, and the option to return for additional certifications.

- Bronx Community College's Career Development Office has created a comprehensive career launch program that begins preparation for post-graduation success well before students complete their programs. Their model includes required career preparation courses, industry-specific resume workshops, and structured job search support.

- Clemson University's Career Center has developed strong industry partnerships that support career launch through its "Corporate Partner Program." This includes dedicated recruiting relationships, specialized career preparation, and ongoing support for successful transitions to the workplace.

Allison Shelley/Complete College Photo Library

Institutional Culture & Strategy

In addition to the strategies undertaken in each phase of the student journey, institutions need to take steps to promote a Purpose First culture to maximize impact for students. Such steps include:

1: Collect

Collect data on major stability and undeclared majors. Analyze the data to understand the current state and identify opportunities for improvement.

2: Evaluate

Evaluate underrepresentation across colleges, meta-majors and majors by race/ethnicity, age, gender, and Pell status.

3: Audit

Audit the current activities across the institution related to helping students identify their academic purpose and future career goals.

4: Meet

Meet with groups of students—either one-on-one or in focus groups—to understand how you can better help them reach their future career goals.

5: Create

Create transparency by ensuring information about the current state is shared broadly across the campus community. As you collect more information for each student about their personal goals, share that information with admissions counselors, academic and career advisors, faculty, and departmental staff who interact with students on a regular basis.

6: Establish

Establish an institution-wide working group focused on Purpose First with representation from faculty, administration, student support professionals, and students. When appropriate, include external workforce leaders to offer perspectives on various career opportunities and preferred skills across sectors.

7: Commit

Commit to collaborating across the institution when developing and implementing new approaches. Given the number of people working to ensure student success, it's critical to include many voices.

8: Encourage

Encourage students to participate in campus activities and organizations that build skills and connect to future careers as a part of a well-rounded postsecondary experience.

Technology & Implementation Considerations

While technology can significantly enhance Purpose First implementation, successful adoption requires careful planning and ongoing support. Institutions should consider:

Integration with Existing Systems

- Technology solutions should complement and enhance existing student support structures rather than creating parallel systems. The goal is to create seamless experiences that make it easier for students to access support and for staff to provide it. This might mean starting with basic functionality in existing systems and gradually adding capabilities as needs and usage patterns become clear.

Supporting Human Connection

- Technology should enhance rather than replace human interaction. The most successful implementations use technology to facilitate connections between students and advisors, faculty, employers, and peers. This might involve using technology to help staff identify when students need support, schedule meetings more efficiently, or prepare for more meaningful conversations.

Equity & Access

- Institutions must ensure that technology solutions are accessible to all students, regardless of their technical proficiency or access to devices. This might require providing multiple ways to access key services and ensuring that technology requirements don't create unintended barriers for any student groups.

Professional Development

- Staff and faculty need ongoing support to use technology tools effectively in their work with students. This includes not just technical training but also guidance on how to integrate these tools into their student support practices. Professional development should be ongoing and responsive to emerging needs and opportunities.

Financial Considerations

- Rather than focusing on specific technology products, institutions should consider how technology investments can support their broader student success goals. This might mean:
  - *Starting with core functionality in existing systems*
  - *Prioritizing investments that serve multiple purposes*
  - *Building capacity gradually based on demonstrated need and impact*
  - *Considering the total cost of ownership, including training and support*
  - *Planning for sustainable funding models*

By thinking strategically about technology's role in supporting student purpose, institutions can make informed decisions about where and how to invest their resources for maximum impact.

The key to successful technology implementation is maintaining focus on the primary goal: helping students discover and realize their purpose. Technology should make it easier for institutions to provide personalized, proactive support at scale while maintaining the human connections that are essential to student success.

Measuring Progress: Qualitative Indicators by Phase

Measuring progress in Purpose First implementation is essential for both continuous improvement and institutional transformation. While quantitative metrics like retention rates and career placement statistics are important, qualitative indicators provide deeper insights into how students develop purpose throughout their academic journey. Regular assessment helps institutions identify what's working, adjust strategies that need refinement, and demonstrate the impact of their purpose-focused initiatives. By gathering both stories and statistics, institutions can better understand how their support systems are helping students develop clearer direction and stronger confidence in their choices. This evidence not only guides program improvements but also helps build broader institutional support for purpose-focused strategies, ultimately leading to more sustainable and effective implementation.

