



May 2024

Turning Intention to Action

DESIGN MEMO

PARTNERSHIP

The Turning Intention to Action project is a collaboration between the Center for Applied Behavioral Science at MDRC, the Washington Student Achievement Council, and Central Washington University.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

04

**Project
Background**

06

**Understanding
the Problem**

10

**Barriers to
Enrollment +
Solutions**

37

**Implementation
Planning**

42

References

44

**Acknowledge-
ments**

46

Appendix

Project Background



PROJECT BACKGROUND

The Turning Intention to Action project at Central Washington University (CWU) is a collaboration between Center for Applied Behavioral Science (CABS) and the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC), aimed at tackling a pervasive challenge within the state's higher education system: the discrepancy between college aspiration and actual enrollment. In the state of Washington, there are a significant number of potential collegegoers who, despite being interested in pursuing higher education and having been admitted to college, ultimately do not enroll. Furthermore, a large subset of those who do enroll find themselves withdrawing from their courses shortly thereafter.

Achieving higher education offers a pathway to stable employment and economic mobility; as such, college education is a critical pathway to financial stability, especially for underrepresented students such as

first-generation students, students of color, and students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Despite this, a range of structural and behavioral barriers prevent many potential collegegoers from realizing their educational goals.

A 2022 survey conducted by Washington STEM¹ found that 88 percent of high school students aspire to pursue some type of postsecondary education in the form of a 2- or 4-year degree, apprenticeship, or certificate opportunity. However, only 50 percent of Washington's Class of 2021 transitioned into a 2-year or 4-year institution within one year of graduating high school,² which is a much lower rate than the national average. In recognition of these trends, the Washington state government is actively developing strategies to support student enrollment and retention, highlighting the need for innovative solutions to motivate students to both enroll in and persist in college.

The Turning Intention to Action project was developed by WSAC to serve this vision by using CABS' approach to problem solving, which leverages behavioral science and human-centered design, to design interventions that may help students overcome the hurdles to college enrollment, with considerations around persistence. The project seeks to help bridge the gap between individuals' expressed desire to attend college and their actual enrollment behavior—often referred to as the intention-action gap—by delving deeper into the underlying factors that contribute to this discrepancy. By gaining insights into the causes of students' enrollment behavior, **Turning Intention to Action aims to provide CWU (also known as “Central”) and other institutions across Washington with potential strategies to encourage prospective students to follow through on their goal of college attendance.**

Understanding the Problem



About 15% of recent high school graduates who were admitted to Central Washington University are not enrolling at any college or university.

For the project, and in our problem statement, we interpret the act of applying to college as an indication of the applicant's intention to attend.

There are two critical points where applicants drop off before enrolling at Central:

- **Post-Admission Enrollment Rates:** Among recent high school graduates admitted to Central, 27% actually enrolled at Central, 58% enrolled at another college or university, and 15% did not enroll at any higher education institution.
- **Post-Acceptance Enrollment Rates:** Among those who formally accept their admission to Central, 75% enrolled at Central, 17% enrolled at another college or university, and 8% did not enroll at any higher education institution.

These data reveal opportunities for Central to improve its enrollment rates, both among admitted applicants and admitted applicants who have accepted a seat at the institution. The Turning Intention to Action project focuses on developing solutions that encourage applicants who do not follow through on their intention to enroll in college to complete their enrollment at Central. This includes both applicants who are admitted to and those who have accepted a seat at Central.

HS Graduates Who Were Admitted to Central

27% Enrolled at Central

58% Enrolled at another college or university

15% Did not enroll at any college or university

CLARIFYING THE CONTEXT

In Phase 1 of the project, WSAC analyzed de-identified records from over 100,000 students who applied to Central from 2004 to 2022. Using a wide range of data including college applications, FAFSA applications, high school transcripts, and information about where the students live, the analysis looked at whether students enrolled at any college—or specifically at Central—during their first fall term and if they continued at Central in subsequent terms. The findings from this analysis were used to identify hypothesized behavioral barriers to enrollment.

Adding to this work, in Phase 2 of the project, the CABS team at MDRC team collected qualitative data including mapping out Central’s student enrollment process (see Figure 1), analyzing student-facing materials—including standard communications and the university's public website—engaging in discussions with

administrators and staff from the Admissions, Student Engagement and Success, Financial Aid, Advising, and Health & Wellness departments. Additionally, the team conducted interviews with a small subset of current Central students.

