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Research • Planning • Professional Development  
for California Community Colleges

# Yuba College Completion by Design/Equity Focus Groups

## Student Perspectives Report

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# Table of Contents

<b>Executive Summary .....</b>	<b>4</b>
Introduction .....	4
Methodology.....	4
Key Findings .....	4
Recommendations .....	6
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>9</b>
Project Overview.....	9
In This Report .....	10
<b>Methodology.....</b>	<b>10</b>
Student Recruitment Process .....	10
Participant Characteristics .....	11
Focus Group Approach .....	12
<b>Key Findings by Loss/Momentum Stage .....</b>	<b>13</b>
Connection .....	13
Entry.....	15
Progress.....	19
Completion.....	22
<b>Key Findings across Loss/Momentum Stages .....</b>	<b>26</b>
Absence of Student-Centered Approach in Key Functions and Processes.....	26
Variability in Faculty Commitment to Student Success .....	27
Course Availability as a Barrier to Progress .....	29
Diverse and Friendly but Detached Campus Culture.....	29
Prohibitive Cost of Attending Yuba.....	31
<b>Findings by Student Population .....</b>	<b>32</b>
Students with Disabilities.....	32

Veterans .....	34
African-American Students .....	35
Native-American Students .....	36
Latino Students .....	37
Low-Income Students .....	37
Students Ages 20-24 and Foster Youth.....	38
<b>Recommendations .....</b>	<b>38</b>
Strengthening New Student Outreach and Onboarding .....	39
Improving Academic Offerings, Advising, and Services throughout the Yuba Journey .....	40
Ensuring <i>All</i> Students Are Supported and Engaged .....	43
Empowering Faculty, Staff, and Administrators to Facilitate Student Success .....	45
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>47</b>
Interpreting Focus Group Findings .....	47

# 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](http://higher.ed.aspeninstitute.org/aspen-prize/)<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](https://powerofcommunity.force.com/education/s/cbd-lmf)<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://higher.ed.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.

# Introduction

## Project Overview

Yuba College (Yuba) is on a journey of hope and promise. In recent years, Yuba has struggled with declining enrollments and low student completion rates. To its credit, the college has launched a vital effort to reverse these trends, geared toward increasing institutional effectiveness and dramatically advancing both student access and success.

In 2016, the Yuba Community College District engaged the Aspen Institute to conduct a site visit of the college, assessing its challenges and opportunities based on the criteria for and lessons learned from the Institute's [Community College Excellence](#)<sup>3</sup> prize program. This site visit resulted in a series of recommendations for how Yuba could activate this transformation effort, using the Completion by Design (CBD) [loss/momentum framework](#)<sup>4</sup> to guide its reform work. The Aspen Institute specifically recommended the college **start by gathering student perspectives on the factors that support and impede their connection, entry, progress, and completion**, particularly from **populations that are experiencing lower outcomes** at the college. The Aspen Institute further suggested that given the care and concern for students exhibited by college faculty, staff, and administrators, student voices could foster urgency for change across the institution.

Acting on the Aspen Institute's recommendations, Yuba leadership 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 students from groups identified as experiencing disproportionate impact at the college**. Like the Aspen Institute, the RP Group knows the power of student perspectives to initiate and sustain difficult but critical organization change. Our [Student Support \(Re\)defined](#)<sup>5</sup> study put student voice at the center of the statewide discussion about what supports student success. In the years following this study, we have conducted hundreds of student focus groups and surveys to help colleges better understand how they can more effectively help students achieve their goals.

At the onset, this student focus group project was designed to support Yuba's equity planning efforts, **providing Yuba faculty, staff, and administrators with actionable insights** on the experiences of key student groups at various stages in their path to and through Yuba. Yuba subsequently joined the California Guided Pathways Project, designed to support a select cadre

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<sup>3</sup> <http://highered.aspeninstitute.org/aspen-prize/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://powerofcommunity.force.com/education/s/cbd-home>

<sup>5</sup> <http://rpgroup.org/student-support>

of California Community Colleges in creating structured educational experiences that support each student from entry to attainment of high-quality postsecondary credentials to career. The college’s **move toward guided pathways can naturally build on the loss/momentum framework and advance the institution’s equity agenda.**

## In This Report

This report begins with a description of the methodology used by the RP Group, including the student recruitment process, participant characteristics, and the focus group approach. Next, we outline key themes by each stage of the loss/momentum framework: connection, entry, progress, and completion. We then summarize the five themes that emerged across all stages, followed by the findings unique to specific student populations (i.e., disabled students, veterans, African Americans, Native Americans, Latinos, low-income students, students aged 20-24, and foster youth). We conclude with a series of actionable, near-term recommendations, designed for leaders at all levels of the institution to consider as part of the college’s immediate guided pathways reform work.

## Methodology

### Student Recruitment Process

When launching this project, the RP Group worked with Yuba to determine that we would conduct a total of 12 focus groups, three focus groups per loss/momentum stage (connection, entry, progress, and completion), based on the criteria described in Table 1 below.

*Table 1. Criteria for Student Recruitment by Loss/Momentum Stage*

Stage	Criteria
Connection	Students who have not applied to the college
Entry	Basic skills students with less than 15 units earned
Progress	Students who have successfully completed between 15 and 44 college-level units (including those who have/not completed transfer-level math and/or English)
Completion	Students who have either: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Completed 45 or more college-level units AND transfer-level English and math OR</li> <li>Applied for graduation</li> </ul>

At each stage, we specifically targeted student groups experiencing disproportionate impact in an area most closely associated with that stage, based on the college’s Student Equity Plan

data.<sup>6</sup> After reviewing the data, we recommended an additional 13<sup>th</sup> focus group for Native-American/Alaskan-Native students, who appear to be experiencing lower outcomes across the entry, progress, and completion stages. Table 2 below summarizes the student groups engaged by each stage.

*Table 2. Target Populations by Loss/Momentum Stage*

Connection	Entry	Progress	Completion	Entry, Progress, and Completion
Yuba City High School (YCHS) Students	Disabled Students	20-24 Year-Old Students	Disabled Students	Native American/Alaskan Natives
Sutter County One Stop (Adult School) Students	Latino Students	African-American Students	Latino Students	Foster Youth*
Concurrently Enrolled Students (Sutter County Campus)	Veteran/Military Students		Low-Income Students	

*\* We originally aimed to have foster youth take part in a progress stage focus group. However, due to recruitment challenges, foster youth were ultimately engaged in a single focus group that covered student experiences at all stages of the loss/momentum framework.*

The RP Group worked with Yuba’s Research Analyst, Cassie Leal, to develop a recruitment strategy to engage students from each of these populations. Ms. Leal led a multipronged approach, from broad publicity on the college’s website, to direct outreach to key populations through multiple texts, phone calls, to class announcements via Canvas, the college’s online learning management system. Participants were offered a Yuba bookstore gift card as an incentive for participation (\$15 for One Stop participants; \$25 for high school, concurrently enrolled, and Yuba students; \$50 for foster youth).

## Participant Characteristics

A total of 127 students attended these 13 focus groups, a credit to Ms. Leal’s aggressive and thorough outreach efforts. Two-thirds of focus group participants were female (84 students).

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<sup>6</sup> Target student populations for each stage were based on groups identified with disproportionate impacts in the following outcomes: access for the entry stage, basic skills persistence and course completion rates for the progress stage, and degree completion and transfer for the completion stage.

The smallest focus group engaged three participants (foster youth), while the largest group engaged 16 participants (disabled students, completion stage).

While the information and insights these groups offered are significant and should be taken under serious consideration, it is also important to remember that these students represent only a small portion of the entire Yuba student population (6,158 students enrolled in spring 2017).<sup>7</sup> Moreover, students were not selected randomly, and therefore their views may not represent those of the entire college student population. Therefore, student feedback from the focus groups is not necessarily meant to be generalizable to the whole student body. Instead, the student voices captured from these focus groups are useful for gaining insight into student attitudes and feelings, and reflect the experiences of the students who participated.

## Focus Group Approach

We developed **key questions designed to better understand the factors impacting students' experience at each stage of the loss/momentum framework**. We asked students in the connection phase about (1) their college goals and barriers to enrollment, and (2) Yuba knowledge and experience. Students in the entry, progress, and completion stages were commonly asked about:

- Educational goals and plans
- Challenges they faced during that particular stage of their journey, either as a student in general or as a member of a particular population
- Steps they are personally taking to overcome those challenges, and the supports the college offers to help them succeed in spite of these obstacles
- Advice to college leaders to help better serve students during this stage and in particular from this student group.

In addition to these common questions, we uniquely asked students in the **entry stage about their onboarding process and experience in basic skills English and math coursework**. We particularly explored how students in the **progress stage track their movement toward their goal**, and **students nearing completion were specifically asked about how prepared they feel to take their next steps**.

We audio recorded each focus group conversation with students' consent and then transcribed them for analysis. During the analysis of the focus group transcripts, **key findings emerged that were specific to each stage of the loss/momentum framework; others emerged that crossed the stages, and still other findings surfaced that were unique to specific student populations**. We summarize these findings from each of these three areas in the following sections.

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<sup>7</sup> Data obtained from California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office Data Mart. Retrieved on November 1, 2017.

## Key Findings by Loss/Momentum Stage

The following section summarizes key findings that uniquely emerged across student groups for each stage of the loss/momentum framework. We offer student quotes to illuminate or punctuate key findings.

### Connection

Two key themes emerged from the focus groups related to the connection phase, specifically focused on prospective students' lack of knowledge about the college's options and the value of choosing it for higher education, and the opportunity to increase Yuba's presence in the community.

