

# Information on Career and Academic Pathways (CAPs)

## Introduction

Santa Rosa Junior College is advancing the development of **Career and Academic Pathways (CAPs)** as part of the broader SRJC Forward effort to redesign the student experience. This work responds to a fundamental challenge: many students arrive at SRJC without a clear sense of their academic or career direction and are asked to navigate more than 300 program options with limited structure or guidance.<sup>1</sup>

Students are often overwhelmed by options at the starting line, experiencing exploration as guesswork rather than a supported process. CAPs are designed to address this by providing a **clear, student-centered framework** that organizes programs into meaningful groupings and supports students from entry through completion.

The Academic Senate has already received several updates about the development of CAPs, including recent reports on the student and faculty focus groups.

**This information item is intended to inform the Academic Senate that SRJC Forward is moving through the Institutional Review process by visiting shared governance bodies designated by the President in order to collect additional feedback with the end goal of proposing a vetted and revised recommendation to the President's Cabinet. We will return to the Senate after completing the Institutional Review process.**

Below is a brief narrative summary of where we are currently, along with an opportunity to provide feedback.

## What Career and Academic Pathways Are (and Are Not)

A key principle of this work is clarity about purpose. The six pathways (listed below) serve as the primary navigational 'buckets' that allow students to explore broad interest areas with a collection of majors and certificates that align with their self-reported interests, reducing “choice paralysis” during the onboarding process and leading to a process of exploration shown in the research to be more effective.

### **Career and Academic Pathways are:**

- A **student-facing exploration and navigation tool**
- A way to organize programs for **early exploration and decision-making using Holland Code Theory**
- A **framework used by counseling** to guide students
- A structure embedded in **onboarding, websites, and advising conversations**
- A system that helps students move from **exploration → major → completion**

### **Career and Academic Pathways are not:**

- A reorganization of departments or disciplines

- A change to faculty governance, curriculum, or instruction
- An instructional or administrative restructuring

CAPs are intentionally designed **for student exploration**, not as a restructuring of the academic organization.

## The Problem We Are Solving

The CAPs model is grounded in a clear problem statement:

- Students are required to make early decisions (e.g., selecting a major for financial aid) without sufficient support
- The college presents too many disconnected options without a guiding structure
- Exploration is often unstructured, delayed, or siloed<sup>2</sup>

The result is **decision paralysis, unintended unit accumulation, and delayed completion**. CAPs aim to “flip the script” by creating **clarity, connection, and confidence early on**.

## Design Approach: Inquiry, Research, and Student Voice

The development of CAPs reflects a **rigorous three-part inquiry process**:

1. **Our College**
  - a. Analysis of student data
  - b. Faculty insight and discipline review
  - c. Internal inventories and program mapping of what already exists
2. **Peer Colleges**
  - a. Benchmarking models and structures
  - b. Identification of effective practices from early adopters of Guided Pathways
3. **Research Literature**
  - a. National research on student success and equity
  - b. Evidence from Guided Pathways implementation
  - c. Best practices gleaned from the FYE Conference
4. **Student and Faculty Focus Groups administered by IERP**

A key insight from this work is that **the goal is not quantity—it is clarity**. Research and benchmarking suggest that **six to seven pathways** provide the strongest balance between broad access and navigability.

## Framework: Holland Theory and Student-Centered Design

SRJC selected a **scientifically validated, student-centered framework** to organize programs: the **Holland (RIASEC) Theory of career interests**.<sup>3</sup>

This framework:

- Groups programs based on **student interests and motivations**, not institutional structures

- Is widely used in career development and higher education
- Has been successfully implemented at other institutions
- Creates a simplified experience that students can utilize themselves, OR in collaboration with counselors. The tool will be easily accessible (visible), easy to navigate, and student friendly

Importantly, CAPs use Holland Theory to **classify majors and certificates—not departments or disciplines. Academic Counselors and Career Counselors coded our majors and certificates.**

## Design Criteria

The CAPs model was developed using a clear set of criteria:

- Creation of **distinct, meaningful areas of interest**
- A **right-sized number of pathways**
- Integration of **research and peer models**
- Inclusion of **student voice throughout the process**
- Use of **clear, student-friendly naming**
- Consideration of **all sites and modalities**
- Intentional support for **undecided/exploring students**
- Development of **guidance tools and onboarding supports**
- **Collaborative development** across campus stakeholder

## Student Voice and Counseling Leadership

Students and counselors played a central role in shaping the design as follows:

### Student Input (Focus Groups)

Key takeaways included:

- Preference for **simple, intuitive naming** (e.g., two-noun structure)
- Desire for a **clear, visually navigable web experience**
- Need for transparency in how programs are grouped

### Counseling Leadership

The Counseling Department contributed expertise in:

- Major and career exploration
- Student decision-making processes
- Onboarding and advising design

Their involvement included:

- Department-wide review
- Subgroup formed to code all SRJC's majors and certificate using Holland Code Theory
- Consideration of onboarding implementation
- Formal endorsement of the proposal from SRJC Forward

## Why use the name of “Career and Academic Pathways (CAPs)”

The naming of CAPs reflects intentional design choices:

- Emphasizes **belonging and connection to a pathway**
- Encourages **exploration before specialization**
- Integrates **career and transfer pathways** (not career vs. transfer)
- Organizes the college around **students, not departments**
- Signals **institutional responsibility for guidance and support**
- Provides a **clear, structured route from entry to completion**
- **Student representatives on our workgroup advocated for it**

## Intended Outcomes

CAPs are designed to improve both student experience and outcomes:

- Students **choose majors earlier and with greater confidence**
- Reduced unnecessary switching and resulting additional units
- More targeted and effective **support services**
- Earlier and more meaningful **career and academic conversations**
- Improved tools and data for **counseling and advising**

## The Six Career and Academic Pathways (CAPs)

To provide students with a method of guided exploration, SRJC majors and certificates will be organized into six thematic pathways. Each CAP is defined by a common set of interests, skills, and career areas:

Pathway	Focus & Description
<b>Tools &amp; Trades</b>	Programs that involve hands-on, practical work with tools, machines, or physical systems, often in fields like construction, engineering, or technical trades.
<b>Research &amp; Discovery</b>	Programs focused on analyzing information, solving complex problems, and studying science, math, or research-based topics.
<b>Vision &amp; Expression</b>	Programs centered on creativity, self-expression, and producing original work in areas like design, writing, music, or the arts.
<b>Connection &amp; Care</b>	Programs that involve helping, teaching, counseling, or supporting others through interpersonal and service-oriented work.
<b>Leadership &amp; Innovation</b>	Programs focused on leadership, persuasion, business, and influencing others in areas like management, marketing, and entrepreneurship.
<b>Systems &amp; Solutions</b>	Programs focused on organized, detail-oriented work involving data, records, numbers, and administrative systems

## **Engagement, Feedback, and Next Steps**

This work has included broad communication across the college, including:

- PDA sessions
- Counseling Department
- Academic Senate
- Student Government
- Classified Senate
- Cabinet

Institutional review spaces are being asked to provide input on:

- What is most compelling about this model
- Key concerns or risks
- What would make CAPs most effective for students and staff
- Folks can [submit feedback on the Institutional Review Process Feedback Form](#)