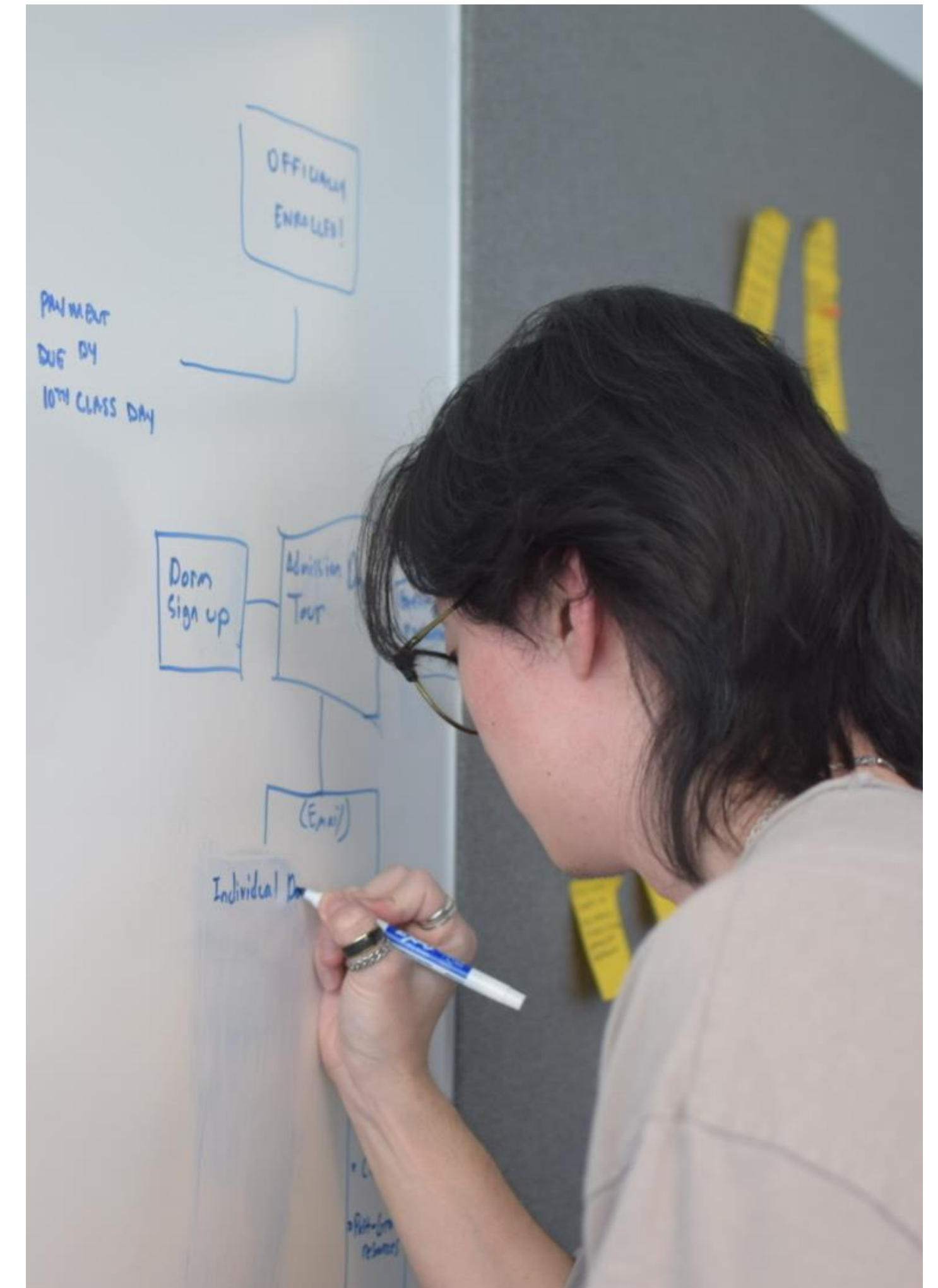
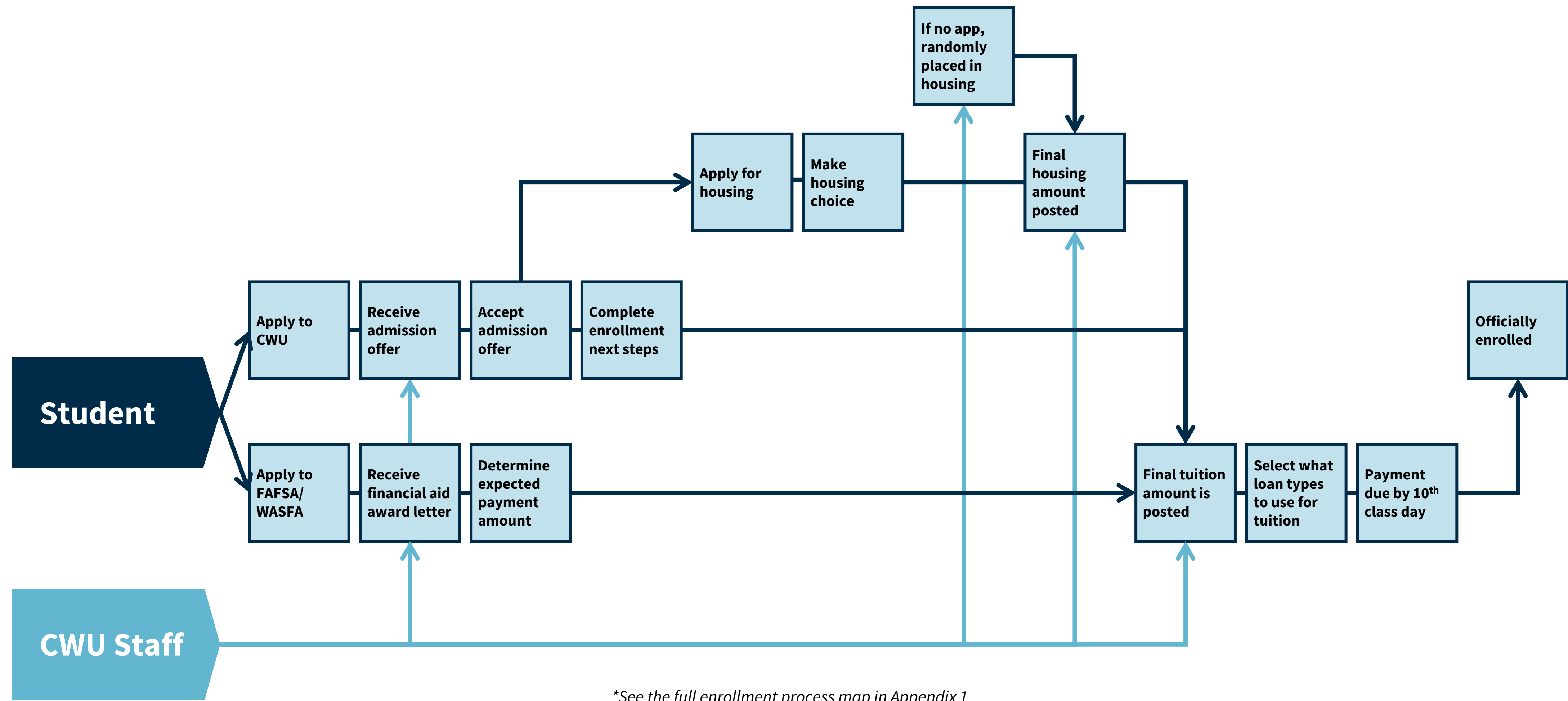
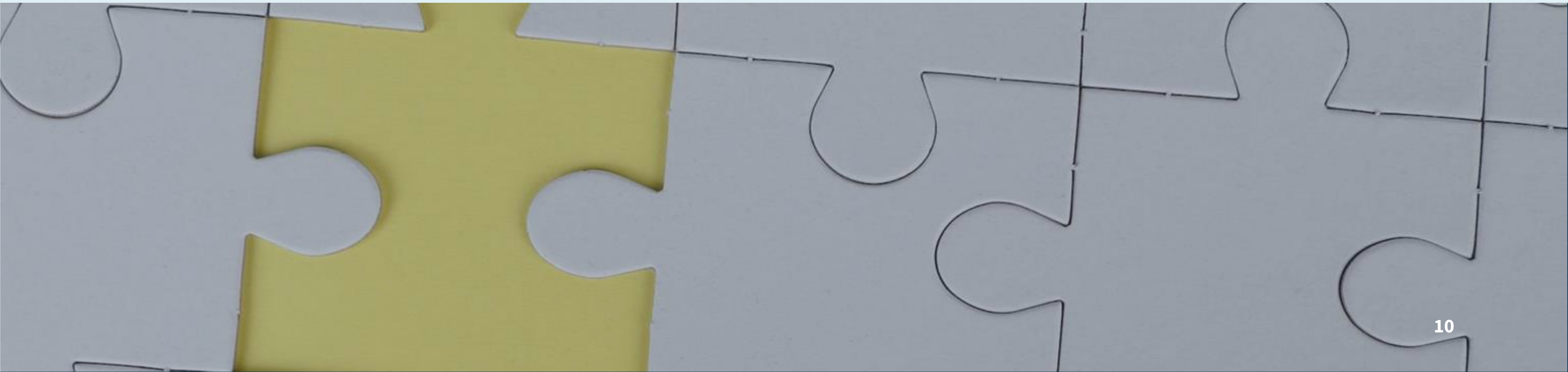


Figure 1. Simplified Map of Student Enrollment Process at Central*



Potential Barriers to Enrollment + Preliminary Design Solutions

The team identified several potential barriers to enrollment at Central through data gathering and analysis conducted during both phases of the project. The CABS team organized a design sprint to delve into the project's qualitative findings and generate design ideas targeting these barriers. Below are details on each of the barriers; for each, there is a short list of the team's favorite ideas, including explanations that clarify their goals and highlight some of the behavioral science concepts being applied.



Barrier #1: Financial Aid



Financial aid complexity and unclear communication about aid options pose significant barriers to college enrollment. Confusing terminology in award letters can make it difficult for students to understand and access the financial support they need, potentially deterring them from pursuing higher education.

BARRIERS TO ENROLLMENT: FINANCIAL AID

Financial aid stands as a significant barrier to student enrollment. A 2023 poll conducted by Lumina Foundation and Gallup found that for adults who never enrolled in college or stopped out before they could earn their degree or credential, the cost of a degree or credential was the top reason why they weren't enrolled.³ Central staff perspectives reinforced these findings, as they suggested that cost and how to pay for college was the number one concern for students. Though Central's tuition costs are lower than some 4-year institutions in the state of Washington, staff insights revealed that other institutions may offer more substantial gift aid and merit awards, potentially diminishing the appeal of Central's lower tuition costs.

Complicating matters further, communication to prospective students regarding financial aid packages is often muddled. Award letters use confusing terminology, with aid types like loans and grants described using ambiguous terms such as "self-help" and "awards" as opposed to

more common terms like "loans" and "grants," respectively. This complexity may make it challenging for students to accurately assess their financial aid offers, leading to potential misunderstandings about the actual costs of their education, the amount of debt they might accumulate, and the repayment terms. This could lead to misunderstandings about their long-term financial commitments.

In addition to these challenges, the availability of financial support from federally funded programs such as the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) is limited by specific capacity and eligibility requirements. CAMP is designed to help students from migrant and seasonal farmworker backgrounds pursue higher education. This program particularly supports Hispanic or Latinx communities, assisting students in navigating the complex and competitive world of financial aid. However, because these programs are not broadly available, only a limited number of students can benefit from their services.

BARRIERS TO ENROLLMENT: FINANCIAL AID



It is important to note that the recent passage of House Bill 2214 in Washington State in February 2024 introduces a major development in addressing financial aid barriers for students admitted to colleges like Central. This new legislation will allow beneficiaries of public assistance programs to automatically qualify as income-eligible for receiving the Washington College Grant, which covers tuition and fees at public colleges and universities in Washington State. This legislative move is particularly significant for addressing enrollment barriers at Central related to financial aid. By eliminating the requirement for income-eligible students to fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), the overarching enrollment process becomes less daunting. More importantly, it opens the door to free college for those students, directly addressing financial constraints that might prevent admitted students from enrolling. This change could dramatically simplify the financial aid

landscape for prospective Central students who receive public benefits, making higher education more accessible and reducing the financial burden associated with college enrollment.

RELEVANT BEHAVIORAL CONCEPTS

- **Ambiguity Aversion:** Students may avoid making decisions about enrolling in college due to the unclear information regarding financial aid.
- **Status Quo Bias:** Due to the complexity and perceived hassle of navigating financial aid, students may choose to maintain their current situation (not enrolling in college) rather than undertaking the burden of deciphering financial aid packages.

Design Ideas for Barrier #1: Financial Aid



Simplify Communication. Revise financial aid communications to use clear, non-technical language. Standardize terminology across all materials to reduce confusion, ensuring terms like "loans" and "grants" are consistently used instead of potentially ambiguous labels.

Peer Mentorship Programs. Establish a mentorship program involving current students or recent alumni who can guide new students through the financial aid process. Mentors can share their experiences and provide practical advice.