#### Limited Community Understanding of Yuba Opportunities and Benefits

Conversations with adult school, Yuba City High School (YCHS), and concurrently-enrolled students revealed that Yuba has a known presence in the surrounding community. However, these prospective student groups were generally **unaware of the benefits and opportunities offered by attending the college**. While they shared this lack of awareness, the perspectives of adult school participants varied somewhat from the experiences of the high school students. We explore these perspectives below.

##### ONE-STOP PARTICIPANTS

Adult school participants reported that One Stop program staff are their primary source of information on the college. One Stop participants **expressed optimism that the college could lead to self-improvement and a career** and envisioned Yuba as playing a role in their future education and career preparation and as a place where they could "better themselves and their lives." For example, one student shared:

*So, I found out I could sign up for [Beauty Esthetician school] within Yuba College as well, and I think that might be a good deal because I need to better my life for my son.*

Another student remarked:

*[Yuba College is a place to] . . . further your education and then basically get . . . a really good job after that too instead of . . . struggling with, like, minimum wage jobs . . .*

Yet, many of these **adult learners did not know what specific programs and services were available** through the institution **or how to make the transition** from the One Stop to the college. When asked how much they know about the programs offered by Yuba College, participants universally said:

*Nothing.*

*Not enough.*

*Yeah, just a little bit.*

#### YCHS AND CONCURRENTLY-ENROLLED STUDENTS

YCHS and concurrently-enrolled students reported that counselors and AVID staff at YCHS serve as their primary source of information on Yuba. Like the adult school participants, high school students were generally **unaware of specific program options available** to them at Yuba, were either **misinformed or uncertain about the enrollment process**, and **did not know about the support services and assistance** (such as financial aid) they could access once on campus. Two students described:

*They just told us about that it's small . . . they don't tell us actually what specific classes they have.*

*They tell us like, a general broad line of [information]. . . . They don't tell you, "Hey, you should take these classes, and then [we'll] help you with this." They don't tell you, like, specifics.*

Unlike the adult school participants, the high school students were less positive about Yuba. Many YCHS students **commented on the poor reputation Yuba holds among their peers**, specifically viewing the college as a convenient option for those with little choice of gaining access to a university, essentially a "last resort." As one YCHS student commented:

*When [people in high school] say, "Oh, yeah, I'm going to spend two years or a year at Yuba after high school," everyone's like, "Oh, did you not get accepted to the schools you wanted to go to?"*

Another YCHS student added:

*I hear it a lot from the teachers at my school. They're like, "Oh, she was going to be so great and do all these great things, and then she went to Yuba."*

Concurrently-enrolled students expressed a similar sentiment, in part based on the input of their parents. One student shared:

*My parents they said . . . , "You can't go to community college. You have to go on to like a four-year. If you want to go to community college, you do it during high school and then you move on to what's next . . . you don't stay at community college. You go and do something better."*

Not surprisingly, concurrently-enrolled students were less likely to name Yuba as part of their future plans. Most of these students were enrolled in Yuba courses to expedite completion of their high school requirements so that they could pursue their goals of entering of a four-year institution or explore an area of interest.

## Opportunity for More Proactive Outreach

The majority of focus group participants indicated a general **lack of Yuba’s presence in their respective communities**, likely impacting their perceptions of the college. More proactive outreach efforts can offer Yuba the **opportunity to reinforce its purpose and potential**, combatting potentially negative impressions in the community about the nature of the institution that surfaced during focus group discussions.

Throughout the focus groups, participants described how **enhanced college outreach activities would encourage their connection** to Yuba. One YCHS student said:

*Setting up something for like 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> graders at Yuba College . . . like activities to build a community-based kind of thing . . . [would be useful towards having students] recognize . . . what Yuba College offers.*

While not a participant in the connection focus groups, a student from one of the entry focus groups reflected on the long path he took to enrollment at the college, also noting the potential benefit of more proactive outreach:

*When I was in high school, I wished there was some outreach program that would have encouraged me to check out Yuba College. Because, I think I’d be a doctor at this point.*

Similarly, an adult school student who personally had a positive experience visiting Yuba suggested that workshops or campus visits could serve as an “ice breaker” for prospective students to experience the college.

Ultimately, participant perspectives indicate that **enhanced outreach would allow the college to market itself as a worthwhile, strategic, and affordable option** for those interested in enhancing their skills or looking for a pathway to a career or transfer.

## Entry

Two key themes emerged across the entry focus groups. One set of findings centered on students’ variable onboarding experiences as they entered the college, including issues related to orientation and counseling. Another theme focused on students’ positive experiences with high-touch services including specific counseling courses, special programs, and academic supports like the College Success Center.

## Inconsistent Support during Key Onboarding Steps

Discussions with Yuba students about their onboarding experience—including activities such as application, enrollment, assessment, orientation, counseling, and educational planning—revealed the **absence of a consistent, coherent, and proactive approach to facilitating students’ entry into the college**. Students generally expressed that these activities felt transactional and abbreviated, and lacked the structure and support required for a smooth and

successful transition. Participants focused their feedback on two particular areas of the onboarding experience: orientation and counseling.

## ORIENTATION

Students described the **orientation process as perfunctory, inconsistent, and absent critical information** about how to navigate the college, what to expect as a new student, and where to go for support. One student described the experience, stating:

*What I remember . . . they didn't say . . . welcome or like anything. It was just like, "Here's a bag. Okay, good luck." They ran through it. It was run through really fast.*

Other students described receiving certain information during their orientation that peers reported not receiving; one student exclaimed:

*I've taken [orientation], like, three different times, and they've been different every time.*

Some concurrent enrollment students reported they were not required to participate in an orientation. As one participant explained:

*If you go through the freshman orientation that they have, which isn't required . . . but you can, then . . . you learn about the college, and then you go talk to a counselor, and then they give you an education plan. But it's not a required thing to do, and most people don't even know about it, so they don't do it.*

At the same time, focus group participants suggested that new student orientation is an **opportune time for Yuba to welcome students to the campus, introduce college procedures and practices, and highlight resources**. Linking together the connection and entry phase, one adult school participant reported participating in an on-campus orientation and receiving useful, personalized support—highlighting that perhaps Yuba can build on existing practice to foster a positive start at the school for *all* students. As this student explained:

*I will say, you know, when I started this [One Stop] program, I did sign up for Yuba College. I went to orientation and everything. . . . There was plenty of help. I had someone who actually took me back into the room, and like guided me, and made a little plan. . . . So, there is hope, and they'll walk you extremely through it. When I went on the campus, I loved it. So that's what drives me to go to Yuba College.*

## COUNSELING

Focus group participants also indicated that **counseling can be variable and out of step with students' interests and needs**. Encouragingly, the vast majority of participants also indicated establishing an educational plan with a counselor during their entry experience that served as an ongoing guide for their course selection. Several participants also offered **affirming reviews and expressed strong appreciation for a few "star" counselors** who took ample time to help them through the planning process.

At the same time, the most frequent frustration with counseling shared by participants was the **perception that counselors provide inconsistent information or guidance misaligned to student goals**. Three students noted:

*When I first started here, I had four different counselors, and four different ed plans . . . no one was listening to what I wanted.*

*I've [moved] from EOPS to DSPS to the main counselors. I have jumped around . . . one person says something else different . . . and another person says something else different.*

*I've been here since 2014, and I feel like when I go to one counselor, one counselor will say this. And then I get an appointment with another counselor because she's not available, one will say this. And they're two different things.*

We further explore student perceptions of and experiences with counseling and the impact of these interactions on the progress and completion stages below.

## Positive Impact of High-Touch Services

Positively, a few key resources emerged as particularly helpful to getting students on track once enrolled. Participants specifically referred to high-touch supports such as the three-unit Counseling 10: College Success course, academic tutoring accessed through the College Success Center/Hard Math Café, and special programs such as EOPS and DSPS as key sources of assistance that enabled them to gain traction.

### COUNSELING 10: COLLEGE SUCCESS

While many focus group participants indicated feeling lost during their first semester at Yuba, several students noted that **completing Counseling 10 increased their awareness of how to navigate the college**. One participant explained the value of this course in revealing both the academic and nonacademic supports and empowering and building students' confidence:

*But when I took my Counseling 10 class, that was so amazing because it was [a] college [success] course. It gave me everything. Financial aid, counseling, all the back doors, how to advocate for myself.*

Another student shared a similar experience with Counseling 10, stating:

*Well, one of the classes that I'm taking is a Counseling class, an . . . the whole class is teaching us about all the different programs that they have at the school, and so, I know quite a few of the programs that they have like EOPS, and like, Puente, and programs like that that they have here for students and . . . so, that's pretty cool.*

At the same time, a few students who were interested in the course reported they did not enroll because of their concern that it would overload their schedule. Students suggested

**alternative formats for delivering the content** to enable more students to receive this critical information and not have it impact their unit load. As one student suggested:

*I feel . . . classes like this can be done in workshop type environments.*

#### ACADEMIC TUTORING

Students **consistently praised the services of Yuba's Success Center and Hard Math Café**, noting the utility of the tutoring in either staying on track or regaining footing during particularly challenging courses. As one student explained:

*I've been for [tutoring in] Introduction to Psychology and Biology, and right now I'm in Anatomy. And I feel like it's really helping me.*

Another student shared:

*I think the College Success Center helped me a lot. Before I wanted to major in architecture, so I was taking multiple math classes. And that was a super, great tool. I recommend it to everyone. Even if you're just like barely struggling, it helps.*

Yet, likely because of students' reliance on tutoring, the **Success Center received some critical feedback**. One issue that repeatedly arose during focus groups was the **availability of tutoring**.