Discover Phase

Look for evidence that students are engaging meaningfully with career exploration early in their journey. During individual advising sessions, students should be able to articulate initial ideas about their interests and potential career directions. In first-year experience courses, observe whether students are making connections between their personal interests and academic possibilities. Review reflection assignments to assess if students are developing a more nuanced understanding of their strengths and aspirations over time.

Align Phase

Evidence of progress appears in how students discuss their program choices. In advising conversations, students should be able to explain why they selected their meta-major or major and how it connects to their goals. Faculty should notice students asking more informed questions about the career applications of course content. Review student educational plans to see if they reflect thoughtful consideration of career goals rather than just meeting basic requirements.

Map Phase

Progress becomes visible in students' ability to connect their coursework to career preparation. During academic planning sessions, students should demonstrate understanding of how specific courses build career-relevant skills. Look for evidence in course selection patterns that students are making strategic choices aligned with their career goals. Faculty should observe students making explicit connections between classroom learning and workplace applications.

Experience Phase

Signs of progress emerge in how students engage with experiential learning opportunities. Look for students taking initiative in seeking out internships or field experiences aligned with their goals. In reflection assignments, students should demonstrate a deeper understanding of their chosen field based on direct experience. Employers should report that students are arriving better prepared and asking more informed questions during site visits or job shadows.

Reflect Phase

Growth appears in the sophistication of student reflection. In advising sessions, students should demonstrate the ability to critically evaluate their experiences and articulate how these experiences inform their goals. Look for evidence that students are making more informed decisions about continuing or adjusting their academic plans based on their experiences. Review how students discuss their development in portfolio assignments or career preparation materials.

Launch Phase

Progress manifests in students' readiness for next steps. Students should be able to clearly articulate their skills and experiences in professional contexts. Review application materials to see if students effectively connect their academic experiences to job requirements. In mock interviews, students should demonstrate understanding of their field and ability to present themselves professionally. For transfer-bound students, look for clear reasoning in their program selection and transfer planning.

IV. Responding To Common Questions

Are you saying all students should be encouraged to go into high-paying careers regardless of whether or not those careers are aligned with their skills and interests?	**No,** but let's make sure we are providing them with the information and guidance they need to make an **informed choice** of career based on their **interests, skill set *and* financial goals.**
If the data suggests that certain student populations are less likely to pursue high-paying careers, are you suggesting we intentionally work to funnel these underrepresented students into majors associated with high-paying careers?	**Yes and no.** Too often, students from historically excluded backgrounds are **not exposed to information about majors and career options** that would lead to high-paying occupations. It is only by ensuring that **all** students receive the necessary information and support to make an **informed decision** that we can close and **eliminate opportunity and achievement gaps.** Institutions must examine the disaggregation of majors/meta-majors by race, ethnicity, age, gender, and Pell status to best understand how to resolve equity gaps.
Aren't you worried that students won't have the time and opportunities they need to explore?	No, Purpose First provides **additional, more structured opportunities** for students to explore **while still maintaining momentum** toward an on-time graduation. In fact, by providing early information, assessments, and encouraging students to select a meta-major, students have **more time** to consider and explore their options.
What about the role of higher education in creating well-rounded individuals?	Purpose First **does not limit** our ability to create well-rounded individuals; it simply ensures that students are **also** provided the tools and experiences needed to **graduate on time** and successfully pursue a **meaningful career.**
How do employers fit into this?	Employers play an important role in helping institutions **identify the skill sets** prioritized for new hires and in **supporting career exploration** through internships, mentorship, and presentations.
Shouldn't only undeclared students go through this new onboarding structure?	**No.** All students (undeclared, declared, and returning adults) should be provided with a Purpose First experience. For students who have declared a major, additional information and support can help them either **confirm their choice or explore new opportunities** they hadn't yet considered.

