## Faculty & Staff: A Toolkit for Mid-Level Managers

# Practice Profiles

These stories contain concrete examples of mid-level leadership in practice. They highlight colleges doing exceptional work and share field-based lessons.

**Authors:**   Martha Ellis and Jeremy Martin, The Charles A. Dana Center at The University of Texas at Austin

Alison Kadlec and Ashmi Patel, Sova

**Contact:**   info@sova.org

Every student deserves a strong start in their first year of college. This toolkit is part of a SSTF three-part series, providing resources to assist postsecondary leaders design and implement reform strategies that support equitable outcomes for students who are marginalized and racially minoritized.

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# Black River Technical College
## Implementing quality corequisite courses

There is much to learn from Black River Technical College (BRTC) about developmental education reform. BRTC achieved its goal of enrolling 75% of underprepared students in corequisite support by fall 2021 one year early, in spring 2020. Corequisite courses have been rapidly brought to scale and are now offered for College Algebra, Mathematical Reasoning/Quantitative Literacy and Pre-Calculus. BRTC is one of 22 community colleges in Arkansas committed to implementing high quality, rigorous corequisite courses in English and mathematics.

- Located in Arkansas
- One of 22 community and technical colleges
- 3,000 students enrolled annually
- Student population: 93% white, 3% Latinx, 2% Black

### Developing an action plan with a cross-functional team

Black River Technical College put together a cross-functional leadership team to lead this work. The dean of general studies led the team. Other members of the team included a math department head, two additional math faculty, two advisors and an institutional researcher. The team developed a multi-year action plan, including implementation targets for a percentage of students who would be placed in corequisite courses and who completed gateway math courses.



### Corequisite Student Enrollment

| | AYS2019 | | AYS2020 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | # of Students | % of Students | # of Students | % of Students |
| Total # of Students Enrolled in Remedial Mathematics Coursework | 355 | 100% | 289 | 100% |
| Corequisite Remediation Enrollment | 203 | 57% | 216 | 75% |
| Pre-Requisite Remediation Enrollment | 152 | 43% | 73 | 25% |

Target for corequisite enrollment by AY2021 was 75%. The goal was achieved in AY2020.

## Roles and responsibilities

The team took a two-pronged approach to implement the plan. Dean Statler served as the ambassador of the effort, introducing the corequisite support courses and discussing the model with faculty and staff. She met with advising staff to talk about why the corequisite model and multiple pathways are important, and to help them understand how to place students appropriately based on their scores and degree program.

For its part, the math department created a spreadsheet that detailed the multiple paths students could take to achieve their math requirements, beyond the default gateway course of College Algebra. The spreadsheet aligned the appropriate math course to the degree programs and was provided to advisors to assist them in placing students into corequisite courses and the right math pathway.

## How BRTC uses data

Assessment is an ongoing process for all BRTC classes. The math department works together to backmap courses, align curriculum and create common assessments in all sections of a course, which are analyzed at the end of each semester. The data is then used to improve the quality of each course. The faculty utilize course level assessment data reports to measure all the outcomes for all sections of a particular course. The college continues to utilize their Course Level Assessment Data Reports to determine if they are meeting all the objectives and outcomes they set for each course. At the end of each semester, student outcome data from corequisite math and English courses are shared with all the faculty and the administration.

## Key takeaways

BRTC's success can be attributed to several key strategies.

- A cross-functional approach was critical from the beginning of the implementation process to develop a robust process that could be scaled. Gaining an understanding of all elements of the student experience, from entry through placement and completion of the gateway courses, was vital for this change process to be effective from the start.

- Faculty were involved in the change, and the dean of general studies encouraged faculty collaboration and communication during implementation and the continuous improvement processes. The senior administration was supportive of time allocation and professional learning opportunities for faculty to own and lead the change.

- BRTC set targets in the action plan for structural change, and student outcomes provided milestones for the implementation process. Common calendars, numbers and strategic scheduling of courses, as well as a percentage of students placed into corequisite courses, are examples of structural measures that the college undertook.

- BRTC's departments engaged (and continue to engage) in continuous improvement processes, including gathering qualitative and quantitative data from both students and faculty. They disaggregated data to understand student populations and address opportunity gaps.

