CCRC COMMUNITY COLLEGE RESEARCH CENTER

TEACHERS COLLEGE, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Ask-Connect Workshop

June 5, 2023

About this workshop

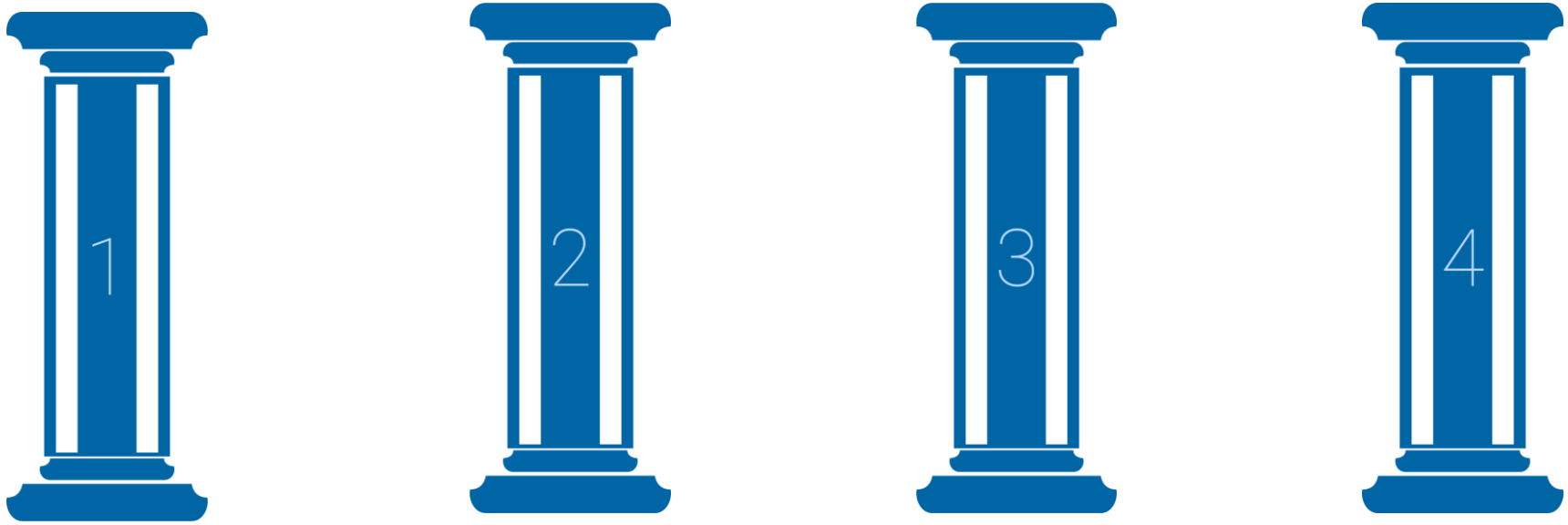
This workshop is designed to provide participants with strategies for adopting *Ask* and *Connect* practices as part of the Ask-Connect-Inspire-Plan onboarding framework. The goal of *Ask* is to learn about students' interests, career goals and lives in order to *Connect* students with a community and support network that fosters academic and career exploration and provides students the academic and non-academic resources they need, both in the college and the community, to help them successfully complete their credentials.

Workshop Agenda

- Ask-Connect in the context of guided pathways and ACIP (5 minutes)
- About Ask-Connect (15 minutes)
- Team Activity (25 minutes)
- Questions or Comments (5 minutes)

Ask & Connect in the context of Guided Pathways & ACIP

Remember the four pillars of pathways reform?



Clarify paths to student education and career goals.

Get students choose and enter a path.

Keep students on a path.

Ensure students are learning.

