

Equity and Inclusion: Expanding the Urban Ecosystem

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Equity and Inclusion: Expanding the Urban Ecosystem

Judith A. Ramaley and Tia Brown McNair

As our nation grows ever more diverse, the need to ensure that our educational institutions are truly equitable and inclusive becomes more and more urgent. This sense of urgency plays out across a social and political terrain that threatens the very core of our identity as a nation. Our growing diversity is seen by some as a threat to our national security and as the primary cause behind the displacements and angers being created by the ever growing differences that are dividing our country. Our authors see our growing diversity as a much needed and valued source of energy, creativity and a vital contribution to our capacity to thrive in an especially challenging period in our history and are committed to creating educational environments where people of all backgrounds can thrive.

Articles in this Volume

Inclusion

The concept of inclusion has often been based on a model that typically devalues the lived experiences and backgrounds of underserved students as deficits that hinder their academic success, while the values, practices, and beliefs of the dominant culture have been elevated as the norm and the end goal of most inclusion efforts. In contrast, the concept of inclusion that you will find in these articles is based on an asset model, one that recognizes the talents and knowledge that all students bring to their college experience as contributions to a new definition of inclusion that understands the history and legacy of exclusion. Inclusion of the kind envisioned in these articles means creating opportunities for people with different backgrounds and ideas to work together in new ways to address the complex, unscripted problems that our communities, our nation and the world face in today's rapidly changing world.

Moral Imagination

Working together requires both knowledge and empathy and what Martha Nussbaum (1997) has called a "moral imagination." Writing twenty years ago, Nussbaum explored the realities behind our commitment to preparing citizens and what "a good citizen of the present day should be and should know." She foreshadows the world we live in now as "inescapably multicultural and multinational (Nussbaum p. 8)." All of us must learn to act with sensitivity and alertness as citizens of the world. (Nussbaum, p. 8).

From our beginnings as a nation, education has played a vital role in preparing a growing population drawn from many parts of the world to learn together, work together and solve their differences in mutually respectful and democratic ways. We have too often fallen short in our aspirations to achieve *e pluribus unum*. Our situation today is especially frightening. As Erika Christakis (2017) wrote in a recent article in *The Atlantic*, "Across the political spectrum, Americans have declared [our public schools] a failure. But we've underestimated their strengths—and forgotten their purpose." The same can be said for our nation's colleges and universities. Increasingly, we are being considered by policymakers and families as a private

good, not a public resource. Yet, we, too, serve a vital “nation binding” public purpose, to educate a diverse citizenry and to contribute knowledge and skill drawn from many cultures and experiences to the solution of the complex problems of our times.

Urban Ecosystem

Our urban and metropolitan universities enjoy an especially complex and intimate relationship with the urban environments in which we live, learn and work. While institutions of higher learning were once enclaves separated from the community around them, our boundaries are now increasingly porous. The physical and social spaces that surround us offer a complex urban ecosystem from which we can draw an increasingly diverse group of students, all of whom will need to develop the skill to navigate a multicultural world, wherever they choose to go after college. We are being shaped by those connections as we seek to contribute to community building both as a good neighbor and as active members of our communities through partnerships and collaborations with other organizations.

Our own physical environments, our demographic profiles and our interests and purposes are shaped by our urban context. At the same time, our institutions often seem like kitchen middens made up of a complex collection of organizational philosophies and practices that have piled up over the years and that often represent the lives and perspectives of a different group of people than those who lead our institutions, teach in them and learn in them today. This issue of *Metropolitan Universities* journal is devoted to both conceptual models and practical experience applied to the task of creating equitable and inclusive learning environments that are linked in meaningful ways to the lives and concerns of the people we serve both on campus and beyond.

Inclusive Excellence

Our urban colleges and universities have long reflected the experiences and interests of the diverse urban communities that surround them. Increasingly, the world has come to us to be educated and to practice the habits of working together in new ways. In this issue of *Metropolitan Universities* journal, you will learn about ways that several urban campuses are creating equitable environments and providing learning that rests upon a foundation of diversity. Diversity has become an essential ingredient in creating a meaningful education in a multicultural and multinational world and in supporting inclusive excellence (AAC&U 2017a). There is much more to be done to reimagine how our colleges and universities, most of them designed and operated according to the expectations of earlier and less diverse generations, can educate for today’s world and draw upon the cultural assets and talents of all of the campus community in equitable and meaningful ways. These articles document a promising start to this effort.

Our campuses are becoming places where our growing diversity of background, experience and interests are becoming the essential ingredients of an equitable and inclusive community. The articles in this issue share a common assumption that our campuses and the communities around us are complex systems (Cilliers 1998) where small changes can cascade through the community in unexpected and unintended ways, where the connections amongst the elements

that make up our campuses can interact in surprising ways or not at all, where we are increasingly influenced by and open to the world around us.

Design Thinking

In attempting to change the behavior of a complex human system, our authors make clear that attention must be paid to a number of critical elements involving both people and place and the culture we have created within our institutions. One way of doing this is to employ design thinking as a strategy for understanding, and then influencing, an organization's behavior and culture (Brown, Tim 2009). This careful study and exploration sets the stage for creating the capacity to look at every aspect of campus life through an equity lens. Our policies and practices, the design of our physical spaces and our use of social media all play a role in shaping our campus cultures and our responses to the new ideas and questions that arise when we become more diverse. These elements shape how we teach, how we design the curriculum, what we expect of ourselves and our students, the questions we ask as scholars, and the choices we make as educators.

In this issue, you will see the challenging environment and landscape of higher education through the eyes of senior administrators, faculty members, students, faculty development experts and community members. All of these bring fresh perspectives to the task of creating a culture of equity and inclusion in higher education. In all of these approaches, you will see an interesting blend of deeper probing into how our minds work and how to practice new habits of thinking and action that draw people of different backgrounds together to work on problems that cannot be solved through a single discipline or social perspective alone. You will also see attention to the nature of the environment, both physical and cultural, in which these efforts are unfolding. Frequent reference is made to concepts such as thinking of an institution as a complex system (Cotter, 1998), the use of an ethical lens to examine how the policies and practices of an institution shape what is possible and what is difficult, to the challenge of addressing implicit bias and to the role of leadership and example as a powerful influence on what members of a community value and how they interact with each other and the impact of the growth of equity and inclusion on the experiences and choices being made by students.

This issue's manuscripts start with a broad, system-wide view of an institution and all of the complex connections and interactions that create and sustain its culture, then move to an exploration of what motivates each member of a campus community and how our unexamined and often implicit biases affect what we pay attention to, how we respond to others and what we consider to be important. The issue closes with a focus on how our efforts to become more committed to equity and inclusion ourselves is affecting our students and how they are using their knowledge and skill to address issues that matter to them.

The path begins with Frank Golom's article on whole system change. Golom explores the reasons why we have made so little demonstrable progress in creating equity and inclusion, despite the fact that our campus communities and society as a whole have been growing more diverse every year. He argues that one explanation for our failure to change is that our approaches to diversity and inclusion overemphasize individual actors, attitudes and behavior. They fail to take into account the influence of larger organizational dynamics that favor some

actions and discourage others. Golom goes on to offer three different frames through which to view our approach to campus diversity work—contextual, multilevel and complex systems thinking.