V. Partners & Acknowledgements

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Institutional Policy Foundations

for Purpose First Implementation

When implementing transformative strategies like Purpose First 2.0, institutional policies serve as the essential infrastructure that enables and sustains meaningful change. While many institutions recognize the value of helping students develop a clear sense of purpose, successful implementation requires more than enthusiasm and good intentions—it demands thoughtful policy review and development.

Effective policies translate aspirational goals into concrete institutional practices, ensuring that purpose development becomes embedded in the institution's operations rather than existing as isolated initiatives. They allocate resources, establish accountability, define responsibilities, and create the structures necessary for consistent implementation across departments and over time. Perhaps most importantly, well-crafted policies send a clear signal about institutional priorities, elevating purpose from an optional enhancement to a core component of the educational experience.

The institutional policy examples outlined below represent different approaches to institutionalizing purpose across key domains of college operations. By examining how governance structures, academic requirements, and student support systems can be aligned through policy, institutions can create a cohesive environment where purpose development becomes part of the institutional culture rather than a peripheral program. These examples are not meant to be prescriptive but rather to illustrate how policy review and development can transform the Purpose First framework from concept to sustainable practice.

As you consider these policies, reflect on your institution's current policy landscape. What existing policies might need modification to support purpose development? Where are policy gaps creating barriers to implementation? How might new policies create the conditions for purpose to flourish across your campus? Answering these questions is a critical first step in creating the policy foundation that will support successful Purpose First implementation.

Institutional Policies for Purpose Development

GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATIVE POLICIES

1. Purpose Integration Policy

Creating an institutional policy requiring all academic and student support departments to integrate purpose-focused content into their programs would establish a cohesive student experience rather than isolated pockets of career development. This approach ensures that students encounter consistent messages about purpose and career relevance throughout their college journey, regardless of which services they access or courses they take. The policy would require departments to document their purpose integration strategies and assess their effectiveness, transforming purpose from a siloed initiative to part of the institutional identity.

2. Cross-Functional Collaboration Requirement

Establishing formal collaboration structures between academic affairs, student affairs, and career services addresses the fragmentation that often exists in higher education. This policy would create clear expectations for how different units collaborate on purpose development, including regular meetings, shared metrics, and joint programming. By breaking down institutional silos, students benefit from coordinated guidance where their academic advisor, career coach, and faculty all work from a shared understanding of the student's goals and needs.

3. Data Collection and Disaggregation Policy

Implementing a policy requiring regular collection and analysis of major stability, career confidence, and post-graduation outcomes data provides the evidence base needed to continually improve purpose initiatives. By requiring disaggregation by demographics, institutions can identify where purpose gaps exist for specific student populations and develop targeted interventions. This approach transforms purpose work from intuition-based to evidence-driven, ensuring resources are allocated to interventions with demonstrable impact on student outcomes.

4. Campus-Wide Working Group Mandate

Creating a standing committee with representation from faculty, staff, students, and employers ensures that purpose initiatives reflect diverse perspectives and needs. This policy would establish clear expectations for membership, meeting frequency, responsibilities, and reporting lines. The resulting governance structure creates broad institutional ownership of purpose work rather than relegating it to a single department, making initiatives more sustainable, comprehensive, and responsive to the full campus community.

ACADEMIC POLICIES

1. Purpose-Aligned Curriculum Review

Requiring all academic programs to regularly map their curricula to career competencies fundamentally changes how academic programs are designed and delivered. This policy would establish clear expectations for how and when programs conduct this mapping, what frameworks they use, and how results inform curriculum revisions. The process makes implicit career connections explicit, helping students understand the professional relevance of their coursework while illuminating gaps in career preparation for faculty.

2. Career Competency Integration Policy

Mandating that all course syllabi include explicit connections to relevant career competencies and workplace applications transforms how students engage with content. This policy would provide clear guidelines for faculty about how to articulate these connections in course materials and assessments. Rather than wondering "why am I learning this?", students understand the professional contexts where knowledge will be applied, increasing motivation and deepening learning.

3. Experiential Learning Requirement

Establishing a graduation requirement that all students complete at least one purpose-aligned experiential learning opportunity provides every student with direct experience in professional environments. This policy would define qualifying experiences, establish learning outcomes, and create processes for assessment and documentation. Beyond skill development, these experiences build social capital through professional connections, particularly benefiting first-generation and underrepresented students.

