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Research • Planning • Professional Development  
for California Community Colleges

# Yuba College Completion by Design/Equity Focus Groups

Student Perspectives Report  
Executive Summary

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# Executive Summary

## Introduction

A 2016 Aspen Institute site visit to Yuba College (Yuba) assessed the college's challenges and opportunities, based on the criteria for and lessons learned from the Institute's [Community College Excellence](#)<sup>1</sup> prize program. This site visit resulted in a series of recommendations for how Yuba could activate institutional transformation, using the Completion by Design (CBD) [loss/momentum framework](#)<sup>2</sup> to guide its reform work. One key recommendation focused on gathering student perspectives to demonstrate the urgency for change and to engage stakeholders across Yuba in taking steps toward institutional improvement. In response to this recommendation, the college contracted with the Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges (RP Group) in 2017 to **conduct a series of focus groups with Yuba students to learn more about students' experience at the different stages of the CBD loss/momentum framework, paying particular attention to groups identified as experiencing disproportionate impact at the college.**

## Methodology

At the onset, the RP Group designed this student focus group project in partnership with Yuba leadership to support equity planning efforts, **providing faculty, staff, and administrators with actionable insights** on the experiences of key student groups at various stages in their path to and through the institution. The RP Group's approach was to talk to student groups identified as experiencing disproportionate impact in Yuba's Student Equity Plan in each loss/momentum stage (connection, entry, progress, and completion). In total, the RP Group conducted 13 student focus groups over the span of four days, involving 127 students from specific populations (disabled students, veterans, African Americans, Native Americans, Latinos, low-income students, students aged 20-24, and foster youth). These focus groups also included Yuba City High School students, individuals attending the Sutter County One Stop adult school, and students concurrently enrolled at the college's Sutter County campus.

## Key Findings

The key findings resulting from this research organize into three groups: (1) findings related to each stage of the loss/momentum framework (connection, entry, progress, and completion); (2) themes that emerged across all stages; and (3) findings unique to specific student populations. We summarize the key findings in each of these three areas below.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://highered.aspeninstitute.org/aspen-prize/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://powerofcommunity.force.com/education/s/cbd-lmf>

## By Loss/Momentum Stage

- **Connection** (prospective and concurrently enrolled) students **expressed limited understanding of Yuba’s value, its opportunities, and benefits**; some perceived the college as a “last resort” rather than a place of promise.
- **Entry** students reported **inconsistent support during key onboarding steps** such as orientation, counseling geared toward selecting a goal, developing an education plan related to achieving that goal, and receiving information about the **positive impact of high-touch services at the college** such as tutoring, special programs (e.g., EOPS, DSPS, Veteran Resource Center), and counseling courses such as *Counseling 10: College Success*.
- **Progress** students pointed to the **insufficient support for and monitoring of their progress towards meeting their academic goals**, and reported the need for students to be highly proactive in triangulating information about program requirements and determining their own movement toward goal attainment.
- **Completion** students identified the **need for better advising on how to efficiently and effectively reach their academic goals** and **increased support for making successful transitions** to a university and/or employment.

## Across Loss/Momentum Stages

- Students shared experiences that suggested the **absence of student-centered approaches in key functions and processes**, such as negative interactions with staff in various offices.
- Students commonly **perceived variability in faculty commitment to students’ success**, describing “star” instructors who make a positive impact on their success and others who appear disconnected and underprepared.
- Participants consistently cited the **high cost of textbooks and required access codes** as impacting their success at each stage.
- Students generally reported a **lack of sufficient course availability and offerings** hampering their achievement of key milestones.
- While most participants characterized Yuba as **diverse and friendly**, students across the stages noted a critical **lack of community on campus and not feeling connected to the college**.

## By Student Populations

- **Disabled students** shared several challenges they experienced, ranging from Americans with Disabilities Act (**ADA**) **compliance issues** on the campus to **concerns related to their rights as disabled students and sensitivities around their needs**.