Proactive Outreach. Implement an outreach program where financial aid officers proactively contact prospective and admitted students to explain their financial aid packages in detail. This could include personalized webinars or one-on-one meetings.

Key Behavioral Concepts Used:

- Simplification: By simplifying language and standardizing terminology, we can reduce the cognitive load on students, making information easier to process and understand.

Key Behavioral Concepts Used:

- Social influence: Peer mentorship utilizes social proof, encouraging students to adopt behaviors demonstrated by their peers.

Key Behavioral Concepts Used:

- Reciprocity: When students receive personalized attention and support, they may feel a greater sense of positivity and dedication to the institution, potentially increasing their engagement in the enrollment process.



Regular Feedback Collection. Implement a system to regularly collect and analyze feedback from students regarding their experiences with the financial aid process. Focus on identifying the aspects students find most challenging and pinpointing where intention-action gaps occur—differences between students' intentions and their actual behaviors. Use this data to continuously enhance services and support, whether by developing new tools or modifying existing resources.

Key Behavioral Concepts Used:

- Feedback loop: By collecting and responding to feedback, a loop is established, allowing for continuous adjustments to communications and services based on student experiences.
- Intention-action gap analysis: Analyzing the reasons behind intention-action gaps helps in designing effective interventions that align students' intentions with their actual behaviors.

Barrier #2: Housing

Mandatory on-campus housing and dining plan requirements pose significant financial burdens for students. The added complexities of selecting housing and uncertain final costs, combined with a competitive housing assignment process, create a challenging and potentially discouraging enrollment experience for many students.

Most 4-year institutions in Washington require all first-year students under the age of 20 years old who live more than 50 miles from campus to live in a on-campus residence hall during their first academic year.⁴ Along with on-campus living, students are required to purchase a dining plan. The combined expenses for these requirements can range from approximately \$13,700 to \$18,800 for an academic year (as of 2023), depending on the selected room and meal plan. For many, the total cost of housing and meals exceeds tuition. This considerable expense presents a significant barrier to enrollment for many.

Furthermore, the process of selecting housing adds another layer of complexity. The financial aid award letter and CWU website provide only estimated costs, with final figures becoming clear only after students finalize their housing choices. These final costs are posted on students' MYCWU accounts shortly before the quarter begins, contributing to financial uncertainty. Housing is assigned on a

BARRIERS TO ENROLLMENT: HOUSING

first-come, first-served basis, and the more desirable facilities, which may include amenities like air conditioning and elevators, tend to fill up quickly. Due to these high costs and the complexities involved, some admitted students may opt against attending Central or any college.

RELEVANT BEHAVIORAL CONCEPTS

- **Hassle Factors:** Faced with complex and costly decisions regarding on-campus housing, students may prefer to stick to their current living situations, avoiding the administrative hassle and financial burden figuring out where to live and how to pay for it.
- **Choice Overload:** The variety of housing options and meal plans, each with different costs and benefits, can overwhelm students, making it difficult for them to choose optimally or even make a decision at all.

Design Ideas for Barrier #2: Housing

Increase Communication Around Benefits of On-Campus Housing. Using emails, text messages, and other modes of communication, communicate to admitted students the benefits of on-campus living, such as proximity to classes, built-in social networks, and security, to counterbalance the perception of high costs. Utilize testimonials, information sheets, and virtual tours to highlight these advantages.

Key Behavioral Concepts Used:

- Framing: Present on-campus living positively by emphasizing benefits like proximity to classes and built-in social networks.
- Social influence: Using testimonials from peers leverages social influence by showing that a choice is supported by other students.
- Salience: Making the benefits of on-campus living more salient through regular communications can make these advantages top of mind when students are making housing decisions.



Enhanced Communication about Local Advantages. Because local students do not need to live in on-campus housing, it may be beneficial to enroll more of this subgroup of students. Create marketing campaigns that specifically highlight the benefits of attending college close to home, such as lower living costs, the ability to stay close to family, and the convenience of familiar surroundings. Share success stories of local alumni through various media to showcase the opportunities and outcomes of attending Central.

Key Behavioral Concepts Used:

- Framing: By presenting the advantages of staying local for college, Central can shift perceptions of prospective students and influence their decision-making.

Local Student Scholarships and Incentives. Offer scholarships or financial incentives specifically tailored to students living within 50 miles of the campus. These could be marketed as "Community Scholar Awards" to emphasize the value the university places on local students.

Key Behavioral Concepts Used:

- Incentives: Offering financial rewards specifically targeted to local applicants may make attending Central more appealing to prospective local students.
- Social identity: Branding these incentives as "Community Scholar Awards" taps into local students' social identity, fostering a sense of belonging and pride, and emphasizing their unique value to the Central community.



Simplified Housing Selection Process.

Streamline the housing selection process by reducing the number of choices presented. Offer a guided decision-making tool that recommends housing options based on the student's preferences and financial constraints. Students can respond to prompts about their preferences and priorities around cost, living with others, proximity to campus, and amenities. This approach is particularly beneficial for first-generation students and their families who may be navigating the housing selection process for the first time and might not be aware of all necessary considerations.



This design idea was further developed by Central staff!

See details on the following pages.

Key Behavioral Concepts Used:

- Choice architecture: Structuring the decision-making environment in a way that helps students make choices. Reducing the number of options presented initially can also help manage any “choice overload” experienced by students.
- Defaults: The decision tool could have defaults set such as more affordable housing options or options closer to the institution. This could nudge students towards decisions that align with their financial and educational needs.



Simplified Housing Selection Process | Insights from Central staff

Key Questions:

- Would you prefer to have a roommate or live alone?
- Do you prefer a bathroom in the room or in the hall?
- How important is meal size in selecting a dining plan?
- Would you like to live with others from a similar group (e.g., student athletes)?
- How far are you willing to walk to classes and the dining hall?
- How close do you want to be to downtown?
- Will you have a car on campus?
- Do you prefer a same-gender or co-ed living arrangement?
- Do you need access to cooking spaces or other specific services?
- Which amenities are important to you (e.g., AC, elevator)?

Key features:

- Model the tool on [Tesla's "help me choose" tool](#) feature.
- Include virtual tours similar to those on [Apartments.com](#) to give a realistic view of housing options
- After students respond to the questions, provide a list of hall options categorized by price range:
 - The lowest-cost option that meets most of your preferences includes features A, B, and C.
 - A moderate-cost option that meets most of your preferences includes features D, E, and F.
 - The highest-cost option that satisfies all your preferences includes features X, Y, and Z

Additional considerations:

- At the end of the survey, prompt students to apply for financial aid scholarships if they express concerns about costs.
- Implement single sign-on for the housing platform to streamline access.

Challenges:

- Ensure transparency so students fully understand the options and their implications.
- Improve user friendliness of the housing portal, which currently lacks single sign-on with the admissions portal, leading to issues with password management and navigation.
- Address the issue that photos online may not accurately represent the residence halls, which can make decision-making difficult without an in-person visit.



Simplified Housing Selection Process | Insights from Central staff

Outcomes of Interest:

- Housing Selection Timing: Track changes in when students make their housing selections to assess the tool's impact on decision-making timelines.
- Local Student On-Campus Living: Monitor the rate at which local students choose to live on campus after the introduction of the tool.

Implementation Considerations:

- Vendor Requirements: Assess whether the development of the tool requires collaboration with an outside vendor.
- Platform Integration: Decide whether the tool should be integrated directly into the Housing platform or featured on the CWU website like a shopping tool or a BuzzFeed quiz.
- Language Accessibility: Ensure a Spanish translation of the tool is available to accommodate Spanish-speaking students and their families.
- Application Process Link: Embed a direct link to the tool in the email sent to students with their application next steps and housing information.

Barrier #3: CWU Email Accounts



Many admitted students do not often check their official school email accounts. At the same time, departments do not consistently reach out through personal emails and sometimes face limits on sharing sensitive details this way. This situation makes it challenging to smoothly guide students through the enrollment process.

Upon admission, Central assigns prospective students CWU email accounts for official communications. However, these accounts are often underutilized because students may not regularly check or engage with them. To address this, some Central departments sometimes send reminders to students' personal email addresses until orientation, through this practice varies across departments. Moreover, the type of information that can be shared with personal emails is limited due to privacy concerns, necessitating that students check their school emails for critical details. This process is further complicated by the frequent clutter of spam in school email accounts, which discourages students from using their CWU email accounts.

Prospective students also face challenges managing communications across different email platforms. During their high school years, students may receive communications from

Central to their school-provided email, which typically becomes inaccessible after graduation. This leads to a confusing transition where communications shift from their high school email to a personal email, and finally to their official CWU school email.

