

CSU Student Success Network

Middle Leadership Academy Primer

The California State University (CSU) plays a critical role in shaping California's workforce, economy, and civic future. Given the scale of its impact, the CSU is committed to becoming a national model for student success. The CSU Student Success Framework provides a unified, systemwide approach to improving opportunity outcome gaps, strengthening career readiness, and advancing social mobility for all students.

The CSU advances **student success** by:

- Providing personalized and collective experiences within supportive communities that promote flexible, inclusive, and impactful learning.
- Equipping students with the knowledge, skills, and experiences needed for academic excellence, career success, and economic mobility.
- Developing clear curricular and co-curricular pathways that support timely graduation and prepare students to excel in their careers and further study.
- Fostering lifelong relationships with students and graduates through meaningful connections to their university, alumni, and communities.

Resource: [California State University, Student Success](#)

CSU Student Success Strategy and Framework

The **New CSU Student Experience** defines what students will tangibly experience as a result of the CSU Student Success Framework, outlining the key milestones of the student journey that will be transformed through systemwide action. The New CSU Student Experience includes the following commitments:

- Every student can **afford the total cost of a CSU degree**.
- Every student has **clear curricular and co-curricular pathways** aligned with academic and career goals.
- Every student experiences **an inclusive, accessible, and intentional** teaching and learning environment.
- Every student benefits from a **digitally enhanced, personalized, and streamlined experience** that supports timely degree completion.
- Every student **gains real-world skills** and builds **professional networks** through internships and experiential learning.

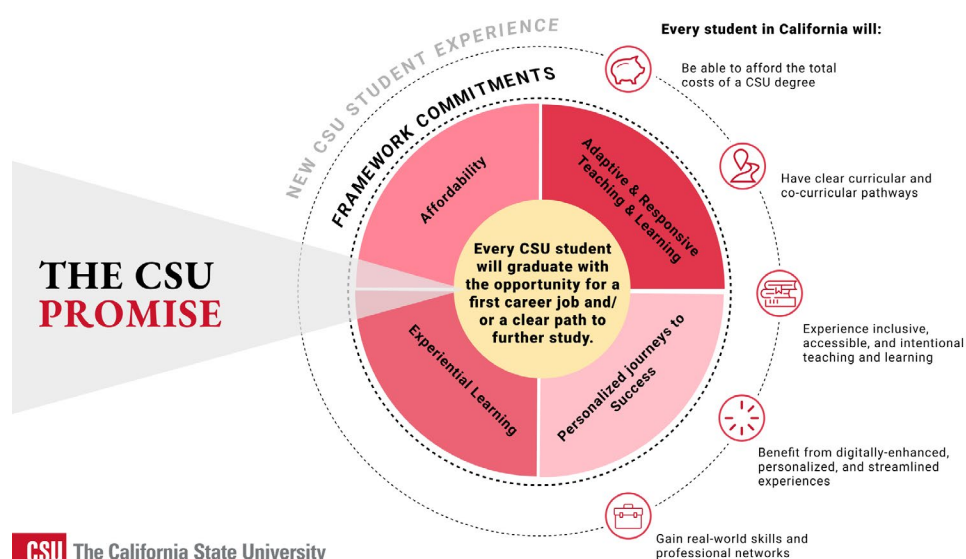
Together, these student experiences represent the CSU's strategies for fulfilling its commitments and advancing the CSU Promise. They translate high-level goals into

tangible outcomes for students and are supported by coordinated systemwide actions designed to drive equitable, on-the-ground implementation across all CSU campuses.

The Framework in Action

With the COVID-19 pandemic and inequitable impacts across communities of color and moderate-income families, the CSU seeks to urgently close the gaps that exist between underserved students and their peers across the system. Therefore, in addition to the initial goals of GI 2025, the CSU has identified [five equity goals and priorities](#) to address the gap.

