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# GUIDED PATHWAYS TRAILBLAZERS

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Aug. 3, 2020

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**Greetings Pathways Trailblazers!**

**Lets #OccupyLearning.**

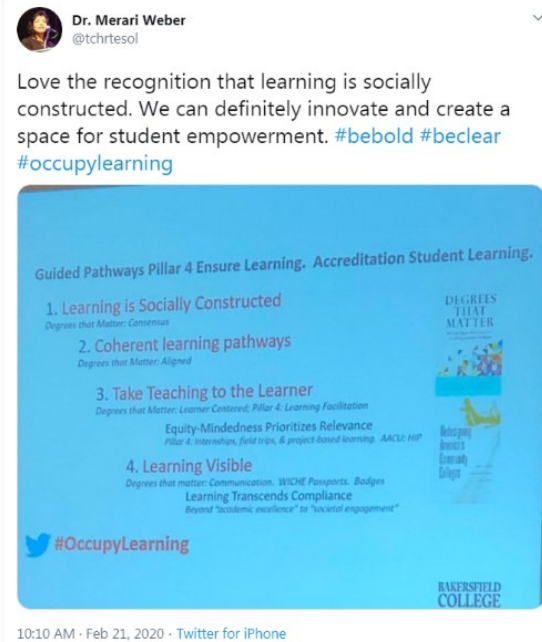
*Note: An earlier draft of this email was sent in error. My apologies.*

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It has been several (too many) months since my last trailblazers letter to you all. I wrote much of this letter in the first part of the spring semester after two inspiring conferences (ASCCC & Jarek Janio's SLO Symposium in Monterey) focused on student learning. Then COVID-19 upset everything and stopped all face-to-face instruction and all of us were in a crash course of how to continue quality education online. The public education enterprise promises to be the great equalizer for social and economic prosperity but COVID-19 and then George Floyd's murder have clearly shown us that the promise is unfulfilled. Our move to online education exposed the systemic gaps of access many of our students face, particularly our students of color. One of my college's institutional learning outcomes is that our students will engage productively in all levels of society—interpersonal, community, the state and nation, and the world. As an institution focused on learning, we are learning about what we need to do to close the gaps, so that all of our students—all of our students—will be able to engage productively in all levels of society. While we close the systemic gaps, we continue asking ourselves what our students need to learn to be engaged citizens because learning is socially constructed.



**“Learning is Socially Constructed”** is an idea you’ll hear from me often as we take Guided Pathways to the next level. Although student learning is always at the heart of everything we do (because if learning is not happening, then everything else we’re doing doesn’t matter), Guided Pathways in California has been focused on progression & completion. We have expended a lot of time and brain power on Pillar 1: Clarify the Path by creating clear maps of our programs that are understandable to today’s first generation students; on Pillar 2: Enter the Path by getting students into transfer-level college classes as quickly as possible; and on Pillar 3: Stay on the Path by ramping up our intrusive counseling and developing the technology to more accurately track the students and target the particular academic support each of them need.



**Pillar 4 is Ensure Learning.** While it may look at first glance that we’ve ignored Pillar 4, the other pillars, especially Pillars 1 and 3, do support student learning and even, in fact, ensure that learning happens. As part of my preparation for my address to faculty, staff, and administrative leaders at the SLO Symposium in Monterey in February, I read the book “Degrees That Matter” (DTM) by Natasha Jankowski and David Marshall. Everyone at the symposium was given a copy of the book thanks to the sponsorship of eLumen. If I had to summarize the book with a single phrase, I’d say, “Clarify Learning”. We ensure learning happens by clarifying what the learning is for ourselves and for our students.

Because learning is socially constructed, the process of Pillar 1’s clarifying the path is actually wrestling together in the higher education community about and building consensus about what students need to learn in higher education and our particular programs in a fundamental way. **Because learning is socially constructed, that consensus building needs to include students in the dialogue, so that students can “have a good understanding of the goals for which they should be aiming”** (DTM, p. 28). Our wrestling together about what students need to learn must involve examining the assumptions we make in what the outcomes mean and how the courses and co-curricular activities fit together and communicating it in an understandable way to the students, so they can see the why of the various steps of the path, especially, the general education part of their program. Examining our assumptions will require honest, cross-disciplinary dialogue about what the course and program learning outcomes mean to the faculty in a given program and to the faculty outside the program. Clarifying the learning is as much for ourselves as for the students because we need to need to be very intentional about our role in society: how we prepare the future workforce of engaged citizens who are fulfilled human beings.

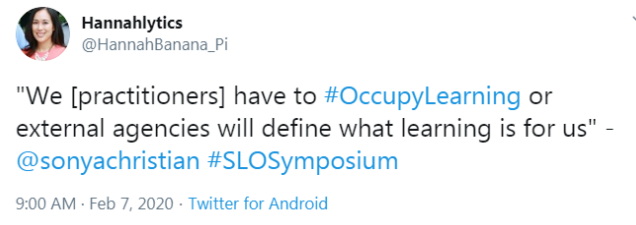
We also must examine the assumptions we make “about our role as faculty or staff in the process and the role of students in their relation to their learning” (DTM, p. 39). Because learning is socially constructed, **we need to shift our focus from teaching to learning to “create environments and learning experiences that bring students together to construct knowledge for themselves”** (DTM, p. 43). When students internalize their learning and see the relevance of the tasks we present in the courses and of the courses themselves to their lives beyond the classroom, they will perform much better and enjoy the challenges.