4. Meta-Major Declaration Policy

Creating a policy requiring all students to declare a meta-major by the end of their first semester prevents aimless wandering through the curriculum while still providing room for exploration. This policy would establish processes for exploration, declaration, and support during this critical decision point. The approach balances flexibility with momentum, allowing students to explore related fields while making progress toward degree completion, resulting in fewer excess credits and more purposeful academic choices.

STUDENT SUPPORT POLICIES

1. Mandatory Career Advising

Implementing a policy requiring students to meet with career advisors at specific milestones shifts from a reactive, student-initiated approach to a proactive developmental model. This policy would establish when these meetings occur, what they cover, and how they're documented. This ensures that all students receive career guidance, not just the self-motivated few who seek out services, particularly benefiting first-generation and underrepresented students who might not otherwise recognize the importance of early career planning.

2. Purpose Profile Requirement

Creating a policy that all students develop and regularly update a comprehensive purpose profile creates a structured process for students to document and reflect on their evolving goals and achievements. This policy would establish when and how this profile is created, updated, and used throughout the student journey. The resulting documentation helps students synthesize diverse college experiences into a coherent narrative about their skills and preparation for employment..

3. 360° Coaching Model

Establishing a policy integrating academic advising, career coaching, and holistic support services addresses the whole student experience. This policy would define how different support functions coordinate their work, share information, and collaborate on interventions. This approach recognizes that purpose development doesn't happen in isolation from other aspects of students' lives, resulting in more effective support as coaches understand the full context of students' challenges and aspirations.

4. Technology Integration Policy

Requiring all student-facing digital platforms to incorporate purpose-focused elements ensures that technology reinforces purpose development rather than simply managing administrative functions. This policy would establish standards for how systems share data, support purpose exploration, and guide student reflection. The result is an ecosystem where career exploration, academic planning, and reflection activities are connected rather than isolated, creating a coherent digital experience.

APPENDIX: Research Links

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ACADEMIC ADVISING

	Essential Practices	Leveling Up	Leading with Purpose
DISCOVER	☐ Follow up with students about their assessment results and share relevant information about majors and careers.	Not Applicable	☐ Support students in creating a comprehensive "Purpose" profile (included in student records). ☐ Encourage students to identify civic engagement goals (CLDE connection) in the Purpose Profile.
ALIGN	☐ Develop program-specific career guides. ☐ Create career-aligned math pathways. ☐ Connect all students with an academic advisor to explore academic and career paths prior to selecting a major or specific area of study. ☐ Support students to select an academic program or major aligned with their personal vision by the end of their first academic year. ☐ Share career assessment responses and personal inventory information with academic advisors and career services professionals.	☐ Implement degree planning tools with career outcomes data (preferably alumni data). ☐ Engage all students following their major selection by providing them with relevant career-related information (associated skills, competencies, and education requirements, labor market data, job demand, salary and benefits). ☐ Design major-specific career preparation courses.	☐ Create cross-disciplinary career exploration programs. ☐ Develop industry-informed curriculum maps. ☐ Host major and career fairs designed to facilitate exploration of career opportunities and a greater understanding of how coursework aligns with potential careers.
MAP	☐ Ensure all students work with their advisor to choose a major aligned with their purpose. ☐ Create a student-facing curriculum map showing the progression of career-related skills and competencies from first semester to degree completion, and support students in using this map to track their progress. ☐ Early in their academic trajectory, provide students with an overview of specific career milestones across a student journey and resources for tracking their progress.	☐ Provide all students with an introduction to a career competency framework during their first year. ☐ Include extracurricular activities in the student-facing curriculum map. ☐ Provide all students with opportunities to engage in ongoing career and life design through continued seminar courses and/or routine advising.	☐ Create career-integrated capstone experiences in every academic program. ☐ Build comprehensive e-portfolio systems. ☐ Provide tools for students to compile a Comprehensive Learner Record (CLR) or e-Portfolio to connect their learning with career skills.