Some students have expressed a preference for communication via personal email or text messages, citing unfamiliarity with using Outlook, which they often didn't use in high school. Although many are accustomed to checking emails on their phones, they are not familiar with, or do not have, the Outlook app installed.

RELEVANT BEHAVIORAL CONCEPTS

- **Status Quo Bias/Hassle Factors:** Students might prefer to continue using their personal email accounts because they are familiar and view switching to an official school email as an unnecessary or burdensome change.

Design Ideas for Barrier #3: CWU Email Accounts

Unified Email Integration. Implement a system that allows important emails sent to the CWU email account to be automatically forwarded to a student's personal email account. This system should also notify students when they need to check their CWU email for sensitive information.

Key Behavioral Concepts Used:

- Reduce hassle factors: Automatically forwarding key emails to personal accounts simplifies communication by reducing the need for students to frequently check an unfamiliar email system.
- Reminders: Consistently notifying students to check their CWU email for sensitive information prompts necessary action without being intrusive.

Engagement Incentives. Introduce incentives for students to check their CWU email regularly, such as entering them into a monthly draw for bookstore vouchers or other rewards.

Key Behavioral Concepts Used:

- Incentives: Incentives like bookstore vouchers encourage students to check their CWU email regularly through positive reinforcement, potentially altering their perception of the CWU email from a chore to a beneficial activity.

Consistent Communication Policies.

Standardize communication practices across all departments to ensure that initial reminders and critical information are sent to both personal and school emails until the student is enrolled.

Barrier #4: Language Accessibility



Communications related to enrollment, including financial aid information, are not consistently translated into Spanish. This lack of translation can limit effective communication with Spanish-speaking prospective students and their families, hindering their access to crucial information necessary for making informed decisions. Consequently, this may result in fewer enrollments from students with Spanish-speaking backgrounds.

CWU staff noted that the translation of admissions and enrollment materials into Spanish has been slow and often completed on an ad hoc basis. This inconsistent approach can impede communication with prospective students and their parents who rely on materials in their native or preferred language. For example, a first-generation student reported that they did not receive any translated communications from Central during the enrollment process. The student highlighted the benefit of having financial aid details available in Spanish, which would have allowed their parents to better assist with the process. Fortunately, the student was able to access information in Spanish through their participation in the CAMP program, which assists students from migrant and seasonal farmworker backgrounds. The student's participation in the program included one-on-one mentoring tailored to their academic, career and personal needs, as well as opportunities to

develop personal and professional skills. CAMP administrators provided crucial enrollment information in both languages for the student and their parents—primarily through virtual Zoom meetings—which the student found incredibly helpful. The student emphasized that without CAMP's support, completing the enrollment process might have been challenging.

The reliance on single-language materials not only obstructs access to vital information about financing education but may hamper engagement and informed decision-making. Furthermore, data analysis from WSAC's Phase I efforts indicates that while Hispanic students are less likely to enroll at CWU, those who do are more likely to continue into their second year than other racial/ethnic groups. This trend suggests a supportive environment for Hispanic students at CWU, but this advantage may not be effectively communicated to prospective students, impacting their enrollment decisions.



RELEVANT BEHAVIORAL CONCEPTS

- **Scarcity:** Resource and time constraints might lead staff to settle for "good enough" solutions, such as ad hoc translations or incomplete communication strategies. This approach often results from the limited availability of personnel or budget dedicated to comprehensive translation services.
- **Salience Bias:** The urgency and importance of translating documents might be underestimated because the immediate need for them isn't always visible. Although many Spanish-speaking families still enroll at Central, this might obscure the critical impact that more accessible translations could have on improving enrollment rates and student support.

Design Ideas for Barrier #4: Language Accessibility

Standardize Translation Processes.

Establish a standardized process for translating all critical enrollment and financial aid documents into Spanish. This process should include a checklist of essential documents that need to be available in Spanish from the recruitment phase through to enrollment. Standardizing translations can help Central attract Hispanic students by demonstrating that it is an accessible and culturally competent environment.

Key Behavioral Concepts Used:

- Belonging: Providing documents in Spanish signals to potential Hispanic students that Central is an inclusive and culturally aware environment.

Utilize Technology to Scale Translations.

Implement technological solutions, such as automatic translation tools on the CWU website and other digital platforms, to ensure immediate access to translated materials. Consider using artificial intelligence for initial translations, with staff reviewing for accuracy, rather than translating from scratch themselves.

Key Behavioral Concepts Used:

- Scalability through technology: Using technology to manage translations can efficiently extend Central's capacity to serve diverse populations without significantly increasing resources or costs.

Develop Bilingual Outreach Programs.

Create outreach initiatives specifically designed for Spanish-speaking families. These programs could include information sessions, webinars, and workshops, all conducted in Spanish, and covering essential topics such as financial aid, campus life, and academic support.

Partner with Community Organizations.

Collaborate with local community organizations serving Spanish-speaking communities to distribute information about Central. This partnership can enhance Central's recruitment of Hispanic students by showcasing its commitment to being an accessible and culturally competent environment. Additionally, providing materials through these organizations can help potential students navigate the enrollment process more effectively.



**This design idea was further
developed by Central staff!**

See details on the following pages.

Partner with Community Organizations | Insights from Central staff

Outcomes of Interest:

- Engagement Metrics: Track the number of Latino/Spanish-speaking CBOs Central is partnering with and the number of events hosted with these organizations.
- Applicant Feedback: Gather data on how applicants learned about or were encouraged to apply to Central, using this as a measure of the quality and accessibility of engagement with CBOs, especially for families that speak Spanish.

Implementation Considerations

- Expand CBO Knowledge: Identify current connections with CBOs, including potential links through alumni and current students.
- Develop Introductory Materials: Create "starter packs" or introductory materials to foster relationships with CBOs, ensuring content is authentic and tailored to community needs.
- Feedback System: Establish an open-ended survey system to collect feedback during the implementation phase.
- Integration with Slate: Consider adding CBO engagement tracking to the Slate platform.
- Summer Implementation: Leverage the summer months when schools are out but CBOs are active for implementations and engagements.
- Tracking Student Pathways: Implement a method to track if students enroll at CWU through CBO referrals.

Additional considerations:

- Financial Aid Prompts: At the end of surveys, prompt students to apply for financial aid scholarships.
- Single Sign-On for Housing: Work towards implementing a single sign-on for the housing platform to streamline access.

Challenges:

- Transparency: Ensure all processes are transparent so students and families fully understand what is happening.
- Accurate Online Visuals: Improve the quality of online photos of residence halls to aid in decision-making.

Barrier #5: Fragmented Communication



Some students who have questions during the enrollment process encounter significant delays or lack of responses when transferred between departments. This can lead to a confusing and disjointed experience, possibly discouraging them from completing their enrollment.

During the enrollment process, students often reach out with questions to various departments such as Admissions, Housing, Financial Aid, and Advising. If the initially contacted department is unable to answer a student's question, students are redirected to the department best equipped to provide the necessary assistance. However, feedback from CWU staff indicates that the transition of students between these departments can be challenging, with some departments failing to respond quickly—or even at all—to student inquiries. This situation leads to a disjointed experience, where students may feel neglected or discouraged due to the absence of a cohesive, student-focused approach across the institution. Consequently, some students—particularly those who are not already highly motivated and may need extra encouragement to navigate these processes—could become disheartened and give up on further pursuing their enrollment.

RELEVANT BEHAVIORAL CONCEPTS

- **Silos Mentality:** Departments may operate independently with insufficient inter-departmental communication, leading to fragmented processes and inadequate student support.
- **Loss/Risk Aversion:** Staff may hesitate to provide information unless absolutely certain of its accuracy, fearing the consequences of giving students incorrect advice. This can cause delays, as staff may prefer passing inquiries to other departments over offering immediate assistance.

Design Ideas for Barrier #5: Fragmented Communication

Establish a Centralized Communication

Hub. Create a single point of contact for all enrollment-related questions. This could be an online platform where students can get all their questions addressed without being passed between departments. A search function should be available where students could ask specific questions and receive answers or be routed to the right department or staff person.

Key Behavioral Concepts Used:

- Simplification: By creating a single point of contact, this solution significantly reduces the cognitive load on students, who no longer need to figure out which department to contact. This centralization simplifies the information-seeking process.

Track and Analyze Student Questions.

To reduce dependency on departmental interactions, track and analyze the questions students frequently ask through calls and emails. Log and categorize questions to help identify trends and common concerns and use that to enable Central to create targeted informational materials like comprehensive FAQs, step-by-step guides, or video tutorials.

Key Behavioral Concepts Used:

- Diagnosis & design process: Tracking and analyzing questions allows student inquiries to inform the creation of resources like FAQs and guides. This responsive approach aligns with the behavioral diagnosis and design process and helps adapt systems based on student/user behavior and preferences.

Proactive Communication Campaigns.