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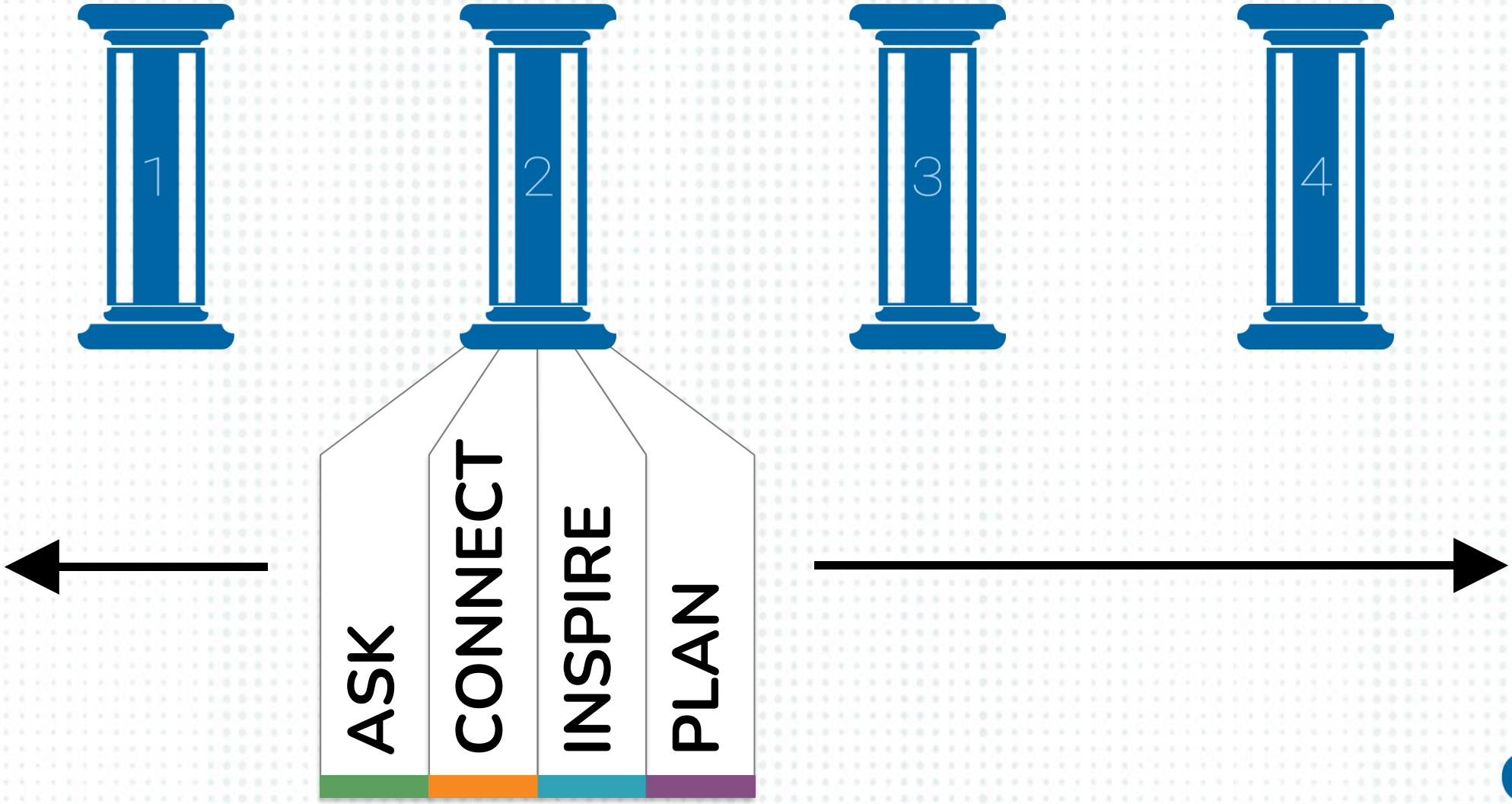
Clarify paths to student education and career goals

Help students choose and enter a path

Keep students on a path

Ensure students are learning



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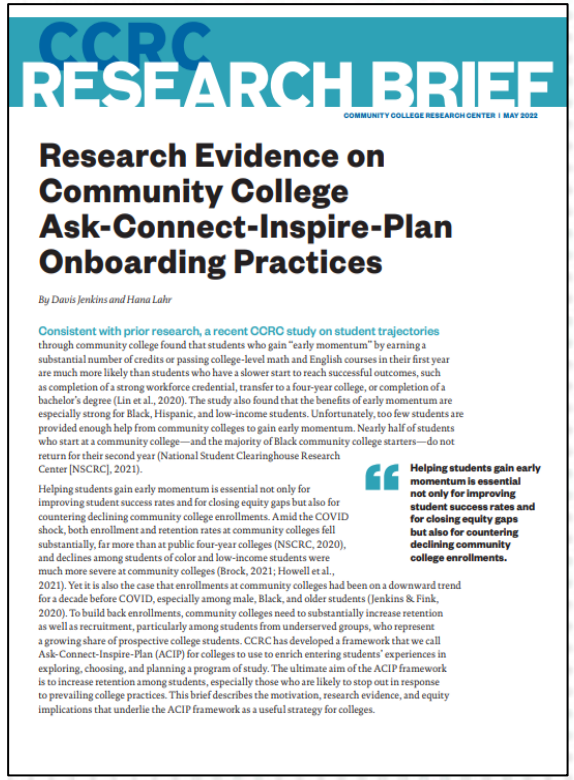
To ensure more entering students stay and gain early momentum in a program of study, CCRC's research suggests that colleges focus on creating a more motivating and equitable program onboarding experience for entering students.



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RESEARCH BRIEF
COMMUNITY COLLEGE RESEARCH CENTER | MAY 2022

Research Evidence on Community College Ask-Connect-Inspire-Plan Onboarding Practices

By Davis Jenkins and Hana Lahr

Consistent with prior research, a recent CCRC study on student trajectories through community college found that students who gain "early momentum" by earning a substantial number of credits or passing college-level math and English courses in their first year are much more likely than students who have a slower start to reach successful outcomes, such as completion of a strong workforce credential, transfer to a four-year college, or completion of a bachelor's degree (Lin et al., 2020). The study also found that the benefits of early momentum are especially strong for Black, Hispanic, and low-income students. Unfortunately, too few students are provided enough help from community colleges to gain early momentum. Nearly half of students who start at a community college—and the majority of Black community college starters—do not return for their second year (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center [NSCRC], 2021).

