

Student Success Center Messaging

INTERNAL document

May 1, 2017

WHY MESSAGING?

Messages are the language we use to describe Student Success Centers and the Student Success Center Network. We want them to be clear and memorable. Most of all, we want our language to connect with others so it creates interest in our work and inspires people to act.

The more an audience hears a message—the same message—the more memorable it will be. For that reason, consistency helps messages stick. That said, every Center is different. This document can help everyone in the Network (JFF, the Centers, and the host organizations) be consistent with the big-picture language and then customize the details to describe their own work.

AUDIENCE, AUDIENCE, AUDIENCE

Strong messaging speaks to your key audiences—the people you want to inspire to act. If we don't speak in ways that make sense to our audiences, we are essentially talking to ourselves.

External audiences do not understand internal jargon, and they have minimal interest in process. They want to hear about actions and results. Keep the focus on the students you are helping—why your work is needed and how it connects to the end game of helping more students complete college.

Also remember that every audience has its own agenda. For example, college presidents have specific goals for their institutions, funders have organizational priorities, and policymakers want to get re-elected. To build their interest and support, show them how your work can help them attain their own goals.

TYPES OF MESSAGES AND HOW TO USE THEM

This document presents messages for a variety of uses, each of which is described below. We encourage everyone to use as much of this language as they can—and of course to add details about the specifics of your work. (The external materials created by the Network show these messages in use.)

We have three types of messages, with each step building on the previous one.

- **One-sentence descriptions of Centers and the Network.** There are two one-sentence descriptions of a Center—one from the perspective of the Network and one from the perspective of a Center.
- **Elevator pitches.** There are two elevator pitches for the Centers—one from the perspective of the Network and one from the perspective of a Center. Centers should feel free to use the language from either version.
- **Detailed messages.** Each detailed message focuses on a key idea for the Centers and the Network. Think of these detailed messages like pieces of a puzzle that can be rearranged to suit different needs or different audiences. Each message point can stand alone or be used in combination with others. The Center elevator pitch is written in the first person (“We do X”) for a friendlier tone, but Centers can change it to third person (“the Center does X”) for a more formal tone. Over time, we will add to the detailed messages as needed. For example, we will expand the Results message section by writing detailed descriptions of Center successes.

At a minimum, we hope everyone will use the same one-sentence description in all written and verbal communications.

ONE-SENTENCE DESCRIPTIONS	
<i>Student Success Centers</i> <i>Network perspective</i>	A Student Success Center is a statewide organization that supports community colleges’ efforts to develop student-centered pathways and increase student completion rates.
<i>Student Success Centers</i> <i>Center perspective</i>	[Name of Center] is a statewide organization that supports [name of state] community colleges’ efforts to develop student-centered pathways and increase student completion rates.
<i>Student Success Center Network</i>	The Student Success Center Network includes 14 statewide Student Success Centers, which support community colleges’ efforts to develop student-centered pathways and increase student completion rates.

ELEVATOR PITCHES	
<p><i>Student Success Centers</i></p> <p><i>Network perspective</i></p>	<p>A Student Success Center is a statewide organization that supports community colleges' efforts to develop student-centered pathways and increase student completion rates. Working with its colleges, each Center creates a coherent, statewide strategy that helps colleges integrate their varied student success efforts, learn from one another, and maximize resources. Centers also represent the collective voice of practitioners in state-level policy discussions. Fourteen Centers are part of the national Student Success Center Network.</p>
<p><i>Student Success Centers</i></p> <p><i>Center perspective</i></p>	<p>[Name of Center] is a statewide organization that supports [name of state] community colleges' efforts to develop student-centered pathways and increase student completion rates. We work with colleges to create a coherent, statewide strategy so colleges can integrate their varied student success efforts, learn from one another, and maximize resources. We also represent the collective voice of practitioners in state-level policy discussions. We are part of the national Student Success Center Network.</p>
<p><i>Student Success Center Network</i></p>	<p>The Student Success Center Network includes 14 statewide Student Success Centers, which support community colleges' efforts to develop student-centered pathways and increase student completion rates. The Network provides opportunities for Centers to learn from one another's experiences. It also shares information about innovations at institutions nationwide so more colleges can implement and scale promising practices. The 14 Student Success Centers serve more than half of U.S. community college students, including two-thirds of students of color and more than half of low-income students. Jobs for the Future (JFF) manages the Network and provides support to Center staff.</p>