Before peak enrollment periods, launch communication campaigns that proactively address frequently asked questions and outline steps of the enrollment process to reduce the number of inquiries.

Key Behavioral Concepts Used:

- Salience: Making important information salient during critical times—rather than too early or too late—ensures that it captures students' attention when they are most likely to need it.

Barrier #6: Website Navigation



The CWU website presents a challenging navigation experience, acting more as an "information dump" without clear guidance on essential processes, placing the onus on students to identify relevant information. The use of complex language in sections like financial aid, coupled with demotivating language regarding financial support, can alienate and discourage students. These challenges may cause the website to fall short of its goal of facilitating the enrollment process at Central.

The CWU website, while initially presenting key sections clearly, may overwhelm students rather than guide them effectively to essential information. It functions more like an "information dump," lacking clear guidance for navigating enrollment. This setup places the onus on students to sift through content, identify what is relevant to them, and figure out how to access it.

Moreover, much of the language used in the financial aid section assumes a high level of familiarity and comprehension, which may alienate students who are attempting to learn how to navigate these processes. The language used on the website is also discouraging at times: "While every student would love to have a financial aid award package full of scholarships and grants, the reality is that most students will have to use at least some loans."

Such language might demotivate students and undermine their trust in CWU as a supportive institution. The overall lack of clear guidance and supportive language on the website can leave students feeling more confused than assisted, potentially impacting their decision to enroll.

RELEVANT BEHAVIORAL CONCEPTS

- **Information Overload:** The website presents students with a lot of information, making it difficult to determine what is relevant or important.
- **Framing:** Demotivating language used on the website might impact students' attitudes towards applying for aid.
- **Ambiguity Aversion:** Without a clear understanding of the enrollment steps, students may hesitate to commit to the process or simply not know what to do next to follow through. Feeling overwhelmed by the intricacies of an undefined process can lead students to disengage completely from the process.

Design Ideas for Barrier #6: Website Navigation

Provide Guided Steps. Implement a clearly delineated enrollment pathway for recent high school graduates on the CWU website. This should involve structuring the key steps in the enrollment process in an efficient order for most prospective students, with clear deadlines for each step to highlight time-sensitive tasks. This structured approach aims to reduce the cognitive burden on students by systematically guiding them through the process, transforming the website from a passive information repository into an active guide that supports students throughout their enrollment journey at Central.

Key Behavioral Concepts Used:

- Choice architecture: By structuring the decision-making environment and reducing potential options, this approach helps manage the choice overload that students often face, facilitating easier and more confident decisions.

Revise Website Language. Update the CWU website to include affirming and encouraging language throughout, particularly in sections dealing with sensitive processes like financial aid. Simplifying the language will make the content more accessible, especially for students unfamiliar with the terminology of higher education. These changes aim to make the website a more welcoming and helpful resource, aiding students in navigating their path to college smoothly.

Barrier #7: Portal Navigation



The complexity and confusion associated with navigating multiple student portals may lead prospective students to disengage from the enrollment process.

Students are required to use several distinct portals for various stages of the enrollment process, including admissions, financial aid, housing, payment, and academics, which sometimes involves multiple steps and unique login details, creating confusion and difficulty. Moreover, these portals are often accessed through desktop-oriented websites and applications which does not match well with prospective students' mobile-first preferences. This complexity and misalignment may lead to some students withdrawing from the enrollment process.

RELEVANT BEHAVIORAL CONCEPTS

- **Hassle Factors:** Managing multiple portals with different interfaces and requirements may serve as a hassle that can contribute to students feeling overwhelmed or confused.

Design Ideas for Barrier #7: Portal Navigation

Emphasize CWU Portal Throughout Public Website. Integrate a prominent navigation link to the myCWU portal at the top of every page on the public CWU website. This consistent placement will highlight the portal's importance and facilitate student engagement by ensuring it is easily accessible from anywhere on the site. Additionally, within each section of the website relevant to the enrollment process—such as admissions, financial aid, housing, payment, and academic affairs—include clear directions and links that guide students to the corresponding parts of the portal. This approach will help students quickly find specific information and complete necessary actions, thereby simplifying their navigation experience.

Key Behavioral Concepts Used:

- Saliency: Making the portal more salient throughout public website will keep the portal top of mind when students are completing enrollment next steps.



Streamlined Cross-Portal Navigation.

Integrate direct links to the various portals within each existing portal. For instance, add a specific "Housing" tab within the myCWU portal that directly links to the housing portal. Similarly, include links in the housing portal that redirect to other relevant portals like financial aid or academics. This interconnected approach ensures that students can seamlessly navigate between tasks without needing to return to the main website or seek external assistance to find the appropriate portal. This solution enhances the user experience by creating a more integrated and intuitive system, allowing admitted students to manage their enrollment processes efficiently from any portal they are currently using.

Key Behavioral Concepts Used:

- Reduce hassle factors: By increasing accessibility to each of the relevant student portals, the solution helps minimize the amount of searching a student needs to do. This may marginally reduce some of the mental effort required to move through the enrollment process, which can have a disproportionate impact.
- Defaults: People are more likely to choose an option if it is presented as the default choice. By making the interconnected navigation the standard layout across portals, admitted students are more likely to use the integrated links as the default method of moving between tasks, easing their enrollment journey.

Barrier #8: Perception as a Backup School



Some prospective students may view Central as a backup rather than a top choice, which may lessen their excitement and drive, potentially leading them to explore other career options if they are not admitted to their first-choice institution.

Staff conversations indicated that many prospective students might view Central as a secondary choice rather than their preferred option. This perception could dampen their enthusiasm for enrolling, as they may feel less motivated or excited about attending an institution that wasn't their first choice. Students may explore alternatives to traditional four-year colleges, such as gap years or employment opportunities, especially if they are not fully committed to their secondary choice institution.

RELEVANT BEHAVIORAL CONCEPTS

- **Status Quo Bias:** Students who do not consider Central as their primary choice may prefer to maintain their current situation, such as taking a gap year or working, rather than enrolling at a school that doesn't fully excite them.
- **Loss Aversion:** The feeling of "losing out" on their first-choice institution may cause students to view attending Central as a consolation. This perception can foster negative emotions, potentially deterring their engagement with CWU and prompting them to consider alternative career paths.

Design Ideas for Barrier #8: Perception as a Backup School

Reframe the Perception of Central. Instead of trying to change Central's image as a backup school, highlight the advantages it offers as an alternative choice. For example, emphasize benefits like more flexible application deadlines and a less stressful enrollment process. Use the CWU website and email campaigns to showcase Central's accommodating and supportive environment. This messaging can shift the perception from seeing CWU merely as a fallback option to recognizing it as a thoughtful choice that values accessibility and student well-being. By promoting these positive aspects, Central can enhance its appeal and potentially increase engagement and enrollment among students who might not initially see it as their top choice.

Key Behavioral Concepts Used:

- Framing: This positive framing helps alter the narrative from one of compromise to one of opportunity, making the option of attending CWU more attractive and strategic.

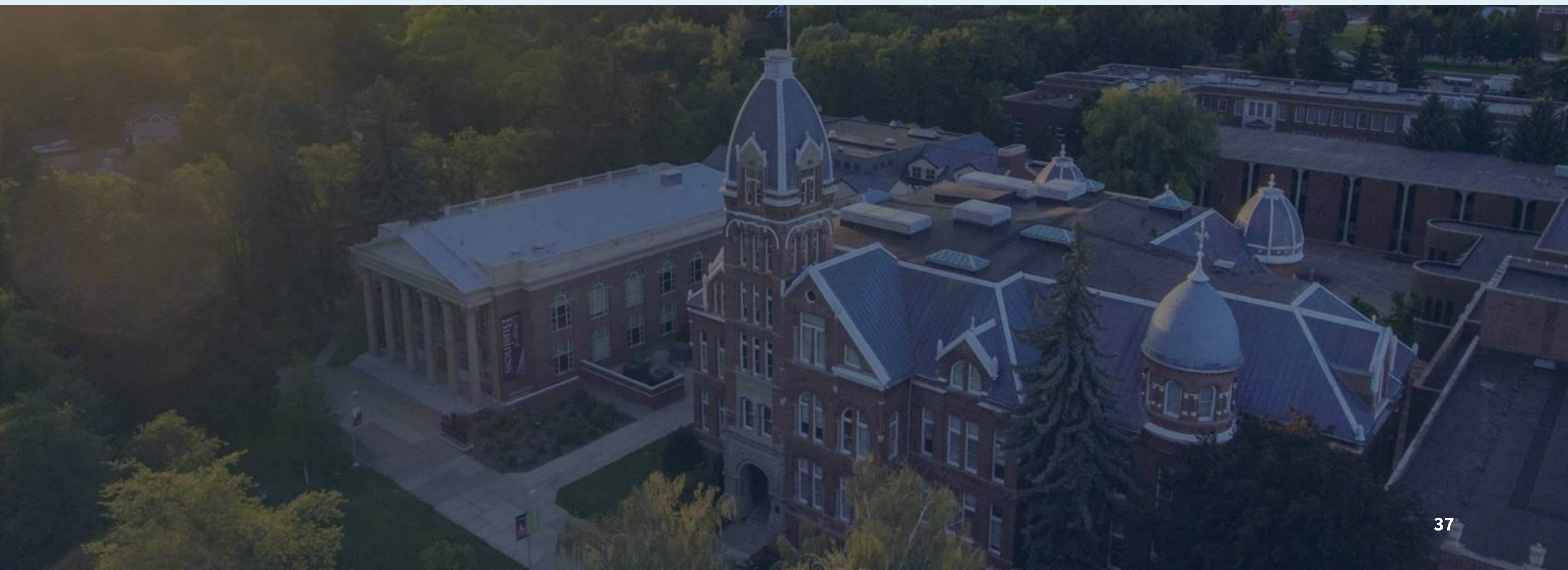
Use Student Testimonials. Share testimonials from students for who Central was not their first choice but ultimately found it to be the right fit. By sharing these personal stories, prospective students could see more of the supportive and welcoming environment at Central, helping to counter any initial reservations they might have.