Zapata, Percy and Andrews provide a complementary way to think systemically. They describe how Portland State University approached the task of updating its strategic plan. This effort took place in an environment shaped by a newly appointed governing board that was feeling its way, resource shortages created by reductions in state general fund support, enrollment swings and student activism in support of equity. An equity lens was used to test the likely consequences, including unintended outcomes of policy and strategic choices being considered as the strategic plan took shape. Equity emerged not only as one of the five goals of the plan but also as a commitment to applying an equity lens to every significant campus decision. The authors offer an honest portrayal of how this process unfolded and advice for others who are considering taking the same approach. This example of explicit attention to the potential impact of every choice on the experiences and well-being of the entire campus community is being explored by other institutions as well and may provide a new and more intentional way to address the whole system change that Golom calls for in his article.

So far, we have looked at ways to adapt our traditional organizational cultures, policy environments and approaches to learning, in order to meet the needs of a changing student body and the increasingly complex social, economic and environmental problems that we and our graduates will face in the future. In sharp contrast, Michelle Jones, the founding President of a brand new two-year college called The Wayfinding Academy, shares her experience in creating an educational environment from scratch. Freed from many of the constraints of tradition and history, she and her colleagues are doing their best to avoid the limitations that institutions with much longer history are facing as they try to change their ways to promote equity and inclusion. The Wayfinding Academy is only in its second year and is therefore very much a work in progress.

With the goal clearly articulated of taking an approach to building upon diversity to achieve true equity and inclusion, the next step is to explore how individual interests, beliefs, attitudes and skills play out in the context of the whole campus environment in which people interact with each other. The next two articles focus on the role of chief diversity officers as key campus leaders. President Merodie Hancock describes how she has sought to leverage the chief diversity officer role in creating an equitable and inclusive environment within SUNY Empire State College, an institution whose role and structure have continued to develop since its foundation in 1971. Empire State is nonresidential; its facilities are spread across the state in 34 academic centers. In this widely distributed environment, Empire State hired its first chief diversity officer in 2016. Hancock describes how today's urban and access-oriented campus chief diversity officers work in partnership with the rest of the senior leadership team and faculty, staff and student leadership to educate communities on and off campus about the importance of a broader investment in building upon our growing diversity to create equitable and inclusive environments. She offers a powerful argument for the benefits of this approach in terms of increased educational attainment, greater civic engagement, robust economic development and more livable communities.

Contrasting with the widely distributed structure of Empire State College, Carmen Suarez, Myron Anderson and Kathryn Young take the reader on an exploration of how two different urban-serving universities, Metropolitan State University of Denver (a regional comprehensive University) and Portland State University (a Research 1 University), have begun to incorporate an equity perspective in different environments with a common overall urban-serving mission. Many campuses, including these two, have chosen to embrace materials from the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) that support the development of equity and inclusive excellence. The ability to compare and contrast the strategies used by these two institutions offers some insights into ways to address very different campus communities and the changing role of the Chief Diversity Office in supporting these different approaches to meaningful institutional change.

Campuses vary in how they focus their efforts to draw upon the strength offered by diversity. Andrew Furco and Kristin Lockhart draw us into the context of the University of Minnesota to explore how to create intercultural understanding. This approach offers insights into how to create a sense of shared purpose in a large and multifaceted environment. Several different administrative and academic units are working to define, interpret and approach intercultural work. This is a case study of how two associate vice presidents, one responsible for addressing issues of equity and diversity across the institution, and the other responsible for advancing the institution's community and public engagement agenda, worked together to build greater multicultural competency campus-wide. As is often the case, these two units had not actually worked together on a regular basis. In this story, we learn how the slow and sometimes painful process of learning to work together in new and more productive ways unfolded. These two units created a collective agenda by (a) taking the time to reconcile difference in both perspectives and intended outcomes; (b) defining the terms of engagement; (c) infusing new perspectives into the effort; and (d) accepting the inevitable tensions that arose due to differences of role, responsibility and experience. Several of the articles in this issue offer wise and helpful insights into what it really takes to change a culture. This piece offers an especially helpful and informative insider's view of the realities of undertaking this kind of work with the goal of achieving a culture of equity and inclusion and intercultural competence when everyone has a different idea about what each of these terms means in practice.

Once a campus community has figured out how to approach the task of creating equity and inclusion, they must deal with two critical issues. The first is the lack of meaningful connections across the campus community, what Richard Prystowsky, the former Provost of Lansing Community College and now Vice President of Academic Affairs and Student Services at Marion Technical College in Ohio, calls the "structure of isolation common in our institutions of higher learning." These are what others often call silos. The second is our failure to address our own implicit biases honestly and successfully, biases that further divide us into separate groups. Prystowsky offers a helpful primer on how to read a campus environment, work out how it operates and discover what interventions might shift how people work together, how they learn and what they value most. He describes the impact of implicit bias training on the curriculum, on campus policies, on faculty searches and promotion and tenure deliberations. He offers an example of how Golom's call to approach change as a whole system can play out in a different campus environment.

Creating new connections and addressing our own implicit biases require fresh ways of reading the environment around us, as well as ways to explore the assumptions that we rarely, if ever, examine. Balajee and Todd offer a primer on how to slow down and focus on ways to build a new approach to seeing and experiencing the realities of our campus context and examine our own roles in shaping the campus climate and culture. Their experiences with efforts to support equity and inclusion in other settings shapes their ability to see a campus from the perspective of “outside insiders” who are not bound by the unexamined patterns and expectations that academics take for granted.

Identity-Consciousness

Kimberly Costino takes us more deeply into the importance of faculty learning in creating an equity-minded institutional transformation and leads us through the steps along the way, approaches to the curriculum and the ways that faculty can be supported in exploring their own assumptions in order to foster their own identity-consciousness. This inquiry-based approach addresses how faculty members can probe more deeply into their own ways of understanding the world and the actions of others and their access to and use of power. This can then flow into understanding the institutionalized behaviors that contribute to alienation, inequity and failure to thrive in the academic environment, and the role that the campus culture and environment play in contributing to student success.

Finally, we wrap up this exploration with two articles that address the landscape of higher education from the perspective of students and recent graduates. Mary Ho and George Sanchez describe the approaches that the University of Southern California (USC) has taken to providing support for first generation students of color. The story is told through both an institutional equity-minded lens and through individual students’ experiences, and how they have been able to connect their educational experiences to issues they care about in the communities from which they came. This article paves the way to think about how the kinds of support offered by urban institutions like USC tap the remarkable assets of cultural knowledge, talents and commitments that first-generation students of color bring with them to college, and help students choose a focus for what they want to do with their new connections and knowledge. The result is a set of inspiring examples of how insights and learning can be put to use to benefit others. One example, bringing together learning and community engagement at USC, is the Boyle Heights Museum of History and Culture, a central point for the community surrounding USC as well as a training ground for the next group of professionals who will emerge from USC’s first generation college student community of color. As Ho and Sanchez describe it, civic engagement can disrupt traditional divides and open up new ways to celebrate and support the identity and distinctive character of a neighborhood and a broader community while preparing students to be engaged and mindful citizens who can use their education in responsible and creative ways.

To bring the issue to a close, Jacinta Safford describes how interdisciplinary departments such as African American Studies and Women and Gender Studies and initiatives like those at USC can prepare scholars of color who are pursuing careers in higher education. She looks at these intellectual centers as incubators that teach participants how to navigate within our current university environments while working toward spaces of greater equity and inclusion. She ends with a challenge to all of us.