- **Veteran** students expressed a **strong connection to the Veteran Resource Center (VRC)**, but perceived a **lack of institutional commitment** to and support for the center’s operations, staffing, and resources.
- **African-American/Black** students specifically reflected on a **lack of Black identity and community on campus in both student life and academics**. They reported an absence of institutional commitment or resources for African-American/Black programs such as UMOJA and the dearth of African-American/Black role models.
- **Native-American** students had similar reflections to African-American/Black students, noting a **lack of a Native-American presence in students, role models, and resources** devoted specifically to their community. These students additionally noted several resources in the surrounding region that could be connected to the college to lend additional support to this population.
- **Latino** students did not articulate specific challenges associated with their ethnicity, but rather **identified issues associated with their identity as a first-generation student** and their inability to effectively navigate college compared to their peers, given their familial lack of experience with postsecondary education.
- **Low-income** students described **transportation-related barriers** at the college as affecting their success.
- **Students aged 20-24 and foster youth** did not express any unique challenges related to their specific populations; their **perspectives were consistent with other student groups**. Note: only three students participated in the foster youth focus group, and all of them were further along in their educational journeys, having achieved some level of success.

## Recommendations

Subsequent to engaging the RP Group to conduct these student focus groups, Yuba joined the California Guided Pathways Project, which is working with a select cadre of California Community Colleges (CCCs) to create structured educational experiences that support each student from entry to attainment of high-quality postsecondary credentials and career. Yuba’s **move toward guided pathways can naturally build on the loss/momentum framework and advance the institution’s equity agenda**.

In conducting focus groups with students of all characteristics and in all phases of their journey to and through the college—from connection through completion—it became apparent that **Yuba has an opportunity to improve student success by taking a more comprehensive and coherent approach to the student experience**. The findings that emerged from these student perspectives **reinforce Yuba’s pursuit of guided pathways**. In turn, our recommendations are designed to help Yuba in its initial steps toward guided pathways design and development.

## Strengthening New Student Outreach and Onboarding

1. **Increase physical presence with and proactive communication to prospective and newly-enrolled students about Yuba's benefits and opportunities**, focusing on the college as a strategic choice and a place of promise, opportunity, and mobility.
2. **Examine all aspects of how Yuba onboards students to create a more seamless and comprehensive transition** into the college, including more meaningful orientation and robust counseling.

## Improving Academic Offerings, Advising, and Services throughout the Yuba Journey

3. **Recognize the need for support and guidance throughout the entire student journey**, including the provision of proactive advising at key milestones that help students track their progress and maintain forward momentum.
4. **Ensure course offerings and academic services are designed and offered to meet actual student need**, particularly looking at the availability of key milestone courses that are critical to student progress and completion and taking in to account the academic support needs of all students (e.g., individuals who attend classes at night and on the weekend, on different campuses).
5. **Explore ways to offset textbook costs for students**, including expanding book reserve and loan program, tapping into open-source materials and resources, and helping faculty become more aware of how their textbook decisions can place a sometime unnecessary financial burden on students.

## Ensuring All Students Are Supported and Engaged

6. **Strengthen student connections to campus**, exploring ways to ensure students feel a sense of place at the college and understand how they can engage and contribute both inside and outside the classroom.
7. **Recognize and support the experience of unique student populations**, particularly building community within and engaging more role models for African-American and Native-American student groups, and demonstrating a commitment to Veteran/Military students through sustained and adequate support of the VRC.
8. **Ensure the college is responsive to the specific needs of students with disabilities**, including ensuring all faculty, staff, and administrators are aware of and comply with ADA requirements and are sensitive to the needs and experiences of this population, as well as ensuring that the physical campus conforms to ADA law.

## Empowering Faculty, Staff, and Administrators to Facilitate Student Success

9. **Ensure all Yuba faculty, staff, and administrators are encouraged, expected, and prepared to take an active role in supporting students' achievement**, providing meaningful and sustained training and professional learning opportunities for all stakeholders—especially adjunct faculty, new full-time faculty, and classified staff.