Helping students gain early momentum is essential not only for improving student success rates and for closing equity gaps but also for countering declining community college enrollments.

Helping students gain early momentum is essential not only for improving student success rates and for closing equity gaps but also for countering declining community college enrollments. Amid the COVID shock, both enrollment and retention rates at community colleges fell substantially, far more than at public four-year colleges (NSCRC, 2020), and declines among students of color and low-income students were much more severe at community colleges (Brock, 2021; Howell et al., 2021). Yet it is also the case that enrollments at community colleges had been on a downward trend for a decade before COVID, especially among male, Black, and older students (Jenkins & Fink, 2020). To build back enrollments, community colleges need to substantially increase retention as well as recruitment, particularly among students from underserved groups, who represent a growing share of prospective college students. CCRC has developed a framework that we call Ask-Connect-Inspire-Plan (ACIP) for colleges to use to enrich entering students' experiences in exploring, choosing, and planning a program of study. The ultimate aim of the ACIP framework is to increase retention among students, especially those who are likely to stop out in response to prevailing college practices. This brief describes the motivation, research evidence, and equity implications that underlie the ACIP framework as a useful strategy for colleges.

Read more about Ask-Connect-Inspire-Plan here: https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/ask-connect-inspire-plan-onboarding.html

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Why is program onboarding so important?

- Six years after initial enrollment, about **43% of CC students nationally have completed any credential**, **12% are still enrolled**, and **45% of students have left with no credential.** (Six-year completion rates are even lower for Hispanic (38%) and Black (31%) students).

If we want to improve longer-term outcomes, we need to start by improving shorter-term outcomes. There are many opportunities for improvement in year 1.

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Where are these opportunities? Consider the following:

- How many students apply and never enroll at your college?
- What are your enrollment trends by student group?
- How many enrolled students leave during their first term? Their first year?
- What are our three-year and six-year completion rates?

What students want during onboarding

- Assistance exploring academic and career interests
- Opportunities to interact with other new and current students, faculty, and others who share similar academic and career interests
- The chance to take a course on topics of interest in term 1
- Assistance developing a full-program educational plan

Check-in

What do you wish that someone had asked you/known about you when you started college?

About *ASK & CONNECT*

The second area of the pathways framework focuses on onboarding students into a program of study (not just college generally).

Ask-Connect is a critical part of onboarding because it's a way of learning more about students – their interests, goals, and lives – so that the college can facilitate intentional connections with people in the college and in the broader college community who can support students toward their goals.

ASK

Every student is engaged in an **ongoing conversation** about their interests, strengths, aspirations, and life circumstances with the aim of **helping them explore** programs of study and career paths aligned with their goals.

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CONNECT

From the start, colleges facilitate **opportunities for every student** to meet with faculty, students, alumni, and employers in fields of interest to them and access college and community resources that can help support their needs.

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Principles of Ask and Connect

- **Linked**: one informs the other
- **Personalized:** universal support will not necessarily improve equity – support needs to be personalized/tailored
- **Proactive, not reactive**: crucial to start early and embed experiences
- **Continuous**: not one and done (students interests and situations will evolve and change)
- **College-wide:** there's a role for everyone to play in asking and connecting
- **Structured**: intentional follow-up that is documented and monitored

Research context: the need for equity-driven, intentional and structured engagement

- Students struggling with feelings of isolation and self-doubt are unlikely to reach out if they don't know who to talk to (Felten & Lambert, 2020).
- College contexts are not intentionally designed to promote relationship-building (Felten & Lambert, 2020).
- Students from different backgrounds may experience the campus environment differently.
- Promoting a sense of belonging for underserved students requires fostering the development of culturally engaging campuses (Museus, Yi, & Saelua, 2017).

Not enough students meet with an advisor early on, but those who do are more connected

- More returning students meet with than advisor (78%) than do new students (62%) (CCCSE, 2018).
- Those who do connect with an advisor feel more engaged with their college
  - Students who meet with an advisor score higher on a variety of measures of student engagement (CCCSE, 2018).
  - Students who indicate they feel a strong sense of belonging at their institution report higher GPAs (CCCSE, 2019).

Activity: *Ask & Connect* in Practice – Identifying Opportunities for Engaging Individual Students

25 minutes

Activity Instructions

1. Read the first two vignettes and then discuss the first set of questions (15 minutes)
2. Read the “alternative experience” vignette and discuss the second set of questions (10 minutes)

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Discussion questions for Student and Advisor Vignette

- What missed opportunities or areas of disconnect did you observe in the vignettes?
- Thinking about our own college, why do many students struggle to navigate and/or not use various student support services?

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“Alternative Experiences” Discussion Questions

- How could Ask and Connect practices be used to create a different experience for the student? What questions would you ask the student?
- Thinking about your college, in what ways might you be able to integrate Ask and Connect practices to provide a coordinated support network, rather than sending students to a variety of isolated / stand-alone services?
- How would you know students are accessing the new Ask-Connect practices and that they're having a positive impact with new students?

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Thanks!

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