DETAILED MESSAGES	
<i>The need or Why Student Success Centers?</i>	<p>Community colleges working to improve completion rates can end up with a sea of initiatives, programs, and reforms that affect every aspect of their operations. But these efforts often are disjointed, and they typically are available to only some students.</p> <p>While small-scale efforts and individual initiatives may help small numbers of students, they are not enough to move the needle on completion. Truly improving outcomes requires large-scale institution-wide change.</p> <p>A Student Success Center creates a coherent, statewide framework for action, or a lens through which its colleges evaluate, align, and integrate their work in various student success initiatives. The strategy, grounded in developing student-centered pathways, focuses on broad-scale change that affects the daily experience of every community college student.</p> <p>Through the Center’s work, colleges across the state can learn from—and build on—outstanding work at their neighboring and peer institutions. They have access to shared resources, opportunities to learn from one another, and support to scale effective practices statewide. The Center connects the dots between colleges across the state so they can collectively meet their state’s completion goals.</p>
<i>Who Centers Serve</i>	<p>The 14 Student Success Centers serve 50 percent of U.S. public community colleges. These colleges enroll:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 60 percent of U.S. community college students ■ 68 percent of students of color at U.S. community colleges ■ 56 percent of Pell Grant recipients at U.S. community colleges <p>In addition, 58 percent of U.S. associate degree recipients are in states with Centers.</p> <p>Source: 2013–14 IPEDS data</p>
<i>What Centers do</i>	<p>Centers help colleges plan strategically and implement effectively. To support colleges and their students, Centers:</p> <p>Provide coherence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Create a statewide framework of action, or a lens through which colleges focus their work and integrate their student success efforts.

DETAILED MESSAGES

What Centers do (continued)

- Unify efforts across the state so colleges can collectively meet their state's completion goals.
- Provide strategic guidance to the state's colleges.
- Identify effective policies and practices and then provide support (technical assistance, professional development) to help scale them statewide.
- Build partnerships with K-12 and four-year institutions.

Convene

- Create time and space for faculty and staff to connect and to discuss strategy and implementation.
- Identify problems common to multiple colleges and help colleges work together to address them.
- Develop economies of scale in training, professional development, and technical assistance.
- Encourage engagement at every level of the college (administration, faculty, and staff), particularly with regard to overcoming barriers to change.

Connect policy and practice

- Represent the collective voice of practitioners in state-level policy discussions.
- Identify and pursue state and system policy changes that support the institutional changes necessary to increase student completion.

Improve data capacity

- Improve data sharing among community colleges and with K-12 and four-year institutions.
- Establish common data metrics throughout the state.
- Support deeper use of education and labor market data by practitioners and policymakers.

Promote research and knowledge development

- Support research projects with colleges (and often with university partners) to evaluate the impact of interventions and identify obstacles to student success.
- Give colleges strategic guidance that builds on lessons learned in the field, including innovative and effective policies and practices.
- Provide access to additional resources through the Student Success Center Network.

DETAILED MESSAGES

Centers in action

These are short examples of Center work.

Over time, we will create longer stories with more detail.

Each Center also should develop stories about its own work and successes.

Centers have driven policy changes, helped their colleges secure funds for improvements, and provided a range of supports to help colleges tackle the difficult work of institutional change. Examples include:

AR: Statewide TAACCCT Grants

The Arkansas Student Success Center secured more than \$20 million in federal and private grants to support implementation of student innovations at Arkansas’ 22 community colleges. The awards include a \$15 million Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) Grant from the U.S. Department of Labor, which provided funds for all community colleges to redesign developmental education instruction, improve student advising and tracking, and streamline select programs so students could earn credentials more quickly. Colleges credited the funds with “creating a culture of student success” and building a foundation for continuing institutional change to improve student outcomes.