Some students expressed concerns about the availability of tutors to cover particular topics/courses. One student stated:

*I've been pretty successful going to the Success Center and getting help there. But as I move into the nursing program, there are no tutors available. So, that's going to be a barrier for me.*

Other students took issue with the hours of operation, noting that they would like to see the tutoring center open during evening and weekend times. As one student stated:

*Today on a Friday, you can't even do the math tutoring. . . . So . . . maybe for people who do have a busy schedule, like who have families and stuff like that . . . hey, maybe offering tutoring services from like 8:00 to 12:00. And . . . I'm pretty sure somebody can take a Saturday off of whatever they're doing for 8:00 to 12:00 . . . for four hours and come and do . . . and have some services available for them to do.*

Students also indicated a desire to extend the time allotted with tutors. One student said:

*The Writing Center only gives you one hour per week.*

Moreover, focus group participants reported that **not enough students are aware of the Success Center/Hard Math Café services**. In some cases, students reported not finding out about the services until *after* they were already failing or had dropped a course, indicating a need to increase promotion of these critical services. When discussing how she became aware of tutoring, one student said:

*I've always used the tutoring because I went to the workshops [hosted by the Counseling Department]. I've always heard about it. But I really don't see much advertisement around the campus for it, unless you're constantly going to the library and stuff.*

Another participant noted:

*Well, I didn't learn about the tutoring until after I had dropped out of my stats class. I didn't know where to get help or where to go. And a girl told me about the Hard Math Café and tutoring in the Library Center.*

## SPECIAL PROGRAMS

Students also consistently **praised the special programs on campus such as DSPS, EOPS, and Veteran Resource Center (VRC) as invaluable resources** for getting questions answered, for having a structure to and support for goal setting and educational planning, and for feeling a sense of nurturing and connection.

Many students shared how helpful they felt staff from the offices were. One student who accessed DSPS services shared:

*Okay, so the DSPS building is amazing. I love the people over there. They're really awesome. . . . She's the one that actually helped me because I had to actually speak to her, during the whole process of coming back and everything. And I told her what my goals were. What I wanted.*

An EOPS student remarked:

*I was in the EOPS program, and they always keep track of us like we need to have our ed plan ready, talk to a counselor, and all this stuff. It was really helpful.*

Similar experiences were shared in the Veteran Resource Center:

*Yeah. He honestly, not just the advisor, just the entirety of the Veteran Center, was supportive, helpful. Most people I could ask questions and nobody was like, "Oh, well figure it out." They all stepped up to help as much as where they could. Yeah, [the advisor] was pretty on point with his ed plans and stuff like that but, everyone helped. So, it's probably the Veteran Center as a whole.*

## Progress

When looking at the unique experience of students in the progress stage of their Yuba journey, one primary issue emerged: the absence of proactive systems and supports to help students stay on track.

## Insufficient Support for and Monitoring of Progress

Discussions with focus group participants underscored that **students must be highly proactive in order to track their progress at Yuba** and revealed several **challenges related to the current model for advising and supporting students' advancement toward their goals.**

### STUDENT-DRIVEN MODEL

First, **students carry the burden of engaging with advising to determine their progress.** As previously mentioned, students largely referenced developing an educational plan early in their college experience. Focus group participants who spent multiple semesters at the college **described taking the initiative to seek out information on their own from counselors and faculty and keep track of the courses** they still need to take in order to fulfill that plan.

Many participants reported that seeing a counselor to review their education plan was key to progress tracking. Students referenced **taking the responsibility to make regular appointments with counselors** to ensure they were on track and identify any new requirements. Two students described their own approach:

*I go for counseling from time to time just to see which classes I'm required to take for the next step. And see what the four-year colleges want me to take.*

*I probably visit my counselor once a month just as long as she has time, or once every other month just to check in, make sure things haven't changed.*

Participants described the **absence of a system to prompt students for regular check-ins with advising at key milestones.** When asked how they know when to see a counselor, participants explained:

*No, [there's not a system]. We have to schedule an appointment. . . . When you go and visit your counselor they'll tell us, "Oh make sure you schedule another appointment with us. Like, next semester or any time." But other than that . . . it's on you.*

Several students expressed frustration with this approach. As one student stated:

*The system itself is flawed . . . and it shouldn't be.*

### ADVISING CAPACITY

Participants described additional challenges with the capacity of counselors once they do engage. Some students **articulated concerns with the veracity of information received** from their counselors. As two students explained:

*I do my own tracking. Getting in with a counselor that's dependable is impossible.*

*So basically, what it boils down to is even though you have an ed plan and all that, you're still, at the end of the day, doing your own work to verify to make sure that you're*

*on track yourself. And if you go into a counselor sometimes you'll get the right answer, sometimes you'll get the wrong answer.*

Students also **pointed to the limited time counselors are allotted to work with them and the subsequent impact these restrictions have on the support they receive**, expressing frustration that their time with counselors is often strictly focused on education planning. As one student shared:

*Well, with the counselor . . . every time you go into a counseling appointment they're . . . [as] part of their rules . . . they're required to build you an ed plan. And you only get a 30-minute slot, and it takes them 20 minutes to do that. So really, by the time you start asking questions . . . you have to pack up and be done.*

In addition to receiving academic advising, students also **want to know about campus resources and to have a conversation about their progress and plans**. As one student stated:

*Definitely, the counselor should definitely you know, these are the services, like when they have a counseling appointment it's not just, "Here's an ed plan, this is what you should take. Okay, bye."*

Overall, students seemed to **prefer consistent engagement with a dedicated or assigned counselor or student support professional**. As one student explained:

*We need more, full-time support staff. We need more full-time counselors, more full-time instructional assistants, so that they will stop moving so fast. They're in, they're out, they move on. The reason I have such a good time at Yuba College is because I have EOPS, I have the same counselor, I have the same peers, I have the same specialist.*

## TRACKING SYSTEMS AND TECHNOLOGY

Finally, students **repeatedly referred to relying on printed education plans to track their progress over the course of their time at the college**. While helpful, inevitably, the static nature of a printed plan can lead to challenges when attempting to determine which courses to take and when, identify which requirements have been completed, and manage any shift in educational goal.

Students **indicated that the college maintains different web-based systems that could lend themselves to both tracking and encouraging progress** including Canvas, WebAdvisor, and My Campus Portal. Some students described using some of these tools to determine the status of their educational plans. As one student said:

*Yeah, I use WebAdvisor for my transcripts and all my documents. So, it helps out with financial aid too.*

However, the **effectiveness of individual tools and the presence of multiple systems surfaced as problematic**. Students described challenges with the Canvas app and the ability to consistently access this system on multiple devices. As one student described:

*Now we have Canvas, which is a little bit better, but there's still some glitches going on. Definitely the app doesn't work all the time.*

Other participants further **emphasized the challenges associated with navigating multiple systems** that do not necessarily align with one another or that are not fully adopted by all campus stakeholders. One student said:

*If we could all get on the same page on which program to use . . . because you have Blackboard, you have Canvas, you have My Campus Portal. And then some . . . professors . . . don't want to switch over. . . . If we could all get on the same page with [the systems], that'd be great, because it makes it . . . much easier.*

Many participants **expressed a strong desire for one, integrated and user-friendly system that would help all stakeholders** (faculty, counselors, and students alike) track a student's course-taking against his/her educational plan, display progress toward completion, and prompt him/her to take action at critical junctures. One participant described using such a system when attending a community college in another state:

*I went to a college in [another state] . . . a community college, and we had this thing called Grad Tracks. And it took every class you've ever taken, put it in a system, and you can click on whatever major you wanted to look into, and it shows what requirements you have and didn't. It was online, very easy to view, and they processed all my stuff from Yuba College. They actually like went in and processed each individual class that would count towards their classes. When I transferred back here, it says on my transcript, "[College Name] - 16 units." It doesn't say what classes I took or anything.*

Another student summed up the need, stating:

*It would be really cool to have some kind of online program that would show me classes and what percentage of the degree have I already done. . . . Because right now the only comparison you get is if you're specifically looking at one [class] and you are looking at your transcript, unless you just happen to have a great counselor, [and] that's on a good day.*

## Completion

Two key themes emerged when talking to students nearing completion of their goals. Focus group participants specifically indicated the need for better guidance—both academic and career advising—in order to successfully attain their goals, and named a desire for increased support as they transition to a university and employment.