Key Behavioral Concepts Used:

- Social influence: Using testimonials from peers leverages social influence by showing that a choice is supported by other students.

Implementation Planning

The success of measuring a new solution or strategy is dependent in part on developing a strong plan to guide implementation and assessments. This implementation plan can help facilitate the rollout of any of the design solutions at Central or another institution.



Solution Design and Description

WHAT solution are you planning to launch? Describe it in 3 bullet points:

WHO is the target population and sample?

(Subject: Who is the target population?)

(Size: How many ppl do you expect to target?)

WHAT outcome are you hoping to influence?

Staffing and Location

WHO will implement the solution?
Identify staff and their responsibilities:

WHO will supervise? Identify supervising staff and their responsibilities:

WHERE will the solution be launched?
Identify a physical or digital location:

Timing and Next Steps

WHEN should the solution be launched?
Include a specific person, date, and time:

(Group / individual responsible for launch)

(Start date)

(Time)

(End date)

HOW will the solution be launched? Write out next steps. Consider: What are our key milestones? Who else should give feedback before launching?

Step 1

Step 2

Step 3

Step 4

Step 5

Step 6

Measurement

WHAT benchmarks will assess how the solution has been implemented?

WHAT tools would help describe how the solution has been implemented? (Program management, quality improvement tools, etc.)

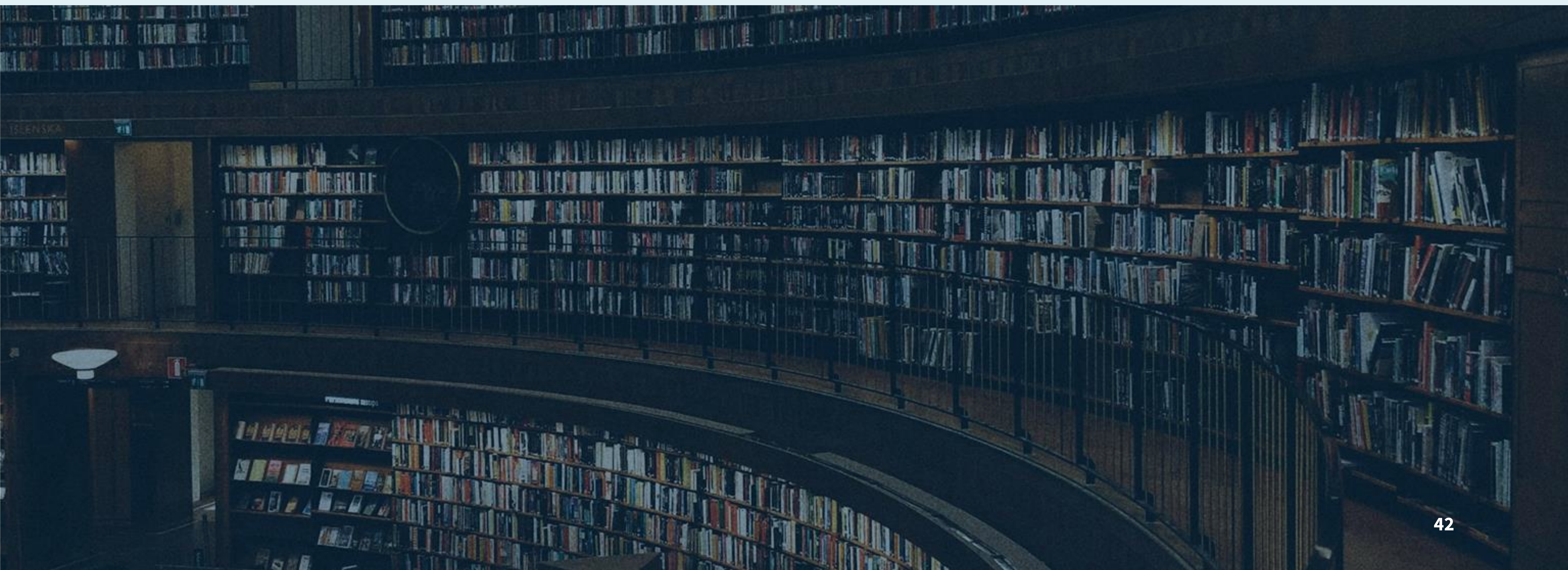
WHAT data will be recorded about the solution?

(System(s))

(Data to be recorded)

(When to enter)

References



REFERENCES

¹<https://washingtonstem.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Improving-K-12-Outcomes-Technical-Report.pdf>

²<https://wsac.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2023.03.09.ResearchSpotlight.DirectEnrollment.pdf>³<https://www.gallup.com/analytics/468986/state-of-higher-education.aspx>

³<https://www.gallup.com/analytics/468986/state-of-higher-education.aspx>

⁴<https://apps.leg.wa.gov/wac/default.aspx?cite=504-24-030>

| Acknowledgements



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We extend our gratitude to the dedicated staff at Central Washington University for their invaluable contributions to the project. Special thanks to Peg Blake, Interim Executive Director of Admissions; JoAnn Page, Assistant Director of Admissions Operations; Luke Simonson, CRM Manager; Laura Miyatake and Andres Moreno Benito, Directors of Undergraduate Recruiting; Megan McConnell, Transfer Center Director; Manuel Rodriguez, Director of Early College Outreach and Campus Visits; Alyssa Endrich, COTS Advisor; Dr. Margaret Ortega, Vice President of Student Engagement and Success; Leslie Hammes, Director of Student Financial Services; Amber Darting, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies; and Joy Stochosky, Interim Director of Health and Wellness. Their insights were essential in enhancing our understanding of the student enrollment process and the challenges students may experience throughout.

For their key role in recruiting students for interviews, we are grateful to Joseph Bryant, Director of Student Rights & Responsibilities; Verónica Gómez-Vilchis, Interim Director of Student Leadership, Involvement, and Community Engagement; Dr. Miriam L. Bocchetti, Executive Director of Federal Grants and HEP CAMP Association President; and Justin Santoli of the Diversity and Equity Center. Their efforts enabled us to directly engage with the students our project aims to support.