ACADEMIC ADVISING (CONTINUED)

	Essential Practices	Leveling Up	Leading with Purpose
EXPERIENCE	Not Applicable	☐ Provide faculty with major- and career-related information and data (e.g., first destination survey data) specific to their academic departments as well as guidance on using these resources to inform classroom discussions.	☐ Create ongoing opportunities (workshops, seminars, etc.) for students to deepen elements of their personal purpose.
REFLECT	☐ Schedule regular career coaching sessions to help students reflect on their college experience and assess their progress toward career-ready skills and post-graduation goals. ☐ Develop structured ways for students to document their learning journey.	☐ Provide opportunities for deep reflection (facilitated by advisors, student support services, faculty advisors and mentors, etc.) each semester.	☐ Support students with Comprehensive 360° coaching that examines more aspects of their lives to support their purpose.
LAUNCH	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	☐ Use first destination survey data to help inform practices, trends, and additional support needed.

ACADEMIC DEPARTMENTS/FACULTY

	Essential Practices	Leveling Up	Leading with Purpose
DISCOVER	☐ Connect incoming students with mentors and alumni in their areas of interest.	☐ Incorporate meta-majors in the application process to better introduce and develop each student's initial interests and goals. ☐ Develop career-focused summer bridge programs.	☐ Enroll all incoming students in a Purpose First/Student Success course that includes career exploration assessments and an introduction to career and life design frameworks to identify their personal "vision." ☐ Create early industry mentorship programs.
ALIGN	☐ Create career-aligned math pathways.	☐ Implement degree planning tools with career outcomes data (preferably alumni data). ☐ Engage all students following their major selection by providing them with relevant career-related information (associated skills, competencies, and education requirements, labor market data, job demand, salary and benefits). ☐ Design major-specific career preparation courses.	☐ Create cross-disciplinary career exploration programs. ☐ Develop industry-informed curriculum maps.
MAP	☐ Create a student-facing curriculum map showing the progression of career-related skills and competencies from first semester to degree completion, and support students in using this map to track their progress. ☐ Crosswalk learning outcomes to career competencies and skills in course syllabi.	☐ Provide all students with an introduction to a career competency framework during their first year. ☐ Include extracurricular activities in the student-facing curriculum map.	☐ Create career-integrated capstone experiences in every academic program.

ACADEMIC DEPARTMENTS/FACULTY (CONTINUED)

	Essential Practices	Leveling Up	Leading with Purpose
EXPERIENCE	☐ Encourage and support faculty to integrate internships and/or experiential learning into coursework by designing career-related assignments and/or requiring students to visit the Career Center for support.	☐ Support faculty in utilizing a career competency framework to make connections between career-related skills and learning outcomes for students. ☐ Provide faculty with major- and career-related information and data (e.g., first destination survey data) specific to their academic departments as well as guidance on using these resources to inform classroom discussions. ☐ Provide resources to faculty to help students regularly reflect on competencies learned in coursework and their alignment with career readiness. ☐ Dedicate time and space to connect classroom learning to industry trends and career opportunities.	☐ Establish a dedicated career services liaison for each academic department to help faculty connect classroom learning to careers. ☐ Encourage faculty to create advisory committees with industry-specific experts to generate opportunities for cross-collaboration and provide guidance on how to do so.
REFLECT	☐ Create reflection assignments in major courses that link coursework to career competencies and help students identify gaps in their skill development.	☐ Provide opportunities for deep reflection (facilitated by advisors, student support services, faculty advisors and mentors, etc.) each semester. ☐ Develop reflection prompts that connect academic work to practical application.	☐ Create interdisciplinary reflection experiences that mirror workplace complexity.
LAUNCH	Not Applicable	☐ Require students to attend career readiness sessions (or embed in the curriculum as a capstone project) to create their professional brand, prepare for experiential learning opportunities such as career-relevant internships, and start building their network.	☐ Develop career launch incubators. ☐ Use first destination survey data to help inform practices, trends, and additional support needed.