# Cuyamaca College

## Driving reform to increase support and student success

Cuyamaca College began transforming its developmental math programs in 2016. Its multipronged approach included incorporating multiple measures to place students in their first math courses and quickly scaling up corequisite course supports in two pathways. Engaging departments across the college, gaining administrative support, and using data to influence change were all a part of the process to implement multiple math pathways to increase student success.

Cuyamaca's changes dramatically increased the number of students achieving transfer-level math credit within their first year of enrollment. In 2015-16, that percentage was 29%. In 2016-17 that number increased to 46%. The table below shows the results of the pilot program in fall 2016.  The results show students passing intermediate algebra (a transfer course in California) with support in one semester compared to the traditional multi-course developmental sequence measure by two years to completion.

- Located in California
- One of two colleges in the Grossmont-Cuyamaca Community College District
- 5,500 students annually
- Student population: 46% white, 33% Latinx, 6% Black

### First-time Students Intermediate Algebra Success Rates[1]

| Initial Placement | One semester with Support (Fall 2016) | Two years traditional (Fall 2014 cohort) |
|---|---|---|
| All Levels | 54.7% | 35.4% |
| Transfer Math | 100% | 65.6% |
| One Level Below | 71.4% | 62.4% |
| Two Levels Below | 66.7% | 28.4% |
| Three or More Levels Below | 37.5% | 17.7% |

1. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FzBXN8kBkjA

### Engaging departments across the college

In 2015, Tammy Marshall, the chair of the math department, spearheaded an effort to change the developmental math program at Cuyamaca. She began by meeting with all of the departments on campus that would be impacted by the introduction of multiple math pathways for students.

Marshall met regularly with admissions staff, counselors advising students, programmers creating the registration site, members of the curriculum committee, staff in the disability services, veterans' services and financial aid offices, and the campus evaluator to be sure everyone knew why the reforms were under way and to hear from them how the changes would impact them. She presented the college's lackluster student success data alongside research that showed the promising outcomes possible with curriculum and pedagogical reforms, and invited leaders across the campus to have a conversation with her. Marshall recognized that she needed input from all these facets of students' campus experience to understand how it would impact their way of doing things.

For example, because the college was removing all of the remediation courses, prerequisites had to  change. Marshall describes asking chemistry and economics faculty what math skills students needed to be successful in their courses and noted none of the topics faculty mentioned were being taught in the prerequisite algebra course, but rather aligned much more closely to the topics covered in the statistics corequisite course. This two-way communication across departments built trust and paved the way for students to get the math content they needed for their fields of interest.

### Administrative support

Marshall says such broad reforms that impact nearly every campus department are not possible without strong, ongoing support from college administrators who prioritize the changes that need to be made at so many student contact points. At the same time, the impetus for change must be faculty-led. A reform-minded administration that doesn't have faculty buy-in will not be able to implement systemic change. Rather, faculty-led innovation and reform, shifting mindsets about how student success is measured, and engaging in pedagogical reform is best achieved when faculty are pushing and supporting each other. Marshall emphasizes that all faculty, full-time and part-time, need to be included in the reform effort and given appropriate support throughout the process.

### Utilizing data to constructively engage around faculty resistance

Making large-scale changes at such an accelerated pace will inevitably be met with resistance from some faculty members. In listening to faculty opinions and fears about the changes, Marshall came to realize that many came from a place of concern for their students' success. She showed them the data that while their students were passing remediation classes, they were not in fact making it through the transfer-level courses that followed. In other words, what they had been doing just wasn't working.

### Culturally responsive pedagogical strategies

Cuyamaca embraced a pedagogical shift, as well. Prior to the fall semester during the first year of implementation, Marshall required faculty who would be teaching the new corequisite courses to attend training focused on shifting away from lecture-based to collaborative classrooms. A "train the trainer" model led to a community of practice teams based on the course and corequisite courses they would be teaching, and eventually led to faculty teaching the courses without the corequisite to start utilizing the same pedagogical techniques.

"Changes in the classroom were just as vital as structural changes," says Marshall.