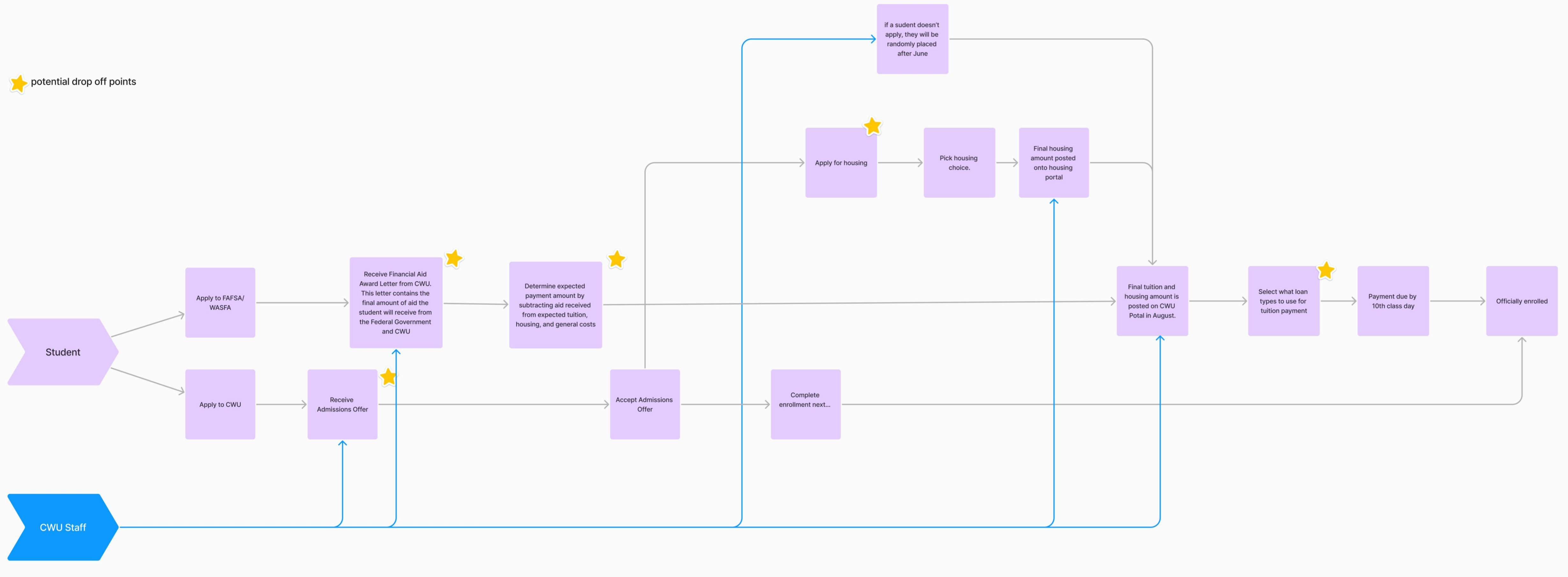
Lastly, we appreciate Adrian Naranjo, former Business Intelligence Analyst and Jason Jones, Assistant to the President & Executive Director of Institutional Effectiveness, Research, and Planning, for each serving as our liaison during different stages of the project, facilitating our interactions across departments.



Appendix

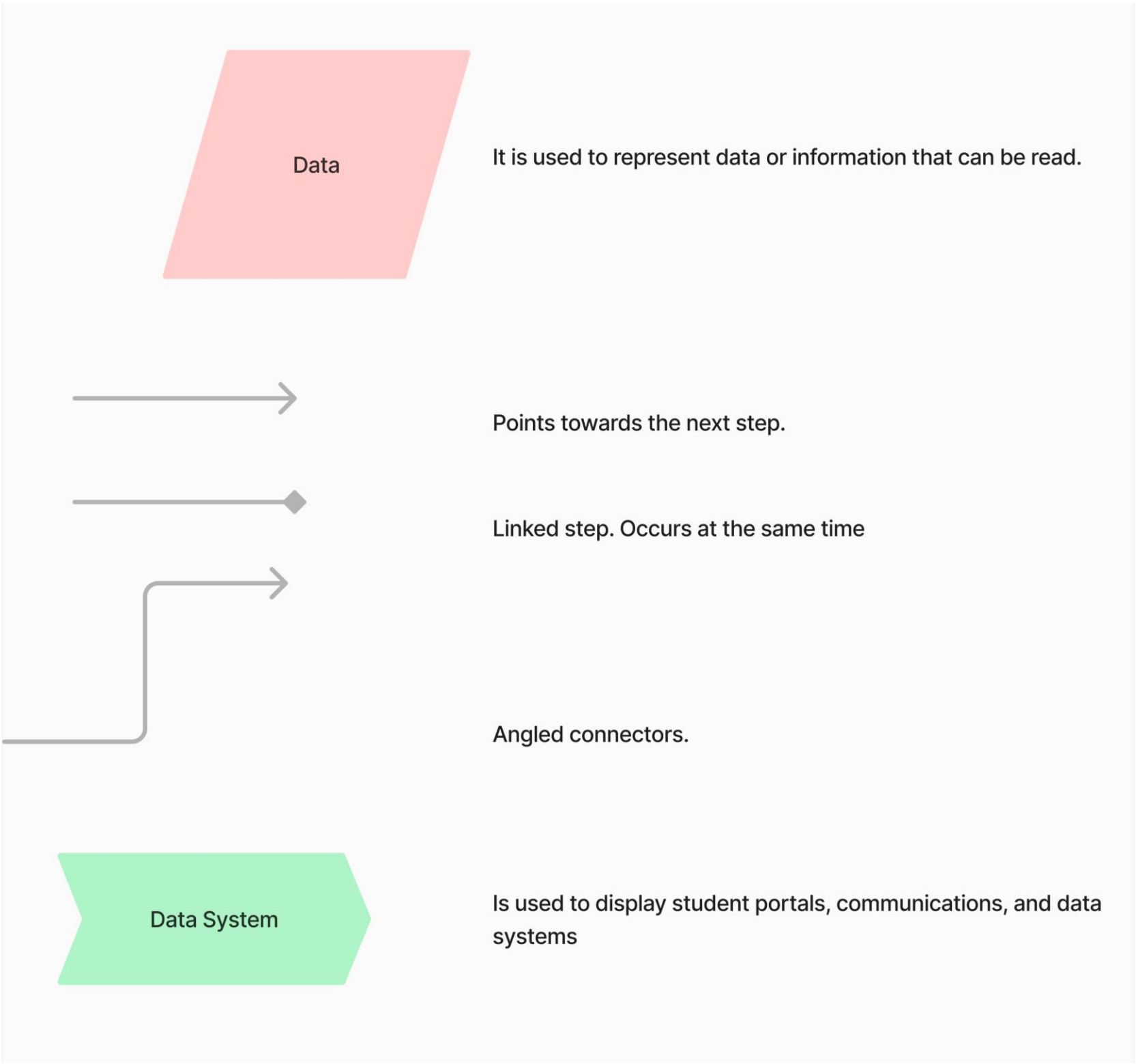
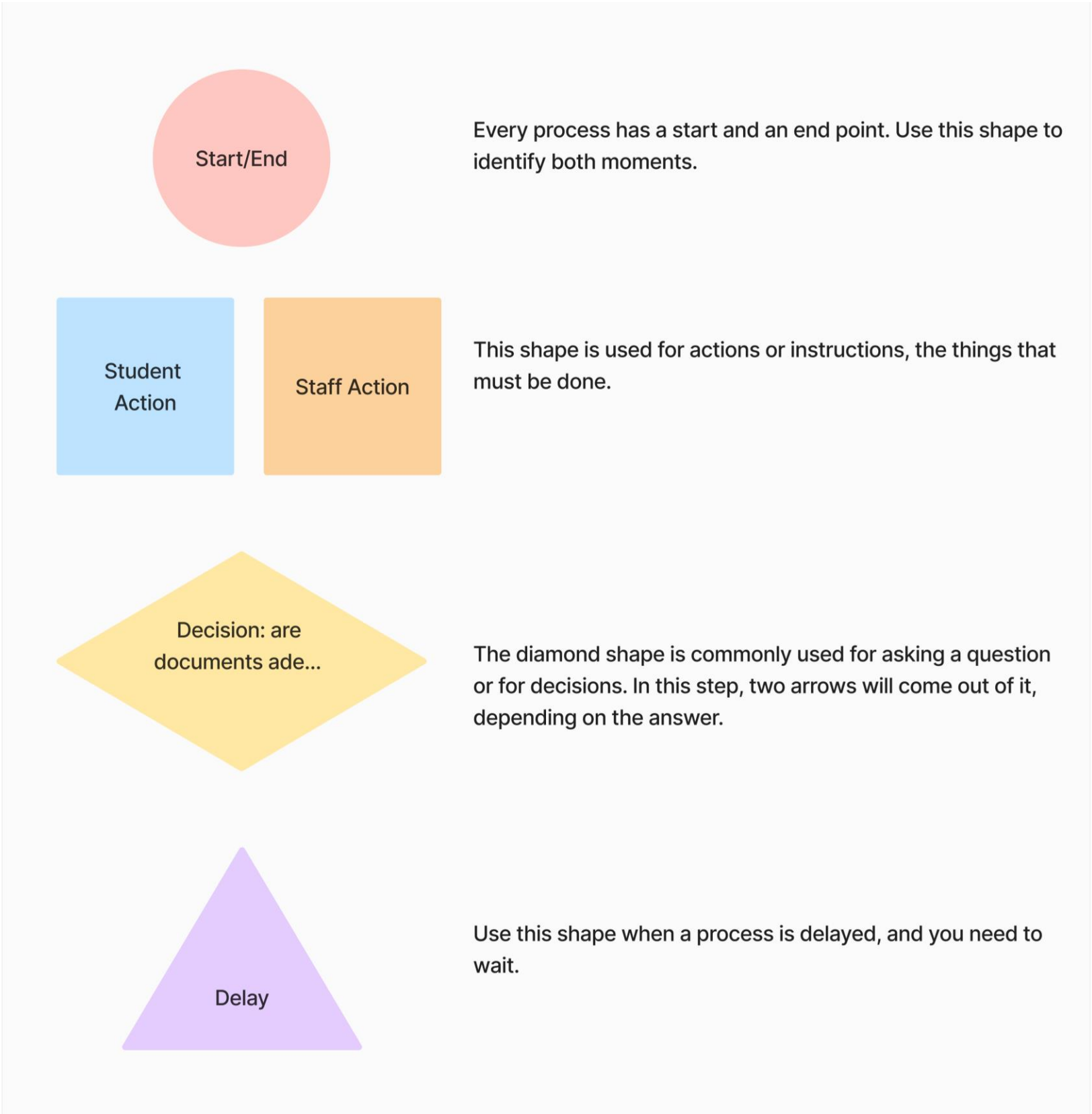
Full Map of the Enrollment Process at Central Washington University