### Need for Improved Guidance for Attaining Goals

When reflecting back on their journey, students who were nearing completion expressed the need for better information on selecting an end goal and getting ongoing guidance about attaining that goal. Similar to students in the progress focus groups, a common frustration

expressed by students close to attaining a credential or transfer centered on **receiving inaccurate advising or guidance about the requirements for achieving their goals**. As one student articulated:

*I've been here for two years . . . and I'll be here for over another year just waiting to finish because I needed to do this [one] class, or [the counselor said], "Oops, forgot you gotta do this, too." And, you know, there's just some kind of surprise or disappointment around the corner, and every corner you go around you're gonna get it. It's frustrating and it's [too bad], you know?*

Students **underscored the negative impacts of such advising on completion, particularly elongating time to goal attainment, racking up excessive units, and eating away at financial aid**. As one student said:

*Financial aid is very strict . . . on their resources. So, if you're transferring, you only have 90 units, and it doesn't matter if a counselor puts you off on a wrong goal. Because that's what happened to me. I was pushed off on a wrong goal. I'm now struggling to get financial aid every semester to finish my main goal when, for two semesters, I was doing early childhood education, when I should have been doing liberal studies.*

Students also indicated that while counselors were helpful in providing generalized counseling, they often had limited knowledge **of the requirements of specific certificates, degrees, or transfer paths**, again impacting their ability to fully reach their goals. As one student shared:

*I think it'd be better if they had more tailored . . . counseling. Just because in my experience, I am a chemistry major. I talked to three or four different counselors before I got the right thing.*

Another student stated:

*Counseling just gives you a generalized direction of where to go. They're not saying, "Oh, you wanna be a school psychologist? Here, do this. Oh, you wanna be a child psychologist? Here, do this. If you wanna do biomedical engineering, do this."*

Students also suggested the **faculty could play a more significant role in education planning, given their discipline-specific knowledge**. As one student described:

*I find the professors tend to . . . have an ear closer to the ground on those things. They . . . talk to the students more, and the ones that know what's going on, they at least have an idea of what their major entails.*

Student feedback also indicated the **absence of clear programmatic pathways that help facilitate student movement all the way from entry to goal attainment**, which may be contributing to some of the frustrations with counseling and advising. As one student stated:

*Even if they maybe didn't do specific counselors, [it would be helpful] if they offered specific paths. If you said, "I'm taking a biology, I want to be a biology major," [and they*

said], “Well, here’s the pathway we have set up for bio majors. This can also branch into chemistry or something else like that.”

## Inadequate Focus on Transitions to University and Employment

The majority of completion focus group participants also described an absence of intentional support designed to help them transition successfully to a university or job after Yuba.

### TRANSFER ASSISTANCE

Despite the majority reporting a transfer goal, focus group participants nearing completion **indicated the absence of effective transfer supports on campus**. One example of this absence is students **indicating the need to be their own advocates in their transition process**. When asked about what activities they were doing to support their transition to university or employment, students ranked “reviewed ed plan to ensure completing requirements” and “meeting with an academic counselor or advisor” the highest.

Again, the vast majority of students also **pointed to the importance of meeting with discipline-specific faculty to help guide this transition**. As one student said:

*Well, when you’re transferring you have to see ...the department teacher... the leader ...of the subject department.... They’re the ones that are supposed to explain to you what are the classes you need and ... they recommend [what you should] start out with when you start your major for your bachelor’s.*

Activities that students ranked the lowest included: “participated in an internship, service learning, and/or clinical placement;” “met with a transfer counselor;” “met with an advisor/counselor at transfer destination;” and “met with career counselor/services.”

Students who mentioned engaging with transfer center supports **indicated the center is not fully staffed or open regularly. Other participants were unaware of this option**. As one student stated:

*I’ll have a question about...transfer, and I don’t know where to go. I don’t know who to see, where to go. I really don’t know much about the programs offered here.*

Students stated that they would like Yuba to provide **more timely information about the mechanics of transferring to a university** and the opportunities in and expectations of receiving institutions. In the words of one student:

*In order to like transfer, you have to get like a lot of those things up on the board [activities to promote transitions], lined up ready to go, and you have to know how to do that. You have to know what things you have to have in place, and I don’t see anywhere at Yuba College where they’re going to help do that.*

Another student shared:

*They changed [the transfer application requirements] this year. And I'm in a panic because this is my entire like future. And so, you know, I just feel like [Yuba] should offer more when it comes to you wanting to continue your education, [help you] succeed.*

Some participants further indicated that the **available transfer supports are out of step with application deadlines and receiving institution requirements**. One student explained:

*Transfer workshops are going to be what, October 15<sup>th</sup> and, I mean we've already applied and applications are closed for Chico State . . . for spring. So, I don't know? Just a little more information to help students to move on.*

Students were additionally **seeking information on the financial aid requirements and scholarship supports at the receiving institution**. One participant stated:

*They could help us find scholarships within our major and they would email us like every now and then for scholarship openings for your major . . . for English or major for . . . for this type of career. That they would be able to help us with that. We could apply on time and with their help we can get sufficient funds for schoolbooks and to pay for our tuition.*

#### CAREER READINESS AND JOB PLACEMENT

In addition to becoming better informed about transfer requirements, students also expressed a desire for career planning, networking, and assistance with job placement. Participants indicated a **dearth of support on campus for work experience and internships opportunities and/or connections to employers** related to their programs. One student commented:

*If the college had the community support . . . the community itself would come . . . and look for candidates here instead of the students going out and trying to find, you know, the opportunities.*

Another student mentioned attending a Yuba career fair and indicated that the employers who participated did not align with the programs available at the college, and **requested connections to more relevant organizations**.

A few students **mentioned enrolling in Counseling 25: Career Planning and Development and spoke highly about the value** of both the instructor and course content, recommending it to others in the focus groups. In the words of one student:

*I took a class, Counseling 25. . . . It's . . . a career planning class. . . . And there was a lot more in-depth information not only about some of the paths that you could take, but . . . also some of the [programs] that are offered on campus and how they transfer to other places as well.*

Participants' positive experience with this course indicates an **opportunity for Yuba to explore scaling this option to more students**, and potentially in different stages of their experience (entry, progress, and/or completion).

## Key Findings across Loss/Momentum Stages

Additionally, key findings emerged about students' experience across multiple stages—particularly entry, progress, and completion. Students universally spoke to five themes: (1) the absence of student-centered approach in key functions and processes, (2) variability in faculty commitment to student success, (3) course availability as a barrier to progress, (4) a diverse and friendly but detached campus culture, and (5) prohibitive costs of attending Yuba.

### Absence of Student-Centered Approach in Key Functions and Processes

Students indicated that **negative interactions with support staff in key college functions (e.g., financial aid, admissions) formed barriers to their success at Yuba, and at multiple critical junctures during their time at the college** (i.e., entry, progress, and completion). One student explained:

*Financial aid . . . literally every single semester I had some kind of issue because they don't care. . . . I told them multiple times I don't know how to access that e-mail [required to secure assistance]. I don't know where to go, I don't know how to do it. I've asked people multiple times to help me with that. And no one would ever sit down and take the time to explain how to do it.*

Another student noted:

*It's hard to make connections with people here because every time I go and ask for help, I have to like repeat myself, especially with financial aid.*

For some, the process of **applying for financial aid was overbearing**. One student reported:

*Financial aid is partially the reason why it took me 14 years to go back to school. I can't tell you how many times that I have started the application process for Yuba College. And then something comes up with financial aid, and they need all these verifications, and it really discouraged me. And then when I got the post 9/11 GI Bill, I knew that I could definitely go to school with just this [assistance].*

Other participants **expressed frustration with how the financial aid office communicates with students**. Students indicated that a lack of timely or direct communication prevented the completion of financial aid documentation. One student shared:

*I qualified for financial aid, the full amount and everything, and then they were sending e-mails to my college e-mail that I didn't even know existed at this point. And so apparently, I had to fill out some forms. So, I ended up not getting financial aid.*

Another student explained:

*It takes a long time to get through that process, you know? . . . When you go in there, they should tell you all of these things that you need upfront, but they tell you “Do this,” and you do that stuff, and then you’re waiting. And then they call you or you go back in to check on what’s going on, and they tell you, “Oh, you need this.” It . . . shouldn’t be that way. It should be more streamlined.*

Students additionally **described their interactions with personnel at the admissions office as poor and absent a student-centered approach**. One student exclaimed:

*Yeah, admissions. They’re the rudest people I’ve ever seen. Every time I go in there with a question like you got to do this and that, and that . . . and I just did this. And you telling me I got to do it again? Why you telling me again?*

Another stated:

*The only problem that I have with the college is [admissions]. They don’t want to help you, and that’s the way that. . . they make you feel. That’s the energy that they give you. I’ve gone in there to ask for specific stuff, and they’re like, “Oh, we don’t do that here.”*

Participants also **noted that various functions worked in siloes and could not offer students full and/or accurate information about how to navigate key college processes**. As one participant described:

*I’ve had a very similar experience to that with the negative attitude and the different departments having different information from each other and not knowing what the other one’s doing.*

Based on their experiences, these students suggested engaging these functions in customer service training that focuses on more student-centered practices and processes.

## Variability in Faculty Commitment to Student Success

Students described inconsistent faculty engagement and instruction. In many cases, participants **pointed to experiences with stand-out faculty members who serve as champions for students**—taking an interest in students’ success, demonstrating a passion for and expertise in their subject matter, and effectively supporting them both inside and outside the classroom. One participant remarked on the encouragement received from faculty:

*Especially if you’re in the class with a specific teacher that’s kind of like guiding you down their major so, they know a lot about it. So, for in a case like . . . theater, I talk to [a faculty member] all the time. . . . And he helps me out. He’s like, “Oh, you know you only need this and this class left and then you’ll be good.”*

At the same time, students commonly reported variable access to these star instructors. One participant explained:

*There are quite a few teachers here who do cultivate that sense of community within their classroom. And they get real personal and helpful, but in my experience, they're kinda far and few in between.*

Another stated:

*So, the . . . quantity over quality is really low here. We have some professors in all different categories . . . of fields here that are amazing. They spend the extra time, they're work with you, they'll email you back and forth over long weekends. They will set you up with whatever you need. They will go out of their way to find tutors for you, the whole nine yards.*

Participants also perceived **differences between the commitment and readiness for teaching between full-time and adjunct instructors**, whereby students felt adjunct instructors were less qualified for the range of courses they were teaching and/or less committed to Yuba students' success.