Faculty were encouraged to think intentionally about creating student-centered learning practices where group work was the norm and so-called "brains on" activities had students thinking and talking about math with each other, gaining confidence in their own abilities, and increasing their math vocabulary and fluency.

Work toward closing the achievement gap for traditionally underserved student populations continues, with faculty analyzing their own disaggregated student data and participating in a campuswide equity teaching and learning institute that faculty are paid to attend. In analyzing their own student success data, faculty can begin to see areas where they might have biases and work to reform their own practices. Marshall is continually providing faculty with the latest research highlighting best practices in improving outcomes for racially minoritized students, and encouraging participation in conferences like the annual California Acceleration Project conference, which has a strong focus on equity.

## Key takeaways

Cuyamaca's changes increased student outcomes. Students across all ethnic groups passed transfer-level math courses at higher rates after changes were made to placement and the corequisite supports were added to the first-year math courses.

- Broad reforms that impact nearly every campus department require strong, ongoing support from college administrators who prioritize the changes that need to be made.

- Shifting faculty mindset from course success to throughput is an important step in the reform process.

- Ensuring stakeholders understand why the reforms are being implemented facilitates buy-in.

- Sharing data with faculty that illustrates how the traditional developmental math program is failing students reduces resistance.

- Both administrative and faculty engagement are necessary for systemic change.

- All faculty, full-time and part-time, need to be included in the reform effort and given appropriate support throughout the process.

# Harper College Leadership Institute

## A study in promoting equity-minded leadership

- Located in Illinois
- 24,000 students annually
- Student population: 48% white, 30% Latinx, 12% Asian, 4% Black, 1% Indigenous and 5% unknown

When Harper College (HC) was established more than 50 years ago, its vastly white faculty and student body reflected the demographics of the surrounding community. As the community began to change, the college's enrollment started to shift and opportunity gaps emerged. The makeup of employees and students became less reflective of the population of this area of Illinois. Harper College senior leadership and its Board of Trustees knew that to advance equity-minded student success, they needed an intentional, transformative approach. They also knew it could not be a one-year solution or project. By advancing leadership at all levels of the institution through an intensive equity- and inclusion-focused leadership development program, the college has witnessed significant results. The college has seen substantial improvement in student success outcomes through many innovative, aligned initiatives throughout the college.

## Identifying areas of need

In 2012, President Dr. Ken Ender and the board of trustees engaged in a series of discussions with faculty, staff and the community. In the course of these conversations, two areas in need of strategic and intentional intervention emerged: leadership development and equity in hiring. To address the former, the college created a leadership institute; and to achieve equity in hiring it set and measured goals to recruit and retain employees from diverse backgrounds.

## Investing in professional development

To support leadership development for employees, Harper College created the Harper Leadership Institute (HLI) and, in 2013, welcomed its first cohort into a year-long program to enhance their leadership skills.

The HLI embraces a leadership development philosophy of learning, leading and reflecting. The curriculum is infused with principles and practices that reflect a deep commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion. Senior leadership with expertise in those areas liaise with the president and the HLI planning committee. The institute also employs an equity consultant to review and assist with the session planning.

The HLI is open to all full-time, part-time and unit eligible employees who apply in the spring of the year prior to the next HLI. Approximately 25 employees are selected each year.

## Immersing participants in diversity, equity and inclusion activities

The program begins in September with a four-day/three-night residential leadership-immersion located off campus. During this process, diversity, equity and inclusion permeate all the sessions, ranging from understanding individual diversity in leadership to using disaggregated data and understanding the student population at HC. The immersion session ends with a half-day workshop by the Kaleidoscope Group on Leading Inclusively. Following the immersion experience, participants meet monthly for a luncheon and facilitated learning experience on campus. Topics for these monthly sessions include identified leadership competencies and discussion of pre-readings around that topic. Each participant is assigned to a project group, and each group has the support of a coach, to develop and implement a project that supports the Harper Strategic Plan and improves the student experience.

## Weaving diversity, equity and inclusion principles throughout the college

To date, almost 200 HC employees have participated in the HLI. Participants have come from every area of the college, including information technology, institutional research, operations, financial services, student services, advising, faculty, president's office staff and custodial services. Past participants weave diversity, equity and inclusion principles throughout the institution in their roles as mid-level leaders.