ADMISSIONS/ENROLLMENT

	Essential Practices	Leveling Up	Leading with Purpose
DISCOVER	☐ Integrate a comprehensive interest assessment into the admissions and application process. ☐ Follow up with students about their assessment results and share relevant information about majors and careers. ☐ Include career exploration activities during new student orientation.	☐ Incorporate meta-majors in the application process to better introduce and develop each student's initial interests and goals. ☐ Provide opportunities during new student orientation for students to discuss their personal and academic interests and explore the connection between major selection and career options. ☐ Develop career-focused summer bridge programs.	☐ Enroll all incoming students in a Purpose First/Student Success course that includes career exploration assessments and an introduction to career and life design frameworks to identify their personal "vision."
ALIGN	☐ Connect all students with an academic advisor to explore academic and career paths prior to selecting a major or specific area of study.	☐ Design major-specific career preparation courses.	Not Applicable
MAP	☐ Create a student-facing curriculum map showing the progression of career-related skills and competencies from first semester to degree completion, and support students in using this map to track their progress.	Not Applicable	☐ Build comprehensive e-portfolio systems. ☐ Provide tools for students to compile a Comprehensive Learner Record (CLR) or e-Portfolio to connect their learning with career skills.
EXPERIENCE	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
REFLECT	☐ Develop structured ways for students to document their learning journey.	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
LAUNCH	☐ Ensure all students meet with a career advisor no later than their 2nd-to-last semester of enrollment.	Not Applicable	☐ Use first destination survey data to help inform practices, trends, and additional support needed.

CAREER SERVICES

	Essential Practices	Leveling Up	Leading with Purpose
DISCOVER	☐ Include career exploration activities during new student orientation ☐ Connect incoming students with mentors and alumni in their areas of interest.	☐ Provide opportunities during new student orientation for students to discuss their personal and academic interests and explore the connection between major selection and career options. ☐ Develop career-focused summer bridge programs.	☐ Enroll all incoming students in a Purpose First/Student Success course that includes career exploration assessments and an introduction to career and life design frameworks to identify their personal "vision." ☐ Create early industry mentorship programs.
ALIGN	☐ Develop program-specific career guides. ☐ Share career assessment responses and personal inventory information with academic advisors and career services professionals.	☐ Engage all students following their major selection by providing them with relevant career-related information (associated skills, competencies, and education requirements, labor market data, job demand, salary and benefits). ☐ Design major-specific career preparation courses. ☐ Guide students through personal financial planning aligned with possible career pathways.	☐ Create cross-disciplinary career exploration programs. ☐ Develop industry-informed curriculum maps. ☐ Host major and career fairs designed to facilitate exploration of career opportunities and a greater understanding of how coursework aligns with potential careers. ☐ Host networking events with regional employers and alumni to showcase potential career outcomes and opportunities associated with various academic tracks.
MAP	☐ Early in their academic trajectory, provide students with an overview of specific career milestones across a student journey and resources for tracking their progress. ☐ Crosswalk learning outcomes to career competencies and skills in course syllabi.	☐ Provide all students with an introduction to a career competency framework during their first year. ☐ Provide all students with opportunities to engage in ongoing career and life design through continued seminar courses and/or routine advising.	☐ Create career-integrated capstone experiences in every academic program.

CAREER SERVICES (CONTINUED)

	Essential Practices	Leveling Up	Leading with Purpose
EXPERIENCE	☐ Centralize resources for students to support them in identifying experiential learning (internships, work-study, service learning, research). ☐ Encourage and support faculty to integrate internships and/or experiential learning into coursework by designing career-related assignments and/or requiring students to visit the Career Center for support.	☐ Support faculty in utilizing a career competency framework to make connections between career-related skills and learning outcomes for students. ☐ Provide faculty with major- and career-related information and data (e.g., first destination survey data) specific to their academic departments as well as guidance on using these resources to inform classroom discussions. ☐ Provide resources to faculty to help students regularly reflect on competencies learned in coursework and their alignment with career readiness. ☐ Support students in building social capital through networking opportunities with faculty, alumni, employers, and community leaders.	☐ Establish a dedicated career services liaison for each academic department to help faculty connect classroom learning to careers. ☐ Encourage faculty to create advisory committees with industry-specific experts to generate opportunities for cross-collaboration and provide guidance on how to do so. ☐ Provide opportunities throughout the student journey for civic engagement (e.g., service learning) to help develop purpose through community connection.
REFLECT	☐ Schedule regular career coaching sessions to help students reflect on their college experience and assess their progress toward career-ready skills and post-graduation goals.	☐ Implement peer career mentoring programs. ☐ Design career competency assessment tools that incorporate both self-reflection and external feedback. ☐ Develop reflection prompts that connect academic work to practical application.	☐ Design comprehensive career coaching models. ☐ Create interdisciplinary reflection experiences that mirror workplace complexity.