As one student observed:

*All throughout campus there's a lot of adjunct faculty and adjunct counselors and . . . because they're only here such a small amount of time. . . . [They] don't care . . . you know, some of them . . . they're constantly moving so they never get any kind of sense of this college atmosphere or ownership of this place.*

Students **reported a recent increase in the number of adjuncts working at the campus** and questioned the strategy and impact this rise had on students' experience—both academically and from the perspective of the culture of connectivity on campus.

One student shared the following observation:

*The tenured faculty are the ones that seem like they care. And will get personal with you. The adjunct faculty aren't invested, so they're not going to give you as much time or care.*

Participants generally **reported selecting courses based on the reputation of faculty** shared by their friends and relying heavily on peer feedback posted on the website [www.ratemyprofessors.com](http://www.ratemyprofessors.com). One student shared:

*My first [instructor], even though it was an accelerated [class], didn't really offer tutoring. [The] second one did almost every week, brought up tutoring [regularly]. . . . "It's available. Go do it. And if you're having problems . . . if you need to take tutoring, go take it. It's free." . . . So . . . I think a big thing is just trying to find a nice professor that works.*

Participants also encouraged the college to **consider investing more heavily in full-time professors** as a way of combatting these issues.

## Course Availability as a Barrier to Progress

Limited access to key milestone courses appears to impact students at all stages in their journey through the college. Students repeatedly **reported trouble accessing key courses needed to move past the entry stage, and for progress toward and completion of goals**. As two students shared:

*I just think the school needs more options when it comes to registering for classes. There aren't enough options sometimes, as classes fill up very quickly.*

*Okay, they'll say this is what you need to get this degree. The counselor will sign you up for that degree because you're excited. And then when you get to, then there will be like an A, B, C class, and they never offer the C class. But you have to have it for the degree.*

Students **described having to drop classes or rearrange their education plan** to accommodate infrequently offered courses. One student explained:

*I was enrolled in my Math 1C class, and then I had to drop it to take my Computer Science A class, which is offered once every two years or about.*

At other times, participants **described a mismatch between their schedules and the times courses were offered**. One participant explained:

*I want to take a Human Service class. They're all offered at night. I work every single night.*

Participants indicated the impact of course availability on their ability to complete critical academic requirements for transfer, specifically in math, English, and/or advanced discipline courses. One student shared:

*The specific classes and the times, they fill up really fast, and if you don't have priority registration. . . . Well, it has to do with the availability of the class. I have to take up to Math 1C, and it's only available in the fall semesters.*

Another student added:

*For the easiest classes, they're just there are so many options, but when it comes to the higher classes that transfer . . . they don't have many options.*

## Diverse and Friendly but Detached Campus Culture

When asked to describe Yuba's campus culture, students typically **described the college as diverse and welcoming to students of all backgrounds** and experiences. Four students shared:

*Oh, [the ages of students] are all over the place here, and I love it.*

*It seems like everyone's very open to everybody here. It doesn't really matter what ethnicity you are.*

*[It] is so pleasant to just be on campus.*

*Everybody [is] just very welcoming*

While welcoming, participants commonly **viewed Yuba as a commuter campus that lacked a sense of community**. Two students explained:

*We just come to the college and leave because that's the type of college [Yuba] is. Just go to your classes, and you just go home.*

*I see the students tend to keep to themselves.*

Participants **described an absence of systems, supports, and activities designed to foster a sense of connection** to the college. One student shared:

*Life is like boring here. Well, you walk around the campus, and there's nothing.*

Another added:

*I graduated high school in '09, and I opted to go to Sacramento City College before I wanted to come here, because [Yuba] just felt like kind of an empty place.*

The absence of a vibrant campus life **led some participants to feel a sense of disconnect, if not discouragement**, about their Yuba experience. One student explained:

*Nobody [is] there to help you or support you or give you words of encouragement.*

Some students noted that they would like to be more involved on campus, but often do not know how to do so. One student stated:

*[There is a] lack of knowledge of the resources [on campus] that would form a community.*

Another remarked:

*I don't even know how . . . like if I wanted to join, let's say, softball, I don't even know how to do that.*

However, students did note Yuba's attempt at engaging students and building a sense of community by hosting workshops and community days, but that these efforts were limited in both frequency and availability. One student shared:

*They try and put out some moral support too, because I work in the counseling department, so I work a lot with our community days and our workshops that we do every semester, and a lot of those are just for like fun, morale boosters and we have seen that like we are helping students. But not many of them.*

Students' **perceptions about Yuba's campuses also varied**, whereby some participants who had experiences at both locations described the Marysville campus as more social, and the Sutter County campus less vibrant. One student explained:

*I would say the atmosphere of the [Marysville campus] is pretty laid back. You kind of feel a little bit more comfortable. Whereas at Sutter, I don't really feel that. I almost kind of feel a little bit more tense. Because . . . when you go into Sutter, it's gray. It's like a hospital, kind of.*

Another student contrasted Sutter County and Marysville by described different gathering places at Marysville, sharing:

*They have the cafeteria, and they have a big place outside the cafeteria, and they have like this big meeting room in the library, and there's a bunch of different places where people can just like hang out and talk. Here [at Sutter] there isn't a lot of space for that.*

Conversely, some students perceived that Yuba's investment in the Sutter County campus left the Marysville campus with fewer resources, impacting the facilities, and in turn, the sense of pride in the surrounding environment.

One student noted:

*Then they go and build Sutter campus. But, then they didn't know that they were going lose enrollment from here to go over there? But yet you've got to get bond issues to fix the buildings here. . . . They're too worried about other campuses doing their thing.*

## Prohibitive Cost of Attending Yuba

Students **pointed to the high cost of textbooks and software access codes as an undue burden** on their journey through the college. Specifically, focus group participants commonly expressed frustration about purchasing textbooks for classes, only to find out from the instructor that the book is not necessary. One student explained:

*Online it says you need it. You show up, and then like by the first week of class they're like, "Oh, you're not even gonna need the book." It's like, "Well, thanks, I just wasted \$200."*

Other students expressed frustration with buying books only to discover that they also needed to purchase an access code for software required for a given course. One student shared:

*The only thing I disagree with on the math side, is these stupid access codes we need for the math classes. I paid \$66 for my book just to rent it, and then I got into the class. He's like, "Oh we technically really don't need the hard copy book. We aren't going to use it. But you need this code, that is \$66." . . . The money I spent on the hard copy book that I don't need.*

At the same time, some students **pointed to books on reserve in the library as a useful offset**. One student explained:

*The books for math and science classes are available at the library, so when our financial aid is late, as it often is, we can go there, check one out, and save some money.*

In commenting on the usefulness of the course book reserves in the library, another participant suggested increasing the access to these resources:

*Another thing that might be nice to help with the book issue, is the library only carries one or two copies of a book that you can reserve. And you can only reserve it for a few hours. So, I think it would be nice if you could actually reserve books for a semester.*

In addition, students pointed to the **high price of food in the campus cafeteria**. These costs appeared to particularly impact students because of the absence of food options in the area surrounding the campus and the inability to easily go off campus for a meal or snack.

Regarding the availability of food, one student remarked:

*Yeah. There's no food options available, except for the vending machine. And most of the vending machines are broken.*

Another student shared:

*I feel like the prices in the bookstore are pretty high sometimes on certain things . . . especially the food in there. . . . You can go to Burger King [to get] a cheap hamburger, in here [at Yuba], you get a decent hamburger, but it's . . . overpriced you know? It's like some people really don't have the money to be buying food every single day.*

## Findings by Student Population

Finally, we summarize below findings unique to specific student populations engaged in focus groups.

### Students with Disabilities

Multiple issues surfaced during focus groups with students with disabilities (those who have accessed services through Yuba's Disabled Programs and Services Program), including problems with campus facilities and grounds, issues related to access to accommodations, and concerns related to faculty and staff awareness of Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) regulations and sensitivity to the needs of students with varying physical and learning abilities.

Students with disabilities in the entry phase shared **frustrations with the placement test process and the absence of accommodations as they were transitioning into the college**. These participants particularly pointed out that because students do not yet have the assistance of DSPS, they are unaware of or uncertain about how to get the support they need

with the assessment process. Students described a challenging test-taking experience, noting that they did not have the accommodations in place to help them work through test questions, nor did they know that they were required to request these supports themselves. For example, students mentioned the absence of pencils and paper used to process test questions. One student stated:

*They didn't give me paper or a pencil either. I had to ask for it.*

Another student explained how she also experienced a lack of support during the placement test:

*I just guessed. Because that was the easiest way to finish and I figured I'll either guess well enough to place somewhere in this school or they're not going to accept me. But I can't, nobody has even asked if everything was okay...no one asked me anything. Nobody engaged. When you do these tests and things you're left alone.*

Once enrolled at the college, some students also **described feeling singled out and embarrassed in class**. One participant shared:

*Just yesterday, I gave the teacher my papers so I could take it back to the DSPTS, so I could take my test. And she was like, "What is this? Exactly what, what is your disability?" I'm like, "Oh . . . you want me to say this out loud?"*

Another student noted:

*When I brought the paper, to give to the teacher explaining my disability and that I might need to get up and use the restroom, they looked at me like, like really weird. And they're like, "What do you want me to do? What do you expect me to do? What is this?"*

These participants **expressed that feeling singled out in this way has negatively impacted their college experience**.