Making the learning relevant to our students requires us to see our students, know our students, and socially construct the learning for our students. All of our students come to us with a view of learning that has been socially agreed upon in their families as they were growing up. While a third-generation college student is ready to engage in abstract theory because of the professions of their parents and grandparents, a first-generation student will more likely need applied learning to make it relevant. Along with the interactions in the classroom, high impact practices such as internships, student employment, field trips, project-based learning, etc. enable students to integrate what they’ve learned in the various classrooms.

One of the strategic priorities for ACCJC is promoting innovation and in my new role as chair of the commission, I have teamed up with ACCJC President Stephanie Droker to advance the conversations related to student achievement and learning with equity at its center. The ACCJC standards start with an emphasis of an institution’s mission and calls out the responsibility of colleges to know their students.

*The mission describes the institution’s broad educational purposes, its intended student population, the types of degrees and other credentials it offers, and its commitment to student learning and student achievement. (IA1)*

This empowers college to take ownership of learning by knowing their students, knowing their community, and engaging in the conversation. Working with the communities they serve, colleges have socially constructed their missions. **How have you intentionally designed your systems to achieve your missions? How are you making the learning visible to the students?** We are the “Michelangelos” in the learning of our students: chipping away at the marble to release the angel inside. We make visible to our first-generation students the multi-faceted intelligence they have while they grapple with the



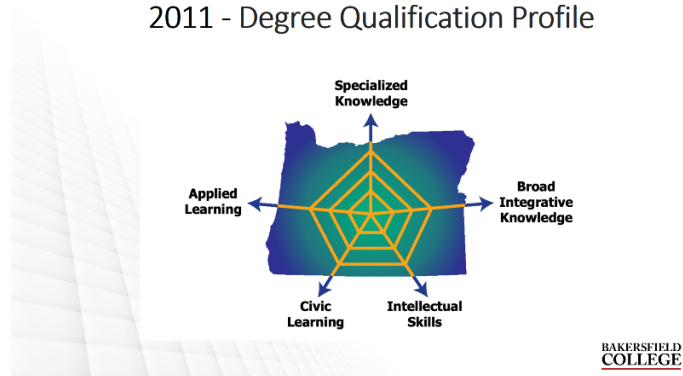
6:01 PM · Jul 29, 2020 from Mount Helix, CA · Twitter for iPhone

concepts in a philosophy class or the skills in a welding class and develop/enhance/empower their creativity to solve problems we don't know yet exist. Learning transcends compliance.

Talking about equity and learning, please join Pam Luster (@SDMesaPrez) and Keith Curry (@IamKeithCurry) as they lead the next twitter conversation with Stephanie Droker (@StephanieDroker) and me (@SonyaChristian) on #EquityChat on August 5<sup>th</sup> from 5-6 pm.

Before I became President of Bakersfield College, I was the Vice-President of Instruction & Student Affairs at Lane Community College in Eugene, Oregon. During this time I was involved with the community colleges and universities in Oregon to begin using the framework of the [Degree Qualifications Profile](#) (DQP) in defining learning outcomes at the associate's degree and bachelor's degree using the five areas identified in the spiderweb representation in the graphic above.

## 2011 - Degree Qualification Profile



Jankowski and Marshall discuss the DQP and Tuning extensively in DTM. Using something like DQP would [enable us to differentiate the skills of the student much more accurately](#) and fully than their GPA and degree major. The DQP looks at five areas of learning: Specialized Knowledge (the particular knowledge the given discipline), Applied & Collaborative Learning (internships, field trips & project-based learning that deepen the learning), Civic & Global Learning (making engaged citizens), Intellectual Skills, and Broad & Integrative Knowledge. The spiderweb-graphic version of DQP has the five areas of learning as the spokes of the web and the three levels of abilities (novice, intermediate, expert) as the rings of the web. Other versions of DQP and even other measurements of learning are possible, of course, but one important benefit of DQP or Tuning is the dialogue among the faculty, staff, and students about what is the learning and making it visible to the students. **Why? Because learning is socially constructed!**



## #OccupyLearning

### 1. Learning is Socially Constructed

*Degrees that Matter: Consensus*

### 2. Coherent learning pathways

*Degrees that Matter: Aligned*

### 3. Take Teaching to the Learner

*Degrees that Matter: Learner Centered; Pillar 4: Learning Facilitation*

### Equity-Mindedness Prioritizes Relevance

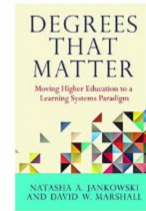
*Pillar 4: Internships, field trips, and project-based learning. AACU: HIP*

### 4. Learning Visible

*Degrees that matter: Communication. WICHE Passports. Badges*

### Learning Transcends Compliance

*Beyond "academic excellence" to "societal engagement"*



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One last comment for now. **Because learning is socially constructed Bakersfield College is creating a coalition of organizations and individuals that will be hosting a statewide conversation about Pillar 4: Ensuring Learning this fall semester.** We have a commitment from Natasha Jankowski, Executive Director of NILOA, to start the conversation with statewide education leaders via a virtual (online) conference. COVID-19 and the nation's response to George Floyd have made even more urgent [that we have](#) a deeper conversation about what our students really need to learn to be engaged citizens. Possible dates are December 3 or 8. More details to come!



With much warmth and collegiality,

sonya

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[BC Pathways Summit Archive](#)