## Achieving equity goals in employment

When Harper College was established more than 50 years ago, its vastly white faculty and student body reflected the demographics of the surrounding suburban community. As the community began to change, the makeup of employees and students became less reflective of the population. To lead multiple efforts to close gaps across all aspects of hiring and retention, the college created the office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and named a chief equity and inclusion officer.

## Acting on equity commitments

When HC appointed Dr. Avis Proctor, a Black woman, as the new college president in 2018, it broke a 51-year history of naming white men to the post. In fact, all of the finalists in this historic search were Black women, marking a new era in leadership for the college. To ensure more diverse hires, the college implemented a "diversity in new hires" goal to match or exceed the diversity of the community it serves. This goal was achieved in 2018 with 35.2% diversity in new hires, a little greater than the community diversity of 34.8%. This goal is measured annually for new hires.

The college also gathers data related to underrepresented employee voluntary separation. The FY2019 voluntary separation rate of underrepresented employees sharply decreased from 16.8% in FY2016 to 5.9% in FY2019. This 2019 percentage is just below the overall employee separation rate of 6.0%.

## Key takeaways

The Harper College story illustrates core lessons about leading impactful equity work:

- Developing collegewide equity consciousness is long-term, multi-channel work.

- A strong vision and sense of purpose must be combined with practical and ongoing opportunities for meaningful professional learning.

- A commitment to equity is not just about students; it is also about ensuring that the leadership of the institution at every level is representative of the student populations served by the institution.

- Equity work is personal, professional, structural and cultural — mid-level leaders are uniquely positioned to foster progress on all of these fronts.

# Pellissippi State Community College

## How a champion can jumpstart reform

Pellissippi State Community College's (PSCC) developmental math reform began in 2014 with a successful pilot project that offered a corequisite model of math support. By 2015, in accordance with a statewide mandate, the college had fully implemented the corequisite model. The results were outstanding and exceeded statewide success figures. Students enrolled in both the corequisite support and gateway math course passed at a rate of 66% in fall 2015 and 56% in spring 2016.

- **Located in East Tennessee**

- **10,800 annual enrollment**

- **Student population: 80% white, 6.3% Black, 5.4% Latinx**

### Championing the reform process

Associate Professor Brittany Mosby was one of five instructors who took part in the corequisite model of support pilot and was instrumental in building relationships and doing the hard work of communicating the reasons reforms were critical to removing the stubborn barrier that passing a gateway math course presents for so many students. As Mosby said, "Transformative change takes more than an announcement at a department meeting. Someone has to be a champion for the change."

### Spreading reform across campus

Systemic reform is not possible without careful coordination among departments across campus. The logistics of "simply" adding corequisite courses at PSCC involved multiple departments that each serve different purposes in students' academic lives. Mosby understood the important role advisers play in guiding students to make the best decisions for their academic interests and goals. The success of the early pilot courses was instrumental in helping advisers understand the power of corequisite supports and be willing to encourage students to enroll in a college-level math course even when their placement scores deemed them unprepared.

Mosby participated in countless meetings, explaining the corequisite model with not only the advising department, but the registrar's office, the IT department's scheduling team, the financial aid department, and at the annual faculty in-service meeting. Gaining perspective and insight into how adding corequisite courses would impact each department paved the way for a smooth transition,

as did PSCC's culture of cooperation. The willingness to share information and ideas ensured that the logistics of scheduling, financial aid and appropriate advising were in place well before students had the option of a corequisite support class.

"Adjustments to curriculum can come later," said Mosby, "but the logistics of adding corequisite supports, making sure advisers understand how corequisite support courses save students time and money, and the necessary changes in the scheduling system itself all need to be an early priority."

## Constructively engaging faculty resistance

Faculty resistance is to be expected. In Mosby's math department, a recent change to remediation efforts resulted in opposition to yet another shift in direction. To reach "people in the middle," who didn't have a strong opinion about the promise of the corequisite model, and to build a critical mass of support within the math department, Mosby and the reform team presented the pilot study results, which demonstrated how getting students through their college-level math would enhance their success in other disciplines.