*I'm afraid, the fact that people are going to judge you. . . . And it's like hard to speak up and ask for help. And I get really embarrassed the fact that I'm already being judged.*

*I didn't go to DSPTS, I actually I haven't used them because it's, I'm traumatized to ask or sit in the special desk that's in the class? And so . . . I don't use it because I'd rather pretend I'm a normal student than say I have this disability.*

Students also **pointed out the lack of ADA compliance across the campus's facilities and grounds**. One student explained issues with the sidewalks and roadways:

*the walkways on this campus, the roadway that goes through the campus in the middle, like goes around? There's no sidewalks, so students walk down the road. And as a disabled student, there's cars that fly around that. . . . And if you're in a [wheel]chair, you're like not really in their visual cue. So, I don't know, I almost got hit a couple times. And I know when I've "driven" through campus, there's like okay, waiting for an hour especially when all the classes get out, for students to pass through that narrow*

walkway and there just isn't, there's no sidewalks there at all. So, I suggest you know, them putting them in, and some of the sidewalks don't quite connect to cross-campus areas?

Another **expressed the direct impact non-compliance has on students' ability to simply get to class**, stating:

*The access to buildings in this place is like crazy. You can't get in. And the one door that works consistently, that's the one they fixed. I mean, the other [doors], you press the button, and the door doesn't do anything. And . . . I mean if I can't get in the building, I can't do my classes.*

## Veterans

Whereas students may eventually find a counselor or instructional faculty member that guides and supports them, participants from the veteran/military student focus group **praised the Veteran Resource Center for providing a proactive and helpful place on campus**. Users of the VRC indicated that it offered a centralized place for accessing multiple supports—including academic and nonacademic assistance. One student commented:

*You can go to the Veteran Center, and they're going to help you with everything. So, you're not walking from counseling to the administration to financial aid. You don't have to go all over the place.*

Another participant **spoke to the sense of connection and community offered by the VRC**, unique to the specific experience of veteran/military students:

*I think that if it wasn't for the Veteran Center, then I wouldn't be coming to Yuba College, and I would just be going to class and going home. The Veteran Center has given me a place to go and meet with other students and talk about classes. Talk about struggles, and stuff like that. . . . You're going to have some youngsters straight out of high school. Maybe they don't have the same experiences as you? You can't relate.*

While student users of the VRC expressed a strong connection to the center, they also **noted that not all students on campus are aware that the center exists**. When asked what advice they would provide to a new student at Yuba College, one participant said:

*I definitely would say [the college needs] to push people more towards the Veteran Center. Because a lot of people I've talked to that are veterans that haven't gone to the Veteran Center or because until, like, either I or someone else told them, they didn't know about it. At all. And so, . . . they end up paying for their classes just because for some reason they don't know the information about the benefits that are available to them. They're not doing it. So, I say the best thing [the college can] probably do is push them towards that Veteran Center. I mean that's what we're there for.*

Ultimately, Veteran Center users **expressed grave concerns about the future of the VRC and frustration at the perceived lack of investment by the college in its services, and in turn its students.** When discussing how the future of the VRC is uncertain after the departure of its director, one student stated:

*We all are worried about losing the Veteran Center.*

The departure of the only VRC staff member has left students worried about the level and quality of support they and future veteran students would have because there **did not appear to be institutional commitment or support** to backfill the positions. Emblematic of students' deep appreciation for the VRC, participants described the lengths they would go to in order to ensure it remains a fixture on campus. As one student stated:

*[I would] do what I could to make sure the Veteran Center stays afloat because it's our safe haven.*

## African-American Students

While recognizing racial and ethnic diversity on campus, African-American/Black students indicated **feeling particularly alone and unsupported in their Yuba journey given the limited number of African-American students, faculty, and staff on campus, and the absence of Black cultural identity at the college.**

Often feeling like they were the only African-American/Black student on campus, two students shared:

*We have no one there, there is no one in tutoring that looks like us [or in other college functions]. . . . So, when you said you want to identify and diversify, you have no one.*

*We're not represented here on this campus.*

Due to the dearth of both African-American students and educators, participants recognized the **burden placed on the few African-American faculty members** to respond to and serve the needs of all students in this population. As one student remarked:

*So that means . . . that does happen to a lot of Black people when you're the only one, then you . . . are that person's problem. And that's how other people see it. Right? And of course, you know, as a Black person, you're like, well, of course you want to help. But you got a job to do. . . . I'm sure she wants to . . . help everybody, but if every Black student comes to her and other students, how is she . . . it's just not fair to her.*

Moreover, **African-American participants reported feeling that Yuba was not necessarily invested in their success.** These students spoke about the limited presence of resources and supports designed to value and foster their cultural identity and academic success. As examples, they described the UMOJA program as struggling to keep sections active, and reported that the college only offered one African-American history.

Further, they also shared how they felt unsupported by faculty, who at best, did not seem to generally care about their success, and at worst, were singling them out because of their race. Black students described feeling targeted or “picked on” by faculty and the trepidation that comes with this experience. One student remarked:

*It's like . . . I'm the last Black person standing. It's like, am I on the chopping block now? Because I got through this far. You know? I see you weeded everybody else out...*

When asked what could support their success, most participants echoed one student's comment:

*More Black anything.*

## Native-American Students

Similar to African-American focus group participants, Native-American students indicated that Yuba **does not foster their cultural identity nor provide resources or supports for their population**. The RP Group observed that these focus group participants were generally enthusiastic to connect with each other and just during the focus group time alone, shared resources and supports unique to their tribes and communities. These students were seeking greater connection to their Native peers across the campus. For example, one participant reported the absence of a Native-American student group on campus, stating:

*I mean, I'm kinda surprised they don't have like some kind of like Native club or something like that.*

Focus group participants also **pointed out that Yuba no longer has any Native-American faculty or staff**, and reported a desire for more practitioners on campus who specifically represented their community. One student stated:

*Like having somebody . . . here on campus would be helpful for improving Native American culture on campus . . . funding a position for a counselor that's Native would be helpful.*

Another student **suggested engaging Native-American community members on campus to provide mentorship and encouragement**, saying:

*You know, someone who's like connected to [professions like] biotechnology, [or] to law. Like, they understand on a higher level like this is just a stepping stone, to tell the Natives, "Hey, go further," you know?*

Native-American students also reported that resources in the community were disconnected from the college. They specifically named the Native Indian Education Program offered at Marysville High School and a national organization called the American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES) as potential partners. They also indicated that it would be valuable to bring on to campus services designed to help individuals secure the “blue card” that establishes their tribal citizenship and allows them to access services and funding. Moreover,

these focus group participants named several local Natives who represent different tribes and teach related traditions who could act as mentors and guides for Yuba's Native-American students. These focus group participants suggested that the college find ways to **create stronger links between these community resources and services and the college, and rejuvenate relationships between Yuba and local tribes** so these groups view the campus as a resource and cultural hub.

## Latino Students

When Latino/a focus group participants were asked about their unique challenges from both the entry and completion stages, students **did not articulate challenges associated with their ethnicity**, and generally indicated that their ethnic identity had less of an impact on their postsecondary experience. Rather, Latino/as **described issues associated with their identity as a first-generation student**. One student explained:

*Well, one thing that I've found common amongst my Latino friends was that we were the first to come here to college from our families . . . I felt like we were at a disadvantage as opposed to other races who had mothers and fathers in the same college and they had that guidance that we didn't have.*

Given that most Latino participants were first in their families to attend postsecondary education, the main challenge for these students was the ability to navigate college effectively. As one participant shared:

*I think that's part of the reason that it was the black hole for me . . . is because I was doing it by myself. Like, I didn't have any prior knowledge, but as time has gone on, you know, you make different peer friends. And then . . . if you want to, you can learn stuff. You have to want to know about the programs that are available. And that's helped a lot, too, navigating through the twists and turns that, you know . . . that are here.*

## Low-Income Students

Like other focus group participants, low-income students also referenced the high cost of books; however, they were more likely to also comment on transportation-related barriers at the college. Many students described **limited public transportation to the college and pointed out the insufficient schedules of buses**. One student remarked:

*You know, the buses don't run after a certain time around here.*

Another student commented thereafter:

*And then sometimes, they only offer those classes as a night class.*

The low-income focus group participants also noted that the college **lacks transportation options between its campuses**, making it even more difficult to access courses critical to their progress that might only be offered on one campus and not another. A few participants

suggested the college consider a shuttle service that improved access to its locations at key times.

## Students Ages 20-24 and Foster Youth

Students ages 20-24 **did not express any unique perspectives** outside of the “Key Findings by Loss/Momentum Stage” and “Key Findings across Loss/Momentum Stages” summarized above. Similarly, the perspectives of **foster youth were consistent with those insights shared across other student groups**. Note: only three foster youth participated in the focus groups; these students were relatively far along their journey and all seemed to be relatively comfortable with their progress at the college.

## Recommendations

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 their experience. The findings that emerged from these student perspectives reinforce Yuba’s pursuit of guided pathways in general, and opportunities and challenges related to the four specific guided pathways pillars: (1) clarify the path, (2) help students select and enter a pathway, (3) help students stay on path, and (4) ensure students are learning.

In turn, our recommendations are **designed to help Yuba in its initial steps toward guided pathways design and development**, including recommendations for immediate action and suggestions that will require longer-term strategic planning and implementation. When appropriate, we indicate the specific loss/momentum stage(s) and/or the guided pathways pillar related to a given recommendation. Additionally, when relevant, we reference associated Aspen Institute recommendations to show where there is continuity between what emerged from the 2016 site visit and student perspectives. Finally, at times we reference the work of the RP Group’s Student Support (Re)defined study, given its resonance with many of the implications that emerged from Yuba’s own focus groups, and its alignment with guided pathways development.