It is not enough to be diverse in representation—that is not the heavy lifting of diversity. Rather, finding a common language that allows each of us to bear witness to the humanity in others is the real challenge, especially for colleges and universities (Safford 2017, p. 7).

Conclusion

The articles in this issue spark difficult, but necessary, conversations that lead to action. As you read this issue, we hope that you consider the following questions: What lies ahead of us as we undertake this journey towards nation building in an increasingly complex and interconnected world both locally and globally? What will our graduates need to know and how will they use what they know both in the workplace and in their own lives as members of a community, as family members, as mentors for others? What kinds of questions must we answer and how will we set about the task of answering them? How will our universities and society at large interact? Will our role still be to serve a critical public purpose, the binding together of an increasingly diverse population into a meaningful democracy? We hope so!

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Reframing the Dominant Diversity Discourse: Alternate Conversations for Creating Whole System Change

Frank D. Golom

Abstract

Diversity and inclusion (D&I) efforts in higher education are decades old, yet progress continues to be slow and elusive for many campuses. Recent events in colleges and universities across the United States suggest that long-standing challenges related to access, equity and inclusion remain as entrenched and intractable as they have ever been, resulting in campus environments that may be unwelcoming or hostile to faculty, staff and students from underrepresented groups. One reason for the partial success of university D&I programs is that they overemphasize individual actors, attitudes and behaviors while neglecting the systemic, organizational cultures in which those actors reside. Drawing on the organization development and change literatures, this paper offers three alternate perspectives for reframing campus diversity work, arguing that all D&I initiatives must consider the (a) contextual, (b) multilevel and (c) systemic nature of change if they are to be robust and successful.

Keywords: inclusion; systems thinking; organization change; organization development; multicultural affairs

Introduction

Institutions of higher education have been attending to issues of diversity and inclusion (D&I) for decades (Harvey, 2016). Such attention can be seen in a number of important and consequential D&I initiatives, including efforts to increase the recruitment and retention of students and faculty from underrepresented backgrounds, the development of specific affinity programming, spaces and offices for minority students, the creation of targeted administrative positions to lead and manage diversity efforts, and training and other psychoeducational programs aimed at educating the broader campus, and the general public, on a number of important topics critical to increasing multicultural competence in the 21st century (e.g., prejudice, discrimination, identity, microaggressions, social justice).

These efforts are long-standing, necessary, responsive and consistent with the aim of expanding access to higher education in the United States. And these efforts are often unsuccessful (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016; Eagly, 2016). Despite decades of attempts at increasing access, equity and inclusion for underrepresented groups, and despite some progress with respect to the diversification of students and faculty, there remains considerable work to be done, and considerable dissatisfaction with campus climates that are deemed unwelcoming or hostile. The current article offers an organizational systems perspective (Senge, 1990) on the state of D&I efforts in higher education, and argues that many of our efforts at diversity and inclusion fail because they do not make the whole system the target of the change effort (Block & Noumair, 2017). It also offers several ways of conceptualizing and framing campus D&I efforts from an

organization-wide, total system, culture change perspective in the hopes of increasing the depth, longevity and success of their impact. To that end, the article is grounded in the change and diversity literature in organizational psychology and organization development (e.g., Burke, 2017), and not necessarily in more traditional writing in higher education or social justice.

Recent Conversations in the Diversity and Inclusion Space

Over the last several years, there has been increased attention to issues of diversity, inclusion and multicultural competence in higher education, fueled in part by the larger national climate and public outrage over racial injustice in the United States, including the deaths of several unarmed African American men at the hands of police officers in Missouri, New York and Maryland. Campus walkouts, protests, sit-ins and uprisings, often in solidarity with residents in Ferguson, Staten Island and Baltimore, have become common, receiving coverage in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *The Associated Press*, *The New York Times*, *The LA Times* and *The Washington Post*. *The Atlantic* even compiled an interactive “cheat sheet and timeline” from some of the more well-known campus protests, including those at Harvard, Yale, Claremont McKenna and the University of Missouri (Wong & Green, 2016).

These demonstrations and the actions they spurred were attempts at producing real change by and on behalf of students who have been historically marginalized. Student groups from at least 80 colleges and universities have requested a variety of actions from campus administration. These actions, collected and listed in full by the website *TheDemands.org*, are attempts at initiating, re-invigorating and maintaining some of the efforts that have typified the higher education multicultural equity landscape for decades, including increased recruitment of students and faculty of color and training for all faculty, administrators and staff on issues of racial justice and microaggressions, the “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory or negative slights and insults to the target person or group” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 273).

Yet even with the increased attention surrounding these movements, the demands put forth by the students and the actions taken by some administrators, actual change with respect to campus diversity and inclusion has been harder to achieve. According to a recent report in *The New York Times*, “black and Hispanic students are more underrepresented at the nation’s top colleges and universities than they were 35 years ago” (Ashkenas, Park, & Pearce 2017). Despite decades of attempts to recruit individuals from marginalized backgrounds, the percentage of African American first-year students at top US institutions remained “virtually unchanged since 1980,” and the proportion of Hispanic first-year students at these institutions did not keep pace with US population trends over the same period.

A plausible take-away from these data, and the last few years of headline-grabbing campus activism, is that institutions of higher education, much like their corporate counterparts, have not produced as much D&I change as they had hoped (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016; Eagly, 2016). Although there are many reasons for the lack of progress, one explanation lies in the way some diversity and inclusion advocates have been framing and approaching their work, frequently choosing to focus their conversations and actions on specific individual instances of oppression rather than on the systemic organizational forces that keep such cycles of oppression locked in

place (Davidson, 1999). William B. Harvey, the former a vice president and director of the Center for Advancement of Racial and Ethnic Equity at the American Council on Education and a distinguished scholar at the American Association for Access, Equity, and Diversity, framed the question this way in an important article published (Harvey, 2016) in the *Chronicle*: “How many protests will it take to finally diversify our campuses?”

Harvey recounts a telling anecdote that encapsulates just how little systemic, structural change has been produced in higher education when it comes to diversity and inclusion. He includes the following passage from another essay he penned, which he started distributing to bewildered colleagues during the campus protests of late 2015 and early 2016:

While greater numbers of minority-group students are matriculating at colleges and universities than ever before, to a large degree those students find themselves outside the mainstream of campus life. At best, the feeling that many have is that their presence is simply tolerated as a politically expedient maneuver; at worst, they feel they are the victims of subtle—and sometimes not so subtle—racist attitudes and practices on the part of classmates and instructors alike.

As Harvey notes, although colleagues frequently agreed with the sentiments expressed, they were somewhat incredulous and confused when he recounted that the article he was quoting from had originally been published 36 years ago in 1981. The new, novel and surprising campus uprisings of the last few years were, according to Harvey, just “a chronic case of racial déjà vu.” From an organization change perspective, they were also a good illustration of just how limited individually-focused and isolated programming can be when it comes to transforming the culture of an entire organizational system, and therefore, producing and maintaining sustainable change.

Shifting the Conversation: An Organization Change Perspective

While the claim of racial déjà vu is more anecdotal than empirical, it is consistent with decades of writing in the organizational psychology and development literatures on when organizational systems produce change, and when they do not. By some estimates, two-thirds of organization change efforts fail, unable to meet their desired objectives (Burke, 2017) and often producing a considerable amount of resistance in the process. The reasons for these failure rates are many, and include technical challenges like unclear visions, active political opposition, ineffective leadership, poor implementation and inadequate communication (Burke, 2017; Pasmore, 2011). Yet, beyond the technical, behavioral and administrative drivers of organization-change failure, one additional reason for the lack of success of many change initiatives is that change leaders often do not make the entire organizational system the target of the change effort (Burke, 2017; Senge, 1990), focusing instead on specific individual events rather than on the deeply engrained patterns, norms, cultures – or the larger systemic context – that allow such events to occur.