This was especially important because of the commitment the college made early on that the same person who was teaching the college-level course would also be teaching the corequisite course. She and others convinced reluctant faculty to consider the superior support they could give their students by keeping a tight alignment between the material presented in the course and the "just in time" material and topics provided in the weekly corequisite meeting.

Senior leadership supported faculty efforts by granting release time during the first two semesters the corequisites were offered to refine their implementation. Faculty were given some flexibility within the curriculum but were required to adhere to a master syllabus.

Additionally, the reform team led workshops for adjunct faculty from all disciplines, talking about the results of the pilot, which showed student success rates not only improved dramatically, but many of the students who took part in the corequisites were more likely to become leaders in the college-level course.

## Developing a growth mindset to create change for students of color

PSCC used grant funding to train students and faculty in how to nurture a growth mindset when it comes to equity for racially minoritized students. Workshops helped faculty recognize that student success can look different, and that cultural differences and diverse backgrounds can be acknowledged and elevated through a choice of data sets that include social justice and environmental data. Knowing that students arrive with valuable and diverse backgrounds, and embracing the job of meeting them where they are in order to promote a stronger sense of belonging and purpose, is a vital piece of the work at PSCC.

"We get the students we get with the background that is part of who they are. We need to level the playing field from the beginning by accepting each student's background," Mosby said.

## Key takeaways

- Systemic reform must be faculty led. The challenge of creating systemic change and intentionally pursuing continuous improvement cannot be done by a single leader or department within an organization. The support of senior leaders is critical if mid-level leaders are to gain faculty support and engagement in the transformation process.

- Transformation, not just transactional change, requires cross-functional teamwork and a culture of collaboration that values listening. Mosby advises those seeking to enact deep transformations to have broad conversations with people from across the institution.

*"Transformative change takes more than an announcement at a department meeting. Someone has to be a champion for the change."*

**—BRITTANY MOSBY, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, PELLISSIPPI STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

# The State University of New York

## Supporting mid-level managers to create change

In 2018, State University of New York (SUNY) launched its work with Strong Start to Finish with the aim of supporting scaled implementation of corequisite gateway math courses, alternative multiple measures placement processes, and investment in change leadership strategies for faculty and staff to sustain this work over time. With this focus, SUNY seeks to significantly increase the number and proportion of students from low-income families, students of color, and returning adults who pass college math and English and enter a program of study in their first year of college.

All 30 SUNY community colleges and eight technology and comprehensive colleges are participating in the SSTF work and are prioritizing: accelerating and scaling up Guided Pathways reform, Math Pathways, and expanding the corequisite English for the 236,000 students served by these institutions. SUNY is also committed to pursuing implementation of multiple measures placement and remediation in the context of the broader commitment to Guided Pathways implementation. The SSTF Core Principles have been purposefully adopted and leveraged as grounding and guiding resources for ensuring institutions are clear about the intended outcomes of SUNY's participation in Strong Start to Finish.

- **29 state operated campuses, five statutory colleges and 30 community colleges**
- **424,000 students annually (not including adult education students)**
- **Student population: 54% white, 14% Latinx and 10% Black**



## Supporting mid-level leaders from the system level

The SUNY system office houses the New York State's Student Success Center where the day-to-day work is led by a small but focused team that understands the necessity of supporting institutional change through the empowerment of mid-level leaders. In addition to supporting presidents and senior leaders, the team prioritizes their role in providing support and frameworks for faculty and staff leaders to engage in and drive the work forward. With faculty planning teams who help design the content for professional development and enrichment sessions designed from faculty feedback, and mid-level leaders intentionally engaged as drivers, the system focuses on professional development as an engine for this work.

## Examples of support services offered

To provide mid-level managers the support they need to lead change at their institutions, SUNY has offered more than 30 different events covering a range of topics, from research to corequisite math pathways to supporting student progress on their chosen pathways. Since 2018, these events have created a wide range of experiences for mid-level leaders, and have included technical assistance, webinars, conferences, workshops and space for dedicated listening. By staying nimble in meeting institutions where they are, and listening to the needs of mid-level managers, system leaders at SUNY are keeping institutions focused on the right initiatives and providing mid-level managers the support they need. They are leveraging their "systemness" to invest in the people most important to successful implementation of Strong Start to Finish priorities.