CAREER SERVICES (CONTINUED)

LAUNCH

Essential Practices

- [ ] Ensure all students meet with a career advisor no later than their 2nd-to-last semester of enrollment.
- [ ] Provide multiple opportunities for students to participate in:
  - Resume and application preparation
  - Career fairs
  - Networking events
  - Job searching
  - Interview preparation

Leveling Up

- [ ] Require students to attend career readiness sessions (or embed in the curriculum as a capstone project) to create their professional brand, prepare for experiential learning opportunities such as career-relevant internships, and start building their network.
- [ ] Host opportunities for students to meet student/professional organizations and faculty members aligned with their chosen major and associated careers (workshops, classroom presentations, meet and greets, etc).
- [ ] Develop alumni mentoring networks.
- [ ] Offer employer-in-residence programs.

Leading with Purpose

- [ ] Provide first-year career transition coaching.
- [ ] Offer post-graduation support programs.
- [ ] Develop career launch incubators.
- [ ] Use first destination survey data to help inform practices, trends, and additional support needed.

STUDENT AFFAIRS

	Essential Practices	Leveling Up	Leading with Purpose
DISCOVER	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	☐ Encourage students to identify civic engagement goals (CLDE connection) in the Purpose Profile. ☐ Create early industry mentorship programs.
ALIGN	☐ Support students in selecting an academic program or major aligned with their personal vision by the end of their first academic year.	☐ Guide students through personal financial planning aligned with possible career pathways.	☐ Host major and career fairs designed to facilitate exploration of career opportunities and greater understanding of how coursework aligns with potential careers. ☐ Host networking events with regional employers and alumni to showcase potential career outcomes and opportunities associated with various academic tracks.
MAP	☐ Create a student-facing curriculum map showing the progression of career-related skills and competencies from first semester to degree completion, and support students in using this map to track their progress. ☐ Early in their academic trajectory, provide students with an overview of specific career milestones across a student journey and resources for tracking their progress.	☐ Include extracurricular activities in the student-facing curriculum map. ☐ Provide all students with opportunities to engage in ongoing career and life design through continued seminar courses and/or routine advising.	☐ Build comprehensive e-portfolio systems.

STUDENT AFFAIRS (CONTINUED)

	Essential Practices	Leveling Up	Leading with Purpose
EXPERIENCE	☐ Centralize resources for students to support them in identifying experiential learning (internships, work-study, service learning, research).	☐ Support students in building social capital through networking opportunities with faculty, alumni, employers, and community leaders.	☐ Provide opportunities throughout the student journey for civic engagement (e.g., service learning) to help develop purpose through community connection. ☐ Create ongoing opportunities (workshops, seminars, etc.) for students to deepen elements of their personal purpose.
REFLECT	☐ Schedule regular career coaching sessions to help students reflect on their college experience and assess their progress toward career-ready skills and post-graduation goals.	☐ Implement peer career mentoring programs.	☐ Support students with Comprehensive 360° coaching that examines more aspects of their lives to support their purpose.
LAUNCH	☐ Provide multiple opportunities for students to participate in: • Resume and application preparation • Career fairs • Networking events • Job searching • Interview preparation	☐ Require students to attend career readiness sessions (or embed in the curriculum as a capstone project) to create their professional brand, prepare for experiential learning opportunities such as career-relevant internships, and start building their network. ☐ Host opportunities for students to meet student/professional organizations and faculty members aligned with their chosen major and associated careers (workshops, classroom presentations, meet and greets, etc). ☐ Develop alumni mentoring networks.	☐ Provide first-year career transition coaching. ☐ Offer post-graduation support programs.

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