We group these recommendations under four categories:

- Strengthening new student outreach and onboarding
- Improving academic offerings, advising, and services throughout the Yuba journey
- Ensuring *all* students are supported and engaged
- Empowering faculty, staff, and administrators to facilitate student success

After reading and discussing the recommendations below, **consider reviewing this [crosswalk](#),**<sup>8</sup> **which describes how to use the [six success factors](#)**<sup>9</sup> from Student Support (Re)defined to assist guided pathways planning.

## 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.

*CONNECTION (CBD); HELP STUDENTS CHOOSE AND ENTER A PATHWAY (GUIDED PATHWAYS)*

Prospective and new students expressed confusion (at best) and pessimism (at worst) about the college's programs, requirements, and benefits. Building on a similar recommendation by the Aspen Institute, the RP Group suggests that Yuba **develop key messages and a public information campaign that proactively communicate the value of the college to the surrounding community**. Prospective and entering students need to know that Yuba provides them access to critical low/no cost postsecondary education and to better understand its distinct program offerings. Showing how the institution offers clear pathways to better outcomes such as employment and bachelor's degree completion can help Yuba position itself as a place students should *choose* to attend rather than enroll in because they have no other options.

We additionally recommend that Yuba find ways to **develop direct paths from high schools and adult schools into the college**. In alignment with participant suggestions, we propose that the college **increase its physical presence at both the high school and the adult school**, holding onsite information sessions and services to first inform and then facilitate entry into the college. Additionally, we suggest finding ways to **bring prospective students on campus** to increase exposure to and understanding of the institution. Yuba might explore programs like *Get Focused...Stay Focused* that promote college and career awareness and planning and ongoing engagement with the college *before* enrollment, from 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

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[http://rpggroup.org/Portals/0/Documents/Projects/StudentSupportReDefined/Resources/Intersection\\_between\\_Success\\_Factors\\_and\\_Guided\\_Pathways.pdf](http://rpggroup.org/Portals/0/Documents/Projects/StudentSupportReDefined/Resources/Intersection_between_Success_Factors_and_Guided_Pathways.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> <http://rpggroup.org/Our-Projects/Student-Support-Re-defined/SuccessFactorsFramework>

## 2. Examine all aspects of how Yuba onboard students to create a more seamless and comprehensive transition into the college.

*ENTRY (CBD); CLARIFY THE PATH, HELP STUDENTS CHOOSE AND ENTER A PATHWAY (GUIDED PATHWAYS)*

Focus group participants enrolled at the college for all lengths of time reported numerous challenges during their onboarding process, creating instant barriers at the front door of the institution. Students described an absence of clarity about assessment and placement requirements, problems accessing financial aid, unwelcoming and uninformative orientation experiences, difficulty with goal selection, and confusion about program requirements. Students also expressed a desire for a stronger sense of connection to each other and the campus from day one.

In alignment with the Aspen recommendations, we further suggest that Yuba **examine the different processes students must go through from application to enrollment**. As identified in the RP Group's Student Support (Re)defined study, we encourage Yuba to **take [students' perspective of support](#) into account to further identify barriers** and consider ways to make these steps more learner-centered. As a place to start, some colleges have experienced success with engaging teams of faculty, student services professionals, and administrators in walking through the onboarding process as if they were students to demonstrate the ways current policies and procedures can prevent a successful entry.

Finally, we suggest the college **explore approaches that (1) create student connections, (2) allow for early career and college exploration in a structured and supported way, (3) move students to program/goal selection, and (4) inform students about resources and supports available on campus**. Yuba's existing Counseling 10 and 25 courses offer a positive practice on which to build. To start, Yuba might explore making either/both of these courses mandatory for certain student groups and/or identify ways to scale these offerings to more students. We also recommend researching first-year experiences, cohorting, and/or learning community approaches and determining models that would work in the Yuba context.

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

## 3. Recognize the need for support and guidance throughout the entire student journey.

*PROGRESS, COMPLETION (CBD); HELP STUDENTS STAY ON THE PATH (GUIDED PATHWAYS)*

Conversations with focus group participants well along their path indicate that Yuba has an opportunity not only to strengthen onboarding, but also to provide continuous support to students throughout their time at the college to ensure they efficiently and effectively reach their goals. Right now, the burden appears to be primarily on students as they make their way through the college, with little to no support. Students repeatedly reported the need to

advocate for themselves, describing challenges getting accurate information and indicating an absence of proactive support from the college designed to help them maintain momentum and complete.

Much like in the Aspen report, we generally recommend that Yuba **determine ways to actively outreach to students at key milestones to help them identify where they are in their journey, what they need to do next to fulfill (or revise) their education plan, and what resources and supports are available if they have fallen off path.** We strongly suggest mobilizing the range of advising and guidance resources available on campus, beyond counseling. For example, how can other student services (e.g., financial aid) assist in relevant student advising? Given the major-specific information students described accessing from instructors, what role can discipline faculty play? How might the college enlist students in providing peer support?

At the same time, focus group participants indicate the need to customize support to what students' needs different points. **Students in the progress stage of their journey report different needs from students nearing completion,** as outlined below.

### 3A. PROGRESS: CREATE MORE PROACTIVE SYSTEMS FOR TRACKING STUDENT PROGRESS.

We applaud the fact that so many focus group participants had a printed education plan and used it to determine their movement toward a goal. At the same time, Yuba can further assist students and practitioners with more advanced tools for ongoing advising. Focus group participants reported the presence of different online systems that are not widely known by students and that do not necessarily capture the same information. We recommend Yuba **invest in one user-friendly progress tracking system that students, instructors, counselors, and staff can commonly access** to determine where a student is on his/her path and display how far they have to go. This system would also consistently prompt students with information about what they need to do next in order to make progress toward their goals, including coming in to see a counselor.

### 3B. COMPLETION: PROVIDE SPECIFIC GUIDANCE FOR TRANSITION TO UNIVERSITY AND EMPLOYMENT.

Given students' strong emphasis on and interest in transfer, we recommend that Yuba **strengthen its support to transfer-bound students, ensuring that: (1) these students are aware of existing transfer supports on campus; and (2) guidance is offered in a timely way, aligned with the requirements of receiving institutions.** We suggest Yuba consider more regular and active engagement of representatives from transfer institutions in the region throughout the year to offer on-campus advising at key intervals in the transfer process (e.g., transfer fairs, days, information sessions on financial planning for transfer).

Similarly, students are seeking support with transitions to employment that match up with their program area. Again, we suggest that Yuba **increase student awareness of existing opportunities to connect with employers** related to their major area of study and **generate new ways for employers and students to engage.** We recommend **exploring the development of an applied learning model that offers a range of opportunities** for students to develop relationships with employers and for employers to either establish and/or deepen their

involvement with the college. This model might include a series of graduated activities that build across a student's program experience, from in-class presentations by employers and community-based organizations, to students' development of projects with real-world value, to participation in internships, work experience, service learning, and clinical placements.

#### 4. Ensure course offerings and academic services are designed and offered to meet actual student need.

*ENTRY, PROGRESS, COMPLETION (CBD); HELP STUDENTS STAY ON THE PATH, ENSURE STUDENTS ARE LEARNING (GUIDED PATHWAYS)*

Discussions with focus group participants revealed that the current model for scheduling courses and offering academic support services calls for an assessment and revision in order to better serve students with the courses and assistance they need, when they need them.

##### 4A. IMPROVE COURSE AVAILABILITY.

Given that focus group participants commonly reported issues with course availability as impacting their experience at all stages of their journey through the college, we **recommend that Yuba seek to better understand students' course needs and develop an enrollment management plan to meet those needs**. According to the students in the focus groups, there appears to be a mismatch between courses students need to take, when they can take these courses, and when the courses are offered. To ensure more students can make efficient progress toward their goals, we recommend the college further **explore how and when it is delivering course offerings and how to improve the supply of courses to meet student demand**. Resources from the Institutional Effectiveness Partnership Initiative (IEPI) Strategic Enrollment Management Applied Solution Kit (ASK), forthcoming in early 2018, may offer support for this assessment.

##### 4B. STRENGTHEN ACCESS TO ACADEMIC SUPPORTS.

Positively, focus group participants generally described their experience with the College Success Center and Hard Math Café as helpful and encouraging of their progress and achievement. At the same time, some students shared that their peers were unaware of the services and/or that the hours of operation did not match up with the schedules of students who may work during the day. We suggest **exploring how to make these vital academic supports consistently available to all students who need them, including during the day and in the evenings and/or weekends, and on all campuses**.

#### 5. Explore ways to offset textbook costs for students.

*ENTRY, PROGRESS, COMPLETION (CBD); HELP STUDENTS STAY ON THE PATH (GUIDED PATHWAYS)*

Given the common complaint about the high costs of textbooks and access codes coupled with instructors who require students to purchase expensive books or codes they do not use, we recommend that Yuba **inform faculty about how their decisions regarding the use of books**

**and instructional materials impact students**, particularly those already struggling with the financial burden of college. We also suggest Yuba **consider expanding the number and type of books available in the library** so students can access these texts for free and/or exploring a book loan program and **exploring open-source materials and resources**.

## Ensuring All Students Are Supported and Engaged

### 6. Strengthen student connections to campus.

*ENTRY, PROGRESS, COMPLETION (CBD); HELP STUDENTS STAY ON THE PATH (GUIDED PATHWAYS)*

Encouragingly, focus group participants described feeling welcome on campus and having positive relationships with peers, and often, faculty. At the same time, students are seeking a deeper sense of connection to each other and to the college. Focus group participants reported variability in faculty ability to effectively engage students with both their coursework and college life. While students reported organically forging their own peer connections, they also indicated there is little campus support for forming and sustaining these networks. Many participants described the overall campus climate as disconnected and lacking a strong sense of community.