The system provides this support and development of mid-level managers through efforts to 1) expose them to national experts and leading-edge research; 2) create space for mid-level leaders from across the system to reflect together on lessons learned about leading change; and 3) pay careful attention to understanding and fostering the "absorptive capacity" of institutions to make best use of information and experiences provided by the system. They also foster peer learning and relationship building by region, and they give mid-level leaders regular opportunities to provide insight that informs future support and engagements.

The system helps create coherence in the narrative and what it means to undertake comprehensive student success reform, and elevates the "why" of the various initiatives as they align to a broader vision. It also helps support campuses to understand how to integrate these programs and look holistically to help students succeed.

## Key takeaways

- Mid-level leadership is not about institutional actors, and the lessons and needs around effective mid-level leadership apply to systems as well.
- Whereas systems are traditionally viewed as compliance entities, sustainable progress on scaling evidence-based innovations requires systems to develop the capacity to serve as advocates and supporters of equity-grounded change. Mid-level system leaders are critical for strengthening the advocacy capacity of systems.

*"When it comes to SUNY's math pathways and corequisite work...the actual content development is all our faculty. They drive the work, and we support them in a variety of ways."*

— JENNIFER MILLER, SUNY ASSISTANT VICE CHANCELLOR FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE SUPPORT

# About This Toolkit

This toolkit was conceived by the Dana Center and Sova with the goal of bringing together leading lessons and insights gleaned by these organizations over the years through direct work supporting hundreds of institutions committed to scaling ambitious, equity-grounded student success reforms. Based on our combined insights, we built this toolkit to provide institutions and systems with practical resources to help mid-level managers become more effective leaders of complex change, and to help inform institutional and system leaders tasked with providing professional development for mid-level managers.

## Toolkit authors

### Martha Ellis

Martha M. Ellis, Ph.D. is president of Mellis LLC, a consulting firm bringing deep experience, substantive knowledge, and research-based innovation to leaders as they confront the challenges and opportunities facing higher education today and in the future. She is the senior pathways lead for the Texas Success Center, Achieving the Dream Leadership Coach, and professor in residence at the University of Texas at Austin.

Previously, Martha was managing director for the Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin. Prior to joining the Dana Center, Martha was associate vice chancellor of Academic Affairs for the University of Texas System. She has 35 years of experience in universities and community colleges in Texas, New Mexico and Oklahoma, including two college presidencies, provost, chief information officer, graduate and undergraduate dean, and faculty member positions. Martha has won numerous teaching awards, has written scholarly publications and is an invited presenter at national conferences. She was recognized by the U. S. Congress and Texas House of Representatives for her leadership in higher education.

### Alison Kadlec

Alison Kadlec is a founding partner at Sova, where she leads a body of work focused on accelerating the pace and improving the quality of large-scale, equity-grounded reform of higher education. She has worked with scores of colleges and universities across the country to support the capacity of senior and mid-level leaders to effectively engage members of their communities as constructive partners in the hard work of change on behalf of equitable student success. Alison and her team also work with state policymakers and system leaders in more than half the states in the U.S. to help improve the quality of policy development and implementation around higher education and workforce issues. She has been active in the Guided Pathways movement since its origins, led the 2020 update of the Core Principles for Transforming Remediation, and is working in several states on issues related to scaled redesign of developmental education.

The authors would like to thank Jeremy Martin and the wider team at the Dana Center, as well as Ashmi Patel from Sova, for their contributions to and support of the creation of this toolkit.

# About Strong Start to Finish

Strong Start to Finish is a network of policy and research partners, institution and systems leaders, and foundations advancing system reforms in developmental education, so every student can succeed in their first year of college. In particular, we support college success for Black, Brown, Asian American, Indigenous students, adult learners, and students with low incomes, who have been underserved by the education system for too long. We work to scale the use of proven, proactive strategies that remove barriers that typically impede these students from earning essential college credits in English and Math courses in their first year. Education Commission of the States is the host of the Strong Start to Finish network.