- **Cost of Attendance:** Reduce financial barriers to degree completion by expanding access to financial aid, affordable housing, transportation, and basic needs resources so students can persist and graduate in a timely manner.
- **Advising and Pathways:** Provide clear curricular and co-curricular pathways through coordinated academic, career, and student support services that help students connect academic choices to career goals and navigate their degree efficiently.
- **Teaching and Learning:** Foster inclusive, accessible, and intentional learning environments that promote student agency, meaningful faculty-student engagement, critical thinking, and responsible use of emerging technologies to support academic and career success.
- **Streamlined Experience:** Create a digitally enhanced, personalized, and integrated student experience that simplifies degree planning, improves access to academic and well-being resources, reduces bureaucratic barriers, and supports timely degree completion.
- **Skills and Networks:** Expand access to internships, experiential learning, and alumni connections that build career-ready skills, strengthen professional networks, and support students' transitions into the workforce and further education.





The CSU Student Success Network (Network)

In support of the various student success efforts at every level within the CSU, the CSU Student Success Network (Network) serves as a complement to the many ongoing efforts, offering forums for sustained, cross-campus, cross-role, evidence-based, professional learning opportunities. Additionally, the Network strives to support meaningful connections across and within campuses that help bridge professional roles and responsibilities.

The Network, under the support and direction of its Advisory Board and the [Education Insights Center \(EdInsights\)](#), provides oversight and direction for all Network activities and program strands for Applied Research, Convenings, Student Success Conference, Middle Leadership Academy, and the Equity in Action Grant Program.

The Network's mission is to support faculty, staff, and administrators as they embrace their power to imagine, plan for, and implement systems and practices that center equitable student learning, engagement, progression, and completion. This is accomplished through the Networks efforts at **prioritizing equity** and **supporting middle leaders**.


The Network defines **middle leaders** as colleagues in educational settings that are central to change management. Middle leaders serve as key stakeholders for change, who are or have the potential to be well-informed about and engaged in the change process; and can encourage colleagues to join efforts to improve equitable student learning and success.

In the CSU, these middle leader positions can include faculty, department chairs, deans and associate/assistant deans, directors and associate/assistant directors, student services staff, and institutional researchers, among others.

Resource: [CSU Student Success Network](#)

Middle Leadership Academy (Academy)

The Academy is an academic year long professional development opportunity that creates space for evidence-based, collaborative learning, and leadership development. While in the past the Academy has asked teams to come in with a project that they would like to pursue, we are shifting our approach for the foreseeable future. We still will support campus-based teams consisting of CSU students, staff, faculty, researchers, and administrators in a collaborative and supportive environment to work on common equity issues related to student learning, engagement, progression, and completion for new majority students. We are asking teams to identify challenges the institution is having meeting the needs of new majority students and to use the time in the Academy to explore possible solutions/approaches and to develop a project that will leverage different members of the campus community and develop



their leadership skills. The Academy serves to motivate participants to “lead from the middle” as they explore and apply new strategies that focus on closing equity gaps.

Academy Core Values

- Equity
- Knowledge
- Assessment
- Relationships
- Leadership

This program offers a professional development opportunity that was created by middle leaders, for middle leaders. The Academy’s core values and pedagogical approach guide our learning outcomes and objectives.

The Academy’s pedagogical approach to participant learning, engagement, and development is grounded in **Problem-based Learning (PBL)**. Problem-based learning uses a participant-centered approach where participants learn skills, practices, and strategies for working in groups to problem solve divisional, campus, or system-based problems. The Academy utilizes a problem-based learning project that involves participants pitching ideas and creating a plan to solve a common equity issue.

Overall, the Middle **Leadership** Academy is a program developed by leaders for leaders acquiring the **knowledge** to operationalize and **assess** change for the advancement of **equity** through campus **engagement** efforts and collaborative **relationships**.

Resources: [CSU Student Success Network](#), [Middle Leadership Academy](#) and [National Library of Medicine](#)



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