CT: Automatic Transfer and Junior Standing

The Connecticut Student Success Center developed 22 transfer pathway degrees that can be completed at any of the state’s 12 community colleges in 60 credits—and all lead to automatic transfer with junior standing at all regional universities. The final 60 credits at the universities are also mapped so students know exactly what is required to complete a bachelor’s degree. In some cases, students who might have been declined admission to a university are offered the option of starting at a community college and being guaranteed admission and junior status upon completing a transfer pathway degree.

MI: Block Transfer Agreement

The Michigan Center for Student Success led the charge for creating the Michigan Transfer Agreement (MTA). Under the MTA, which went into effect in fall 2014, students can transfer 30 credits of the general education requirements in a block to participating four-year institutions. The Center is now convening a committee of community college and university leaders to develop statewide agreements for transferring the full associate degree. These statewide policy conversations, which are an outgrowth of Michigan colleges’ work on implementing guided pathways, demonstrate how Centers connect policy and practice.

DETAILED MESSAGES

*Centers in action
(continued)*

NY: Scaling Math Pathways

The New York Student Success Center is helping its colleges scale the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching’s Quantway/Statway Math Pathways, which have been shown to accelerate students’ progress through developmental math. This effort focuses on enrolling students in math courses that are connected to their programs of study and aligned with their career goals as well as supporting faculty trainings and professional development.

OH: Connecting Policy with Practice

The Ohio Student Success Center is leveraging state policy to build momentum for implementing guided pathways. Ohio’s community colleges have 100 percent outcomes-based funding, and the state requires colleges to submit completion plans with strategies to increase the number and percentage of students earning meaningful postsecondary credentials. The Center’s efforts include a multiyear Student Success Leadership Institute that focuses on scaling guided pathways reforms at all colleges in the state.

TX: Bringing Pathways to Scale

The Texas Success Center has launched the Texas Pathway Project, a statewide strategy to scale pathways at all colleges. The work is closely modeled on the guided pathways project led by the American Association of Community Colleges. The Center is supporting all 50 Texas community college districts’ pathways efforts to help reach the state’s completion goal: 60 percent of young Texans will have a credential by 2030.

WA: Shared Learning and Grant Support

The Washington Student Success Center hosts institutes that bring national pathways experts to every community college in the state. The Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges—the Center’s host organization—worked with College Spark Washington in its process of selecting the first five colleges to receive five-year grants to implement pathways. The Center, in turn, is bringing lessons learned at those five colleges to all other colleges in the state.

DETAILED MESSAGES

Why Centers are critical for getting results or The coherence message

The longer version builds on the short version and gives more detail about how Centers are structured and the history of Centers.

You can use all elements of this message point or pull out specific points as needed.

[short version]

Student Success Centers emerged at a time when community colleges were involved in a growing number of student success initiatives. These efforts had similar goals, but their implementation was disjointed, and they were not leading to results at scale.

Between 2010 and 2013, four states—Arkansas, Michigan, Ohio, and Texas—created Student Success Centers. In each state, the Center worked to bring its colleges’ efforts together in a coherent way.

These early Centers, while developing separately, took on similar roles. Each Center created a statewide framework of action, or a lens through which the state’s colleges could focus and integrate their various student success efforts. Centers refer to this framing as *providing coherence* to the colleges’ work. With coherence, colleges can choose the initiatives that are best aligned with their overall strategy. The result is a unified approach to improving completion and the ability to scale effective practices statewide.

[longer version is a continuation of the short version]

In addition to providing coherence, the Centers played a *convening* role, so colleges began to set aside time to discuss strategy and implementation with one another. And Centers *connected policy and practice* by making sure practitioners had a voice in state policy discussions.

The four early Centers were housed in their states’ community college associations but had their own dedicated budgets. The Kresge Foundation, an early supporter of the Centers, found them to be an effective way to support a great number of colleges.

Today there are 14 Centers, with growth primarily driven through two RFP processes, the first funded by Kresge and the second by Kresge and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The role of Centers is more formalized. They continue to be housed in existing structures—typically the community college association or the state system office—and they continue to control their own budgets.