Student Support (Re)defined underscored the importance of strong student connections, both inside and outside the classroom, to students' success. Yuba has already begun this process, initiating periodic student spirit days, particularly around exam time. How can the college **immediately build on these activities to create an even stronger sense of place** and create more opportunities for students to get involved on campus? How can the institution **create more formal structures and supports for peer networks**? What additional activities can Yuba offer to **ensure that students attending night and weekend classes or courses on satellite campuses also experience a vibrant college life**? Further, how can the college **support faculty—who have the most frequent and potentially the most powerful connection to students—in deepening their pedagogical practice to build community** both in their classroom and across the institution as a whole?

### 7. Recognize and support the unique experiences of special populations.

*ENTRY, PROGRESS, COMPLETION (CBD); HELP STUDENTS STAY ON THE PATH (GUIDED PATHWAYS)*

Student Support (Re)defined likewise found that recognizing the skills, talents, abilities, and experiences of students from all groups, and offering them opportunities to contribute on campus strengthens their success. In addition to enhancing campus life for all students, we suggest that Yuba specifically **pay attention to developing a stronger sense of belonging for African-American and Native American students**. Students in each of these groups felt an absence of identity and kinship on campus, noticed a dearth of practitioners representing their communities, and yearned for recognition of their unique cultural and ethnic experience. Participants in each of these focus groups were genuinely grateful to meet each other and be

together; during their focus group time alone, they swapped resources, shared stories, and networked.

We suggest that Yuba has an immediate opportunity to **find ways to regularly convene these two groups of students**; likely, a small investment of resources would go a long way to helping these populations find comfort, connection, and support in one another, and in turn, the rest of the college. **Bringing organizations and associations from the surrounding area that specifically serve African Americans and Native Americans on to campus can additionally help** Yuba begin to increase its capacity for meeting their needs and valuing their experience.

Veterans similarly described feeling as though they are on their own at Yuba. They shared a deep appreciation for the services and support offered by the Veteran Resource Center on campus. However, they also observed an absence of institutional support for the center, as evidenced by its remote location on campus and its tenuous staffing. We recommend Yuba **consider relocating the VRC to increase its visibility, reinforce its value, and make stronger linkages between the center's services and other supports** on campus. Additionally, **investing in stable staffing** would remove the sense of responsibility from the backs of those students who use its services and demonstrate the college's commitment to this population.

## 8. Ensure the college is responsive to the specific needs of students with disabilities.

*ENTRY, PROGRESS, COMPLETION (CBD); HELP STUDENTS STAY ON THE PATH (GUIDED PATHWAYS)*

Given the numerous challenges raised during the focus groups involving students with disabilities, we strongly suggest Yuba **attend to ensuring support to and compliance with the legal requirements of equitably serving this population**. To start, Yuba has the opportunity to **inform all students before they even enroll about DSPS and how to access the specific supports and accommodations** available to students with disabilities. Proactively providing this information from the start and offering assistance with the application process and placement exam may help more disabled students make a smooth transition into the college.

Additionally, we recommend that Yuba **provide education and training to faculty, staff, and administrators working across the institution both about ADA compliance** and the laws around supporting the needs of disabled students. Moreover, we suggest that this training also **help practitioners develop greater sensitivity** about the needs of these students.

Finally, we recommend **assessing the college's facilities and grounds** to guarantee it is ADA accessible, both across the campus grounds and inside its buildings.

## 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.

*ALL STAGES (CBD); ALL PILLARS (GUIDED PATHWAYS)*

While focus group participants referred to positive interactions with caring and committed individuals across the college, students also described variable experiences with faculty, staff, and administrators alike, and underscored the general absence of a student-centered culture on campus. For students to feel supported both academically and socially, the college must **promote a culture in which all faculty, staff, and administrators feel a shared responsibility for student success.**

Instructors and counselors may see their roles at the college as already inherently about support because their positions require them to work directly with students. However, based on the findings from Student Support (Re)defined, instructors and counselors play a pivotal role in how students' experience college that goes far beyond the classroom and/or the counseling center. As intimated above, instructors can help students develop a connection to and actively engage with their peers, stay focused, and feel that their instructors and the college care about their academic and personal success. In addition to guiding and supporting students to attain their educational goals, counselors can help students learn about engagement opportunities including extracurricular activities and clubs. Furthermore, counselors can connect more students to academic support services and special programs like EOPS, DSPS, and the Veteran Resource Center that help students identify a direction early on and receive ongoing guidance for reaching their goals.

Front-line staff such as individuals working in key student-facing functions such as admissions and financial aid are some of the first people students encounter on campus. Their role is far greater than helping students complete the forms and processes required for enrollment or securing assistance; their approach can set an important tone in terms of how welcome and supported students feel from day one. Other staff may not see how what they do directly supports students, such as individuals working behind the scenes in payroll, maintenance, or administrative offices. However, everyone who works at the college can potentially play a valuable role promoting student achievement by getting to know individual students, serving as a resource to students on campus, sharing stories of their own educational and job experience, and fundamentally connecting their work to the student experience.

**For each and every person working at Yuba to be empowered to provide that student support, more is required than simply telling personnel to be more supportive of students and leaving them on their own to figure out how to implement that directive.** Yuba has already taken an important first step in dedicating a prior convocation session to the findings of

Student Support (Re)defined. Now, Yuba can take the next step in helping personnel across the college discover exactly how, both in their official positions and as members of the college community, they can directly contribute to student success. As such, we recommend that Yuba **provide professional development and assistance that enables personnel at all levels and in all roles to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to support students**, as well as to continually practice these new skills.

In order for this all-inclusive approach to student support to be both meaningful and sustainable, Yuba must work to **create an institution-wide culture in which the promotion of student success is a built-in component of every position** at the college, with the expectations of these responsibilities robustly communicated throughout the institution and fully supported from an operational and logistical standpoint by administrative policies and practices. Below, we offer a few recommendations for faculty and staff specifically.

#### FACULTY

We recommend that Yuba **provide a robust faculty orientation that is specifically designed to help instructors who are new to Yuba** develop both their pedagogical capacity for teaching in the community college environment and their understanding of how to comprehensively support their students' success, both inside and outside the classroom. Yuba might ground this orientation in its guided pathways (GP) reform work, educating new faculty on the fundamentals of GP, identifying ways for them to take part in the institution's GP inquiry and design, and focusing on specific approaches and strategies that meet the needs of students experiencing disproportionate impact at the college.

We also suggest that Yuba consider **strengthening its professional development program for faculty who have taught at the college for a longer period of time—both full-time and adjunct instructors** alike. Again, we recommend that Yuba links this faculty development to the broader institutional effort to adopt guided pathways. As referenced above, we suggest the college **ensure that all faculty are required to meaningfully engage in training that helps them understand (1) how their own classroom practice connects to the broader student experience at Yuba, and (2) what they can practically do to help students successfully move through the college, from entry through completion.**

#### STAFF

We also suggest that Yuba specifically explore ways to **help classified staff working in both student-facing and operational functions better understand their role in student success and empower them with specific strategies for inhabiting this role.** Several California Community Colleges have engaged staff with the Student Support (Re)defined success factors framework and used the findings and themes from this research as a foundation for classified professional development. [Chaffey College](#), [College of the Canyons](#), [DeAnza College](#), and [Feather River College](#) offer a diversity of ideas for how different institutions have employed Student Support (Re)defined to engage staff in student-centered professional development.

## Conclusion

Looking at the college through the lens of student experiences—rather than the lens of policy, administration, finances, organizational charts, or logistics—can dramatically change one’s understanding of the institution, shaping practice in powerful new ways. These focus groups marked an important beginning to making student perspectives more visible at Yuba College. Although the topics raised may not necessarily reflect the key issues and concerns of *all students*, the views expressed during focus groups nevertheless point to the fact that, overall, students are yearning for a Yuba experience in which they feel more engaged and supported in successfully navigating the college, from connection to completion, and on to a university and/or employment.

To this end, the college has an opportunity to build upon this first step of eliciting student views by **developing a systematic process for regularly engaging students in the planning, design, assessment, and refinement of college practices. Yuba’s emerging guided pathways inquiry and design work offers an immediate structure for this student engagement.** If done meaningfully, Yuba can not only continue leveraging student perspectives to make the case for guided pathways reform at the college, but also offer students a place of power and influence at the planning and implementation table as it determines how to restructure the student experience for increased goal attainment.

## Interpreting Focus Group Findings

These focus groups are an important tool that will provide Yuba College with direct feedback from students regarding their academic and personal experiences at the college. Listening to the voices of students from each of the groups targeted is essential to developing a true understanding of how to best promote equitable student success and completion.

At the same time, it is critical not to inflate these focus group findings into a generalization about any particular group of students or the student population as a whole. In comparison to the total number of students at Yuba College, the proportion of students included in the focus groups is small. In addition, students who agree to join focus groups are generally a self-selected group that often comprises students who are motivated, interested, and/or driven to provide feedback about their experiences. While their perspective is both important and valuable, one cannot ignore the fact that the perspective of the students who chose *not* to participate remains absent.

However, it is important to take the findings in this report seriously while keeping in mind that they represent only the perspectives of the students present. The more frequently that student feedback is solicited through focus groups or other forums, the more complete the picture that emerges will be, empowering the college to develop strategies and make decisions that best enable each and every student to thrive.

# Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges

The RP Group strengthens the ability of California community colleges to discover and undertake high-quality research, planning, and assessments that improve evidence-based decision-making, institutional effectiveness, and success for *all* students.

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