To understand this aspect of failure more fully, it is helpful to review basic tenets of systems theory as they apply to an organizational context. Senge (1990) defines a system as “anything that takes its integrity, form and definition from the ongoing interaction of its elements... all of which have a common purpose and behave in common ways” (Senge, 1990, p. 137). More simply, a system can be best thought of as a set of elements “interconnected in such a way that

they produce their own pattern of behavior over time” (Meadows, 2008, p. 2). Different systems theorists distill the elements of organizational systems in various ways (e.g., Burke & Litwin, 1992; Meadows, 2008; Svyantek & Brown, 2000), but a useful classification is provided by Senge (1990), who distinguishes between the structural, functional and behavioral elements of any system. The structural element, which refers to “the basic interrelationships that control behavior and translate perceptions, goals, rules and norms into action” in any organization, includes hierarchies, information-flows and general decision-making processes (Senge, 1990, p. 40). The functional element describes the long-term patterns of behavior between actors that often result from the organization’s structural makeup, similar to the organization’s personality, or response tendencies. And, the behavioral element refers to an organization’s specific, individual responses to a given situation, including specific events embedded in its overall pattern of behavior, or more plainly stated, its “who-did-what-to-whoms” (Golom, 2015).

In many change initiatives and in most organizations, the pull is to conceptualize change by focusing on these individual behavioral elements in isolation, rather than thinking about the patterns and structures that lock seemingly disconnected elements together or cause them (Burke, 2017; Senge, 1990). For example, in the diversity and inclusion space, organizations frequently require training in response to biased or insensitive behavior among organizational members (Davidson, 1999). Yet, when attention in day-to-day organizational life is placed on individual-level events instead of considering what those events reveal about the organization’s culture, the result is often a series of interventions aimed at improving unbearable symptoms, without ever attending to their underlying cause. Organizations committed to addressing change in this way appear actively and reactively busy, calming isolated and even repeated crises, but their cumulative work may not produce substantive change. In fact, a structural approach to change is perhaps the only way to have a significant impact on an institution’s culture, correcting deeply and often unconsciously embedded ways of responding and altering the context so that certain events are less likely to occur (Burke, 2017; Senge, 1990; Golom, 2015).

The failure to target organizational culture is the death knell of many change initiatives (Katzenbach, Steffen & Kronley, 2012). This is particularly true in the diversity and inclusion space, which is, in the literature and in practice, rarely framed from an organization change or whole systems perspective (Block & Noumair, 2017; Foldy & Buckley, 2017). Block and Noumair (2017) articulated this challenge in a recent special journal issue devoted to thinking about diversity and inclusion systemically, noting that current D&I practice and scholarship mostly emphasize “individual-level understanding and interventions, via providing extra knowledge and skills training for women and people of color, or providing bias awareness training for leaders and managers” (p. 150). Research suggests, however, that such individual-level interventions are often unsuccessful in producing large-scale diversity change in organizations (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016), particularly with respect to the representation of women and people of color in top management positions and employee perceptions of the institutional climate. As Block and Noumair (2017) note, such failure occurs in part because D&I practitioners frequently ignore “the role that systemic factors play in influencing diversity and inclusion in organizations,” thereby ensuring that “diversity initiatives are enacted narrowly, making change in part of the system rather than in the whole system,” if at all (p. 150).

Such omissions are as true in higher education as they are in the corporate world, as colleges and universities frequently focus their D&I conversations at the individual-level, spurred in part by specific campus or national “crisis” events that demand immediate attention and reaction from students. Not only is this the dominant frame on change in many organizations, it is a model that has been employed in higher education since multicultural affairs offices began populating student development in the 1970s and 1980s (Patton & Hannon, 2008). These offices are engaged in the important work of attending to the experiences, academic success and psychological well-being of underrepresented students who exist in campus environments that may be both subtly and overtly hostile to them, but as a general rule, they are rarely responsible for or have authority over direct system-wide culture change on behalf of their constituents. Thus, the cycles of justice and equity activity that grip higher education every few years are more about attending to individuals than changing the organizational culture, which is, both conceptually and in practice, a significant driver of the lack of progress frequently cited (Harvey, 2016) by underrepresented individuals on university campuses. In order to produce total system change, D&I practitioners have to shift the conversation and consider framing and enacting their work from an organizational, or total system, change perspective.

Alternate Diversity Dialogues: Context, Levels and Systems

Framing diversity and inclusion work as an organization change initiative requires holding at bay reactions to specific, individual events and instead examining patterns, interrelationships and feedback mechanisms across the organizational system. It also requires engaging in conversations that do not always dominate the daily work of diversifying higher education institutions, which as the evidence reviewed earlier indicates, has been overtaken by reactions to local and national crises, uprisings and student demands, many of which include individual-level interventions (e.g., screening for bias, diversity training, grievance policies) that are not strongly supported in the research (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016; Eagly, 2016). These conversations are based on the theoretical and empirical literature in the field of organization development, and emphasize attending to organizational context, higher levels of analysis and systems dynamics in addition to the immediate individual event or concern of the moment, regardless of how important, pressing or unacceptable that individual element might be.

Conversation #1: The Context Conversation

Social and organizational psychologists have for decades reinforced the idea that we frequently make individual attributions regarding the causes of other people’s behavior, while at the same time offering contextual rationales for our own. For example, we are more likely to discuss others’ bad actions as being a fundamental reflection of who they are, while excusing our own with a litany of outside forces that affected us and of which those around us would be unaware (Ross, 1977). This fundamental attribution error often results in individuals forgetting the simple idea that behavior in organizations is jointly determined by two factors: those related to the individual person as well as those related to the larger group and organizational context in which that person resides (Chatman, 1989; Lewin, 1951). This interactionist perspective is essential for navigating the complex, diverse environments of most modern organizations, as it forces the recognition that the organizational context can be as strong an influence on organizational behavior as personality variables (Chatman, 1989).

In higher education D&I work, a considerable amount of attention is placed on individual elements, including individual instances of intolerance on campus, individual student complaints and individual faculty members and administrators who do not ‘get it’ with respect to diversity and social justice issues. The attention to the individual-level is necessary, but empirical research suggests it is insufficient for conceptualizing and addressing diversity and inclusion challenges in an organizational setting. In effect, context matters, as context can induce behavior in strong organizational environments that overrides one’s personality dispositions (Chatman, 1989). In higher education, what counts as context is far-ranging, including institutional classification (e.g., Carnegie classification), history, mission, cultural norms, legislative environment, demographic composition, curriculum, organizational systems and community partnerships. For example, many campuses have specific policies and procedures for reporting and addressing bias against underrepresented students. In a recent meeting at one university, students began to criticize the bias reporting system for a lack of follow-through on submitted complaints. The administrator charged with overseeing bias reporting insisted that she gave every complaint reported her due diligence and care, and a lengthy conversation ensued about whether the bias reporting system was functioning as intended.