APPENDIX: SIMPLIFIED ENROLLMENT PROCESS MAP



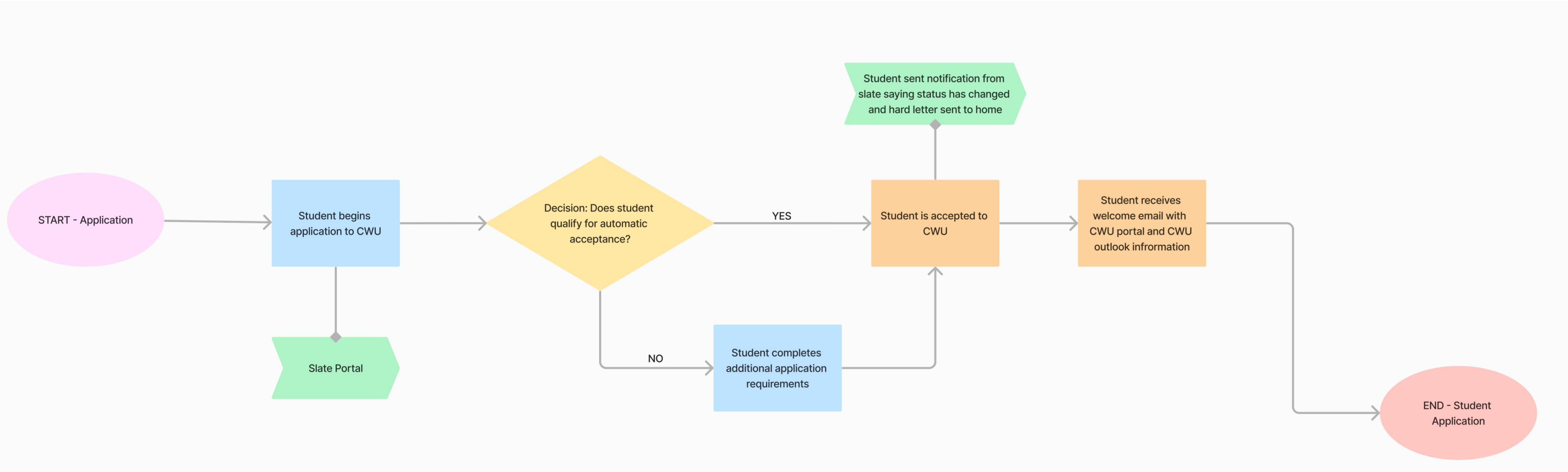
APPENDIX: ENROLLMENT PROCESS MAP – KEY

Process Map Flow Keys

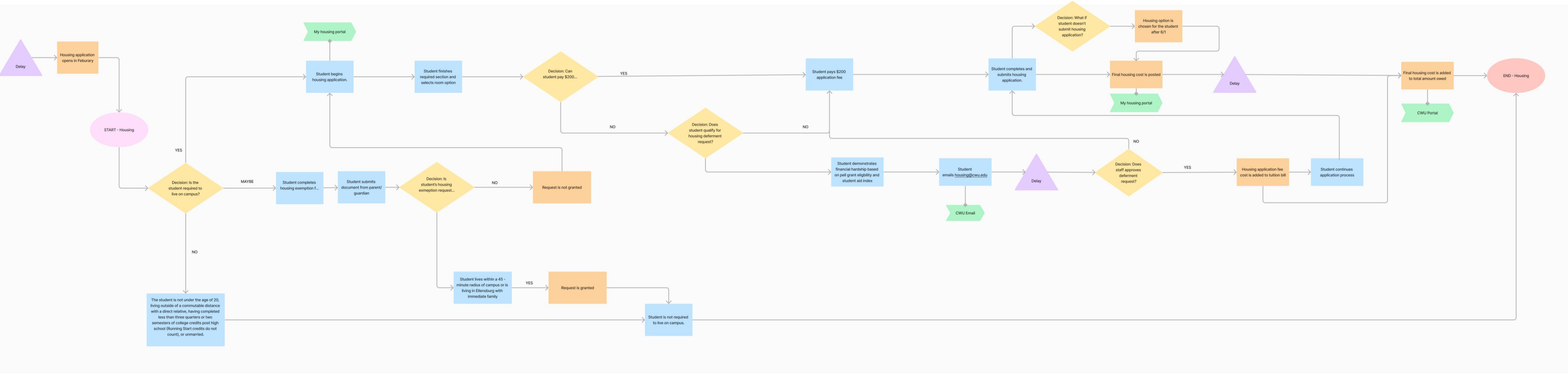


NOTE: The timing of the processes depicted in the process map does not reflect real-time sequences. Many of these steps may occur simultaneously or in a different order depending on students’ preferences and needs.

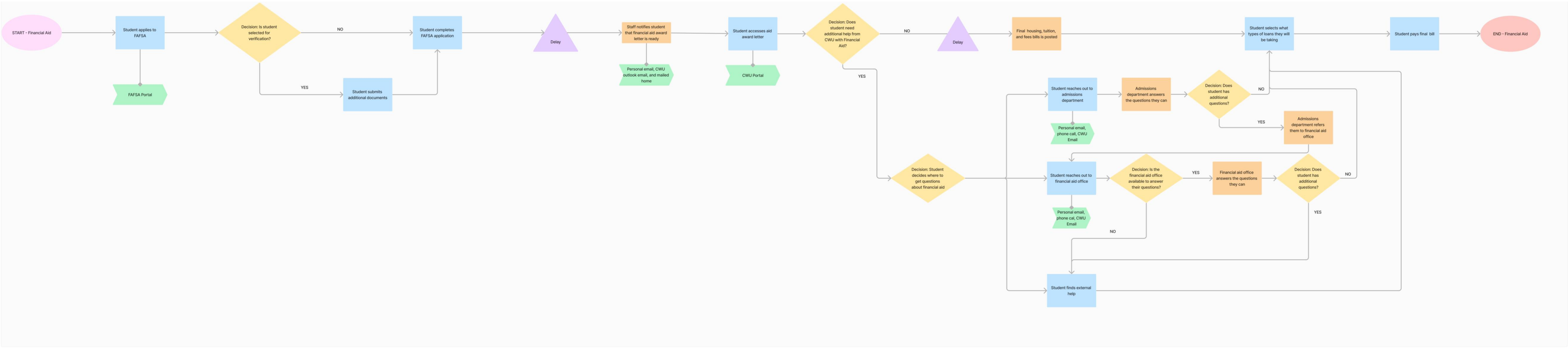
APPENDIX: ENROLLMENT PROCESS MAP – APPLICATION PROCESS



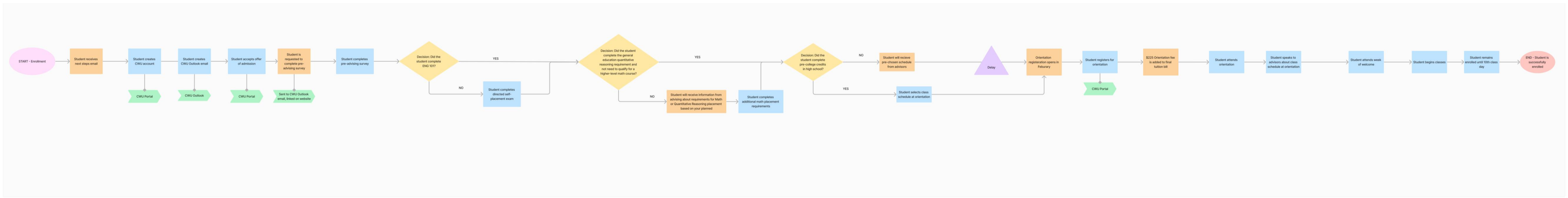
APPENDIX: ENROLLMENT PROCESS MAP – HOUSING PROCESS



APPENDIX: ENROLLMENT PROCESS MAP – FINANCIAL AID



APPENDIX: ENROLLMENT PROCESS MAP – ENROLLMENT



APPENDIX: ENROLLMENT PROCESS MAP – FULL PROCESS

