Discussion Guide for *Guided Pathways Demystified*:

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OVERVIEW

This discussion guide is a companion to the NCII paper that explores ten commonly asked questions by faculty and staff about implementing guided pathways. It provides discussion questions for each section of the paper that are designed to stimulate campus conversation about these important issues that will need to be addressed to successfully pursue a guided pathways effort. Feel free to pick and choose from the list of questions to fit your unique campus culture and setting.

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Concerns about Compromising our Higher Education Values

Four of the most provocative questions we encounter in discussions about guided pathways relate to the very foundation of our country's higher education system. They center on issues of access, choice, quality, and breadth. *Each overarching question is listed with associated discussion questions to explore the overarching question at your campus below it.*

Question 1 - Isn't college a meritocracy where the strong and smart succeed, and the weak, unmotivated, or underprepared don't?

- What are your thoughts about the data suggesting such a disparity between high-income and low-income students at the same mid-to-high preparation levels? Do you see this as a real issue at your college? If so, how does it manifest itself?

- Do you believe that with scaled guided pathways redesign efforts you could produce the type of transformational changes in outcomes that CUNY ASAP, Georgia State, and/or City College of Chicago have? Why or why not?

Question 2 - Isn't "free choice" the cornerstone of American higher education?

- Do you think the behavioral economics and social psychology research on the ideal number of choices applies to your students' choices of courses and programs? Why or why not?

- How can we build a structure that allows for some student exploration and choice without allowing students to wander aimlessly around the curriculum? What does this look like in effective practice for the student?

- What are the barriers to students choosing programs instead of a semester of courses upon entry to your college?

- Assume that we selected six "career focus areas" for your college to help structure student choices of programs, and that the draft list started with Business, Social Sciences & Human Services, STEM, Health and Biosciences, Art, Humanities & Design, and Manufacturing & Construction Technology. How do you think this would work at your college? What would you add or reframe?

Question 3 - Won't we sacrifice quality when we move to guided pathways?

- How does your model for institutional learning outcomes / GE outcomes differ from those described in the guide as the "Four C's" - communication, computation, critical thinking & citizenship? What else helps you operationalize "quality" at your college?

- How might the reduction of the number of general education course options impact the student achievement of your general education outcomes? Why?

- Why do you think employers most often report issues with graduates' critical thinking, communication, computation, and problem solving skills? What might you do about this at your college?

- As you implement guided pathways at your institution, how are you addressing/embedding these competencies that employers so often feel are lacking?

- What metrics and evaluation processes do you use to assess educational "quality" at your institution?

Question 4 - Won't we lose the heart of a liberal arts education when we make students' journey more structured?

- Can you see your college adopting the approach where program faculty suggest a default set of electives that "work together" to ensure attainment of GE outcomes for graduates of their program? Why or why not?

- Do you expect that the general education student experience will get stronger under a guided pathways approach with a recommended / default set of general education course by program? Why or why not?

Practical Considerations about Control and Enrollment

Two practical issues also surface in conversations about guided pathways that relate to the day-to-day autonomy of educators and college operations. Each overarching question is listed with associated discussion questions to explore the overarching question at your campus below it.

Question 5 - Won't faculty lose control over what is taught in their discipline?

- How have state transfer agreements, guaranteed transfer agreements, or other 4-year articulation agreements already affected course offerings at your college? Are transfer changes driven by institutional collaboration or state policy?

- What are the one or two most powerful strategies your institution can ue to strengthen transfer pathways for your students?

- How do you feel about a shift from faculty determining what courses should be taught in their discipline to faculty selecting courses that fit into a student's program of study?

Question 6 - Won't we lose enrollment at our college if we decrease swirl with increased structure—or by making things mandatory?

- What has the enrollment trend been at your college in the past 3-4 years? What is the general consensus on the factors driving your enrollment trend? Do you have data to support the hypotheses about why enrollment is trending in the way you have observed?

- What is the average number of total units attempted per new student in their first three years at the college? How can this metric be used to incent guided pathways implementation?

- What is the average number of units a student completes when awarded an Associate degree at your institution? How would you expect implementation of guided pathways to impact that number? What are the implications for return on investment and efficiency metrics? For students' Pell Grant eligibility?

- Will increasing student persistence & progression increase enrollments? Why or why not?

Apprehensions about the Impact on Students' Learning and Development

Finally, educators rightfully raise numerous concerns about the impact of guided pathways on students' learning and development, such as restricting maturation and independence, hampering self-discovery, and tracking students on a specific career trajectory. *Each overarching question is listed with associated discussion questions to explore the overarching question at your campus below it.*

Question 7 - Isn't all of this "hand-holding" going to create graduates that can't navigate the workplace and the "real world"?

- Would an exercise where faculty & staff tried to enroll at the college & go through the matriculation process or select a 2-year pathway using tools only available to students stimulate conversation on your campus?

Question 8 - Don't students benefit when they "find themselves" by what looks like wandering to the observer?

- If students are clamoring for more guidance and more structure as the research suggests, why do you think we at the college have traditionally resisting providing it? What might we do differently?

Question 9 - How can students be expected to make career decisions at age 18?

- What steps have you taken to integrate the exploration of interests and careers with program selection at your college? Have these steps been provided early enough so that students have the information they need to make choices about programs?

- What steps need to be taken in order to implement common first-semester and second-semester course schedules leading to a wide range of programs within a discipline or meta-major?

Question 10 - Don't students change careers four to seven times? Given this context, why would we put them on structured pathways?

- The paper asserts there is a connection between attainment of strong general education and preparation for career changes. Do you see guided pathways as strengthening this link? Why or why not?