To keep the conversation at the level of the reporting system and its functioning, however, misses a larger contextual data point about the culture of the institution and how it might be contributing to the occurrence of biased events in the first place. An interactionist perspective moves beyond individual incidents of bias or microaggression to consider the context of those incidents, and to wonder what group and organizational-level variables are preventing individuals who would suppress such biases in other contexts from doing so in their current setting. Microaggressions, for example, do not occur in a vacuum (Lilienfeld, 2017). They occur in a context that, depending on its contents, may make their expression more or less likely. Ensuring that the organizational environment is not fertile ground for such incidents is a far better and more effective strategy than only addressing each individual microaggressive event as, or more likely after, it occurs. Metaphorically-speaking, the latter approach is the equivalent of preventing weeds in a garden by pulling each one out as it appears, rather than simply treating the soil to make weed growth less likely, and then periodically attending to an occasional outlier.

Conversation #2: The Levels Conversation

One of the unintended consequences of overly focusing the D&I conversation on individual events, elements and actors is that our change initiatives become focused at the individual-level as well. In short, an individual frame begets common individual interventions, including recruiting, retaining, replacing, displacing, training and coaching particular individuals or a set of individuals (Burke, 2017). Unfortunately, there remains little evidence in the organizational literature that changing individuals results in a changed organizational system (Burke, 2017). First, D&I interventions are frequently reactive in nature and often occur absent a larger organizational D&I strategy (cf. Thomas, 2004), “not in the service of moving the total system in a new direction” (Burke, 2017, p. 101). Second, sometimes change occurs in the opposite direction of what was intended, as some common individual-level diversity interventions have been shown to create backlash or decrease the representation of underrepresented groups in leadership roles (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016).

The organizational literature on the effectiveness of diversity training offers an illustration regarding the limitations of individual-level change interventions, especially when one considers that a frequent student demand during the 2015-2016 campus protests was some form of diversity training. Of the 80 schools featured on TheDemands.org, most of their student groups demanded some form of diversity, racial justice or microaggressions training. Yet, according to a number of empirical studies, such training is more likely than not to be incomplete, ineffective or produce resistance (Bezrukova, Jehn & Spell, 2012). For example, in their review of common diversity practices in 708 private sector organizations, Kalev, Dobbin and Kelly (2006) discovered that “practices that target managerial bias through feedback (diversity evaluations) and education (diversity training) show virtually no effect in the aggregate. They show modest positive effects when responsibility structures are also in place. However, they sometimes show negative effects otherwise. Research to date from HR experts and psychologists suggests that interactive training workshops, of the kind we examine, often generate backlash (p. 611).

In some ways, the lack of findings here and in other studies of a similar nature are not surprising. Exclusively targeting the individual level ignores the multiple levels that exist in and around any organization, including higher-order group, department, university, industry and national forces that influence students, faculty and staff long after the training has ended. At the very least, D&I interventions that address specific units or departments within the university (i.e., group training or group coaching) may yield more dividends than programs that attempt to educate individuals from various quarters of the campus, in part because they may promote the establishment of group norms and knowledge structures that can remain in place after the training has ended (Kulik, Roberson & Tan, 2013; Liang, Moreland & Argote, 1995).

Conversation #3: The Systems Conversation

To consider context and levels more explicitly in the pursuit of diversity and inclusion work is to begin to adopt a systems perspective on creating change. As an oversimplification, one of the challenges of our dominant discourse on diversity and inclusion in higher education is that it does not always involve a systems conversation. In fact, if both diagnosis and intervention remain at the individual level, a systems conversation cannot by definition occur and a lack of progress is almost guaranteed. To think in systems is to attend to context and level of analysis, as has been said, but also to the structural interdependence, interrelatedness and patterns between and among different aspects of the system, both in any given moment and over time. In organizational systems, these structures and patterns are best understood as organizational culture, or the “beliefs, values and behavioral norms that come to be taken for granted as basic assumptions and drop out of awareness,” even as they are implicitly “taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, feel and behave in relation to problems” (Schein, 2016, p. 6).

Culture is paramount because it outlasts any one individual event or element within the organizational system, in part because it is structurally stable, deeply unconscious, pervasively broad and subtly integrating of disparate events and activities (Schein, 2016). For example, one of the issues facing higher education D&I leaders right now is the inclusion and protection of transgender students and faculty. Institutions have taken up the causes of transgender individuals on campus, including the important issue of providing all gender restrooms and housing options.

This attention to transgender issues is needed, important and critical to the safety, learning and well-being of trans students, and it also parallels the attention previously paid to the safety, learning and well-being of gay, lesbian and to a lesser extent bisexual students in the 1990s (Renn, 2009). It is likely that other queer-identified students will receive attention in the coming decade, in a cyclical yet often unacknowledged pattern of welcoming in a new sexual minority “other” that had previously gone ignored. On the one hand, this is the nature of diversity and inclusion work, expanding the circle to an ever-widening array of marginalized individuals. On the other hand, it suggests that previous attempts at change may have focused heavily on one individual group of students or one social identity, rather than thinking about the ways in which the organizational culture and system, particularly its heteronormative or gendered basic assumptions, could be changed so as to allow a more seamless integration of students, faculty and staff of diverse sexual expression.

A focus on changing the deeply embedded cultural norms of a whole organizational system is decidedly a different conversation, but if the goal is to enhance equity and inclusion for all types of underrepresented groups in the academy, it is a required one. Fundamentally altered organizational behavior requires an altered system (Golom, 2015), and while many have adopted the language of “systemic issues” or “systems,” it is much harder to make the paradigm shift required to think systemically or implement that thinking practically in an organizational context (Meadows, 2008). In part, the challenge with implementation rests in the fact that systems are not static; they are dynamic entities that seek to maintain equilibrium at all costs and that frequently fall into entrenched patterns of responding (Meadows, 2008; Coleman et al., 2017). As a result, not only are they difficult to see or change, they also difficult to maneuver, and will frequently return to homeostasis, particularly in the face of narrow or isolated attempts to alter them (Meadows, 2008). The only way to change an organizational system is to change its culture, to shift its norms, values, beliefs and attitudes out from underneath it to an altered, more diverse and inclusive state, often without it realizing what those norms are and without engendering too much resistance.

Translating the Conversations: Systems Blueprints for Change

Thinking systemically is a tall order for any change initiative; for deeply personal and identity-rooted D&I work, it requires the utmost skill, patience and tolerance for ambiguity. A frequent critique of systems approaches to change is that they are interesting diagnostically, but do not easily lend themselves to intervention, implementation and action (Meadows, 2008). Although this critique is valid, the alternate conversations suggested in this article are examples of how D&I practitioners can begin to adopt more of an organization change frame in their work, and how they can shift their conceptual models and mindsets toward greater systems acumen. Examples of how common D&I challenges and interventions might be reframed and approached from a context, levels or systems perspective are provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Common D&I Challenges and Interventions Reconsidered from a Context, Levels and Systems Perspective

Challenge	Individual-Level Intervention	Context Considerations	Levels Considerations	Systems Considerations
Several faculty are concerned about the lack of queer individuals on the faculty and in senior administrator roles.	In the next round of faculty hiring, the provost's office devotes additional resources to identifying and recruiting queer faculty.	Is the climate on campus favorable for queer-identified individuals, and how is scholarship on queer issues viewed?	How would the inclusion of queer faculty in certain departments impact group cohesion, communication, conflict and trust?	How might institutional heterosexism be manifest in formal and informal campus policies, procedures and systems?
A coalition of underrepresented students, unsatisfied with what they perceive as a negative climate on campus, hold a series of demonstrations to voice their experiences of microaggressions.	University administrators, in response to student demonstrations, implement mandatory diversity training for faculty, staff and students.	Does the university curriculum and programming include multiple psychoeducational opportunities for learning about issues of social justice, diversity and inclusion?	How does training support an overall vision, strategy and action plan for campus diversity efforts at the university-level?	What are the potential points of resistance to mandatory training, and how and where on campus are they likely to manifest?
A student of color has complained about a faculty member's biased behavior, including racially insensitive and politically-charged comments.	The student is encouraged to file a formal bias complaint or grievance, which is then investigated by the appropriate university official.	How is this dynamic reflective of or influenced by current (or historical) university, regional or national patterns and trends?	Are the faculty member's actions an isolated event, or do they imply something about the climate for diversity in his or her department?	What implicit norms are present on campus that tacitly condone or allow faculty to remain ignorant of issues of racial justice?

Additionally, a number of systems models exist in the organization change and development (Burke, 2017) and higher education (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015) literatures that can offer guidance to faculty, administrators and students as they consider strategic planning around campus diversity and equity initiatives. These models distill the context, levels and systems conversations reviewed here into practical blueprints for change that include the main factors, leverage points and interrelationships that exist at the core of any organizational system. For example, using an open systems model of organizational performance and change (Burke & Litwin, 1992), Golom (2015) proposed seven recommendations for applying a systems lens to campus diversity work around queer student issues, and provided an in-depth case study of one university's attempt to put the recommendations into practice. Summarized in Table 2, these recommendations include (1) manipulating the context to create a strong sense of urgency, (2) developing a vision for change that sticks, (3) involving the "right" people to communicate the vision, (4) aligning day-to-day organizational behavior with the new vision, (5) sustaining and institutionalizing the vision, (6) rewarding and celebrating small successes, and (7) evaluating and recalibrating the change goals.

Table 2: Recommendations for Effecting Institutional Change around Diversity Issues (Golom, 2015)

Recommendation 1:	Manipulate the context by creating a strong sense of urgency
Recommendation 2:	Harness and channel momentum by developing a compelling vision for the change effort that sticks
Recommendation 3:	Involve the right people to communicate and reinforce the vision
Recommendation 4:	Align day-to-day organizational life with the new vision (and stop behavior that interferes with that alignment)
Recommendation 5:	Independently sustain and institutionalize the vision
Recommendation 6:	Orchestrate, reward and celebrate small successes
Recommendation 7:	Evaluate, titrate and recalibrate the change effort

A full discussion of all seven recommendations can be found elsewhere (Golom, 2015), but two merit review here, both because of their importance in creating and sustaining change and because they often need to be customized to fit the mission and culture of a particular institution in order to be successful. First, the initial step of any change initiative is to create a sense of urgency. According to the literature, urgency serves to build the necessary momentum and readiness for change to occur, and is often achieved by surfacing dissatisfaction with the status quo (Burke, 2017). How that dissatisfaction is surfaced, however, can take on different meanings for different constituent groups and different campuses. The task for D&I practitioners is to

define urgency for their institution in a way that is likely to resonate with the mission of the organization and its members. For example, at a recent workshop where the above recommendations were presented, one participant commented that he had been showing demographic data to faculty and administrators for years to no avail. He consistently highlighted the dearth of minority faculty and staff compared to changing student demographics, yet he saw no increased motivation to change beyond those already motivated.

Based on experience, this is not an uncommon phenomenon or complaint, and one that occasionally devolves into a discussion of all that is ‘wrong’ with the people who just “do not get” the data. It may be more useful, though, to consider the meaning of that data in context. Although data are particularly helpful with respect to capturing and evaluating the progress of any change work, they are not uniformly instrumental in persuading individuals to action, particularly those who do not use data regularly or who may have trouble seeing the story behind the information (Dowd, Bensimon & Witham, 2016). To use data unartfully with these individuals is a risk from an urgency perspective, and may require either technical assistance or a reframe on the use of data from a psychological perspective. D&I practitioners, who are able to see the story in their institutional data, would benefit from thinking about the cognitive and emotional reactions those data generate, and then considering alternate methods for bringing about the same reactions in those who are not data friendly (e.g., student narratives, intergroup dialogues). Alternatively, The Center for Urban Education uses an interactive program called the Benchmarking Equity and Student Success Tool (BESST) that is designed to help faculty and administrators illuminate the ‘story’ behind the data for those unaccustomed to working with such information (Dowd, Bensimon & Witham, 2016). Regardless of the approach used, from an urgency perspective, it is important to note that not all data are equal nor are they equally compelling. In most cases, the data alone are not creating a sense of urgency. What creates urgency is how the data make individuals feel.

Second, although urgency is in effect the sine qua non of any change initiative, urgency by itself is insufficient and generally unsustainable, as it often relies on crises cycling through the system at predictable intervals to rebuild momentum. If one wishes to guide D&I work beyond a reactive and event-based approach, urgency must be translated into a compelling and strategic vision for moving forward that is reinforced at all levels of the organization. From an equity perspective, clear goals and objectives are essential (Dowd, Bensimon & Witham, 2016). A well-articulated and thoughtful vision offers organizational members an end state toward which they can guide their various initiatives. Furthermore, research is clear about the powerful effects of goal-setting on motivation and performance (Locke & Latham, 2002). A compelling vision offers a superordinate goal that can help keep diverse constituencies aligned and unified over the course of a change effort, which is at times bound to be nonlinear, chaotic and full of ostensibly competing agendas (Burke, 2017).

Several recent examples illustrate the power of a strategic vision and the detrimental effects of its absence. For instance, religiously-affiliated institutions often struggle with the inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) and other queer-identified students, faculty and staff. One potential way through these struggles is to explicitly link queer change efforts to the religious mission of the institution, often by citing religiously-based values associated with community, justice and service to the disadvantaged or the underserved (Golom, 2015).

Although certain segments of the campus may bristle at such a deliberate connection, scholars suggest that embedding diversity work into an institution's pre-existing mission, culture or strategy ensures that it is much more likely to be successful (Thomas, 2004).

Along these lines, it may be helpful to consider examples from the student demands mentioned earlier, which originated from campus uprisings against racial injustice. In the spring of 2015, students of color at one university gathered in solidarity with antiracist demonstrations across the nation. Part of the gathering involved sharing painful experiences of racial microaggressions on a large banner. The statements written on the banner were disturbing and gut-wrenching, and were made available far and wide across the campus. On the one hand, these statements certainly created a sense of urgency among university faculty and administrators, including individuals for whom D&I concerns were not typically top of mind. On the other hand, that sense of urgency occurred without a larger, campus-wide conversation about a strategic plan or vision for diversity, broadly defined, moving forward. Instead, the students demanded, and the administration consented, to a number of individual-level programmatic initiatives that have repeatedly been shown to have mixed empirical support in the literature, including mandatory diversity training focused on a narrow definition of diversity (Kulik, Roberson & Tan, 2013). More than two years later, that training has only been piloted in portions of the campus, and the sense of urgency that many thought would bring about real change appears to have lessened, especially as many of those originally involved have graduated or exited the institution.

In some ways, this outcome is not surprising. As Dowd, Bensimon and Witham note (2016), "instead of thinking about equity as a 'targeted strategy' that can be achieved through one particular office or program, institutions should approach equity as a normative standard for all aspects of the institution, from resource allocation to assessment to strategic planning." In other words, successful equity work requires whole system change, and that requires shifting the overall culture of higher education by: (a) attending to the larger context of the change effort (e.g., sense of urgency); (b) linking individual-level behavior and higher-level organizational factors (e.g., day-to-day organizational behavior with clear change visions, objectives and goals); and (c) considering how programs and interventions can be strategically aligned to shift the organization's implicit norms and assumptions about the kinds of people and issues to which it has traditionally attended.

Unfortunately, this is a process that, by its nature, can only occur slowly and over time. Culture change may be the ultimate goal of any systemic change effort, but practitioners are often unsuccessful changing culture by directly trying to change it (Burke, 2017; Lorsch & McTague, 2016). Instead, culture change is often achieved by envisioning the behaviors needed to bring about new cultural norms and values, and then slowly reinforcing those behaviors through altered performance evaluations, incentive structures and decisional authority (Lorsch & McTague, 2016) until equity and inclusion become "pervasive" features of organizational life (Dowd, Bensimon & Witham, 2016).

A Systems Caveat

The examples, blueprints and recommendations mentioned above and summarized in Tables 1 and 2 are important illustrations of what a systems lens on D&I work entails, and their inclusion

at the end of this article is meant to provide specific and helpful illustrations for some of the principles covered. Yet, if one is truly thinking systemically, a list of specific actions that can be taken to produce change misses the very essence of the nature of organizational systems; it is inherently better to help individuals understand the general rules and principles that underlie a system's behavior than to produce a list of acontextual, ahistorical and frozen-in-time actions that should always be taken or always demand attention. Helping organizations and individuals shift their paradigms, mindsets and models toward thinking systemically is a better leverage point for creating change than any one specific intervention (Meadows, 2008). A list of reactive, event-driven and strategically void initiatives can never additively produce total system change.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to offer an organizational systems perspective on the state of D&I efforts in higher education. I argue that many of our efforts at diversity and inclusion fail because they do not make whole system change the target of those efforts. I further suggest that those interested in making academia more inclusive for a variety of underrepresented groups consider how attending to the context, levels and systems surrounding individual events and behavior can enhance their work. To that end, the alternate conversations included in the article are meant to complement our existing approaches to increasing access, equity and inclusion in higher education, to emphasize that those approaches are often static while systems are not, and to expand the conversation we have been recently having in a more dynamic and productive way. Adopting these conversations is not a magic bullet for the success of any diversity and inclusion initiative, nor is it easy. However, to continue to stay at the level of individual interventions is to be complicit with the organizational system in maintaining the status quo, resisting change and allowing the culture of the university to remain unscathed. That may appease different individuals and social groups at different points in time, but it will never offer many of us in higher education the diverse and inclusive future we seek.

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Strategic Planning to Advance Equity on Campus: A Case Study at Portland State University

Marisa Zapata, Stephen Percy, and Sona Andrews

Abstract

Propelled by many factors, including a newly appointed Board of Trustees responsible for governance of our university, resource shortages, and enrollment swings, Portland State University embarked on a strategic planning effort in 2014 with the intent of reunifying a divided campus and creating a bold vision for moving forward in the next five years. While committed from the start to goals of diversity and inclusion, the planning process itself generated greater awareness of and commitment to equity—a bolder vision of empowerment that creates a responsibility to understand and mitigate negative, but often unintended consequences of, campus decisions and action—particularly as they impact groups that have experienced institutional racism and injustice. Equity emerged not only as a goal, with attendant initiatives for action, but also as a commitment to conscientious ongoing attention to decision-making that embraces utilization of an equity lens.

Key Words: justice; empowerment; equity lens; unity

Introduction

One would be hard-pressed to find any university that does not have, or is not currently developing, a strategic plan. Such plans help an organization define its vision, mission, values and priorities. A plan provides an organizational North Star and outlines measurable goals. If done well, a strategic plan is a useful tool for not only large-scale change, but also to guide an organization's day-to-day decisions, ensure accountability, and evaluate progress. Often, strategic plans and their execution fall short of expectations. Individuals often feel time and money were spent, but they are skeptical that little will change and it will be business as usual. Portland State University's (PSU) recent strategic planning process and plan implementation is an example of how a well-executed planning process pushed a university to better define its awareness of and commitment to equity as a strategic priority of the institution. This article describes the state of governance; enrollment, budget and campus climate leading into PSU's strategic planning process. That is followed by an explanation of the use of an equity lens. We conclude with the implementation of the equity lens and reflection on the process.

Backdrop for PSU's Strategic Planning Process

Portland State University had an opportunity in 2014 to create a new strategic plan. The last comprehensive strategic planning process was completed in 2011, culminating in a 2011-2015 Strategic Plan. It was time, based on the traditional five-year strategic planning cycle, to create a new plan. More importantly, PSU had experienced significant changes in governance, enrollment, state support and campus climate since the 2011-2015 plan's inception

(described in the sections below). These changes made it imperative for the campus to comprehensively review its position, consider its unique value proposition and brand, and create a strategic plan relevant and appropriate to its future.

Participants in various strategic planning sessions, including those organized for varied campus stakeholder groups, were asked questions to get at the branding dimension. This included questions and conversation about what makes PSU unique and for what qualities and achievements does PSU seek to be known for in the local and higher education communities. The vision statement created for the strategic plan captures much of our aspiration: “Portland State University leads the way to an equitable and sustainable future through academic excellence, urban engagement, and expanding opportunity for all.”

Governance

Prior to 2013, Portland State University was one of seven public universities in the Oregon University System (OUS). In 2013, the legislature passed Senate Bill 80 (Oregon Legislature 2013), establishing independent governing boards for Oregon’s Public Universities. PSU’s Board was vested by law with the power and authority to govern the University and to exercise all powers and authority of the University as set forth in the laws of the State of Oregon.

The new Board directed PSU President Wim Wiewel, in the fall of 2014, to initiate a campus-wide discussion about PSU's strategic directions, resulting in a new strategic plan. The Board’s resolution stated (PSU Board of Trustees 2014), “The plan should be completed by the end of the 2014-15 academic year, or early fall 2015 at the latest, and should be a high-level strategic plan rather than a detailed work plan. The plan should build on PSU's historical role and strength and its current vision and mission.” The Board made clear its wishes to be involved in the planning process through representation, regular updates, and consultation.

Enrollment and State Support

A look into enrollment trends and state support help tell part of the story of what was occurring at PSU over the past decade or half a decade. PSU saw an increase in student enrollment of 20,026 to 29,818 from 2010 to 2016. This growth in new students was intentional as a result of PSU’s urban access mission, but done at a time of great fluctuations in state funding (figure 1).

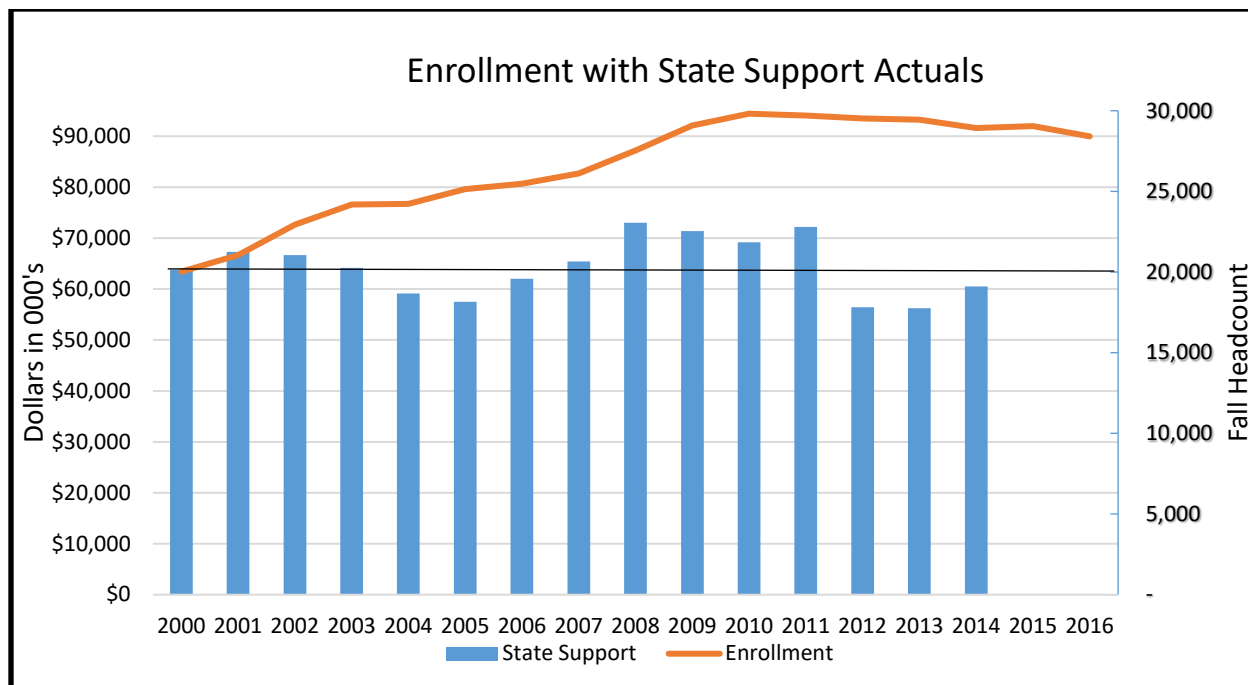


Figure 1.

The lack of predictability in state funding, and the growth and later subsequent flat or declining enrollment, created significant challenges for the university. The university also saw a change in the ethnicity of students in the five years leading up to a new strategic planning effort. This was a purposeful effort by the university as part of our urban serving mission and recognition of the changing demographics in our region. The growth in students who identified with an ethnic minority (figure 2) increased 33% from 2010 (5,710 students) to 2014 (7,643 students).

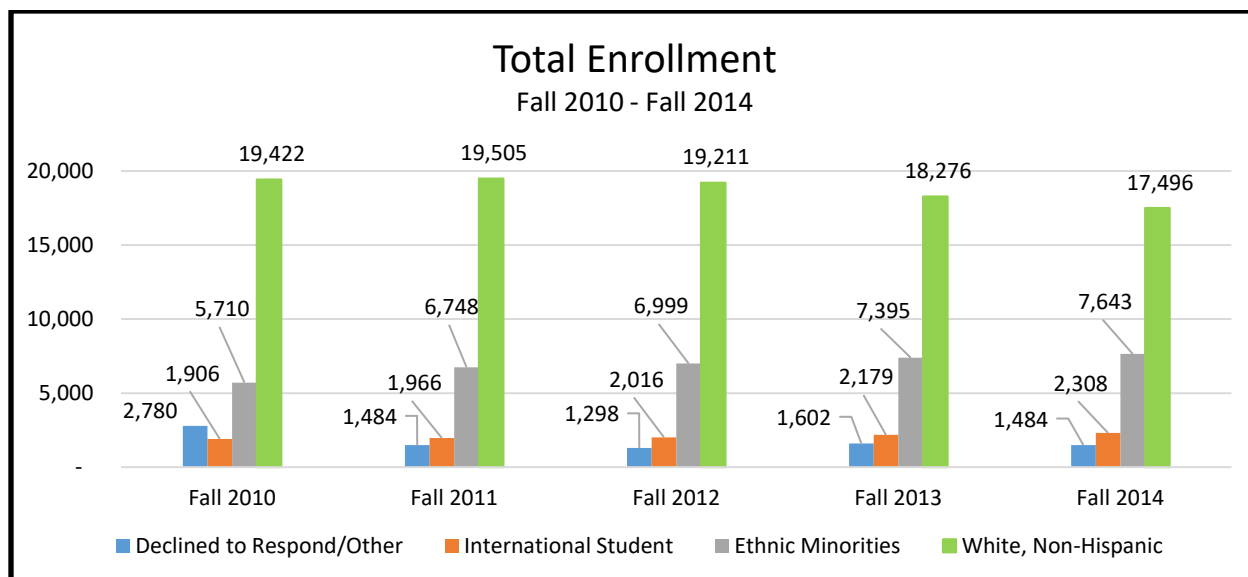


Figure 2.

Campus Climate

Morale on the PSU campus was at a low in the winter of 2014. The University had to make budget reductions due to declining enrollment, state funding levels at an all-time low in 2012 and 2013, and increased operational costs. The campus administration and the PSU Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAUP) were in the midst of very protracted collective bargaining negotiations. There were differing opinions about shared governance roles and understanding of the budget. The administration and union came to an impasse during the negotiations and the PSU AAUP membership voted to strike. The contract was settled before a strike occurred, but it signaled a level of campus disharmony between faculty, staff and the administration.

It was not clear what the underlying differences and goals were among faculty, staff, students and administrators. The 2014 strategic planning process was seen as a vehicle to create a collective set of values and vision for the university and improve campus climate. There was significant concern, even skepticism, that a planning effort would unite the university or would tear us more apart. The need to mitigate those concerns led to an intentional planning process from inception through implementation—one aimed at bringing the campus together through an inclusive and authentic process.

One Voice, One Plan

The Board of Trustees resolution stated, “The plan should be developed with involvement from internal and external constituencies such as the Faculty Senate, Student Senate, represented and unrepresented employee groups, the PSU Foundation and alumni association, and key external stakeholders.” The university administration publicly committed that the process would be defined by open communication, high involvement, transparency, and a drive toward alignment. A large convening of faculty, staff, and student representatives and administrator took place and there was agreement that we needed to improve relations and work together. In spring 2014, 85 people, including faculty, staff, students, administrative leaders, and Trustees convened to take a unifying first step in developing PSU's next strategic plan. The collaborative structure of the day was “an important early precedent for how the plan will be developed in the months ahead.” Participants were provided with an Immersion Toolkit (PSU Toolkit 2015) to access relevant information and questions.

The strategic planning effort was organized through the President’s Office with direct involvement throughout the process by President Wiewel, administrators, faculty, staff, students, alumni and members of the Board. Coraggio Group, a Portland-based consulting firm with significant higher education experience, was selected to facilitate the planning process. The university hired a project manager to support the extensive administrative and coordinating efforts of the planning process.

Creating Diversity in Leading Planning Efforts

A diverse, 30-member Strategic Planning Development Team (SPDT) was created to provide overall guidance to the development of the new strategic plan. Careful attention was given to

determining the membership of the committee to create as diverse as possible membership, with diversity reflecting stakeholder groups, demographic composition (including race, ethnicity, and gender), and experiences in university life. The Team was led by a dean, and included faculty (tenured, tenure-track, non-tenure track, and adjuncts), staff, unions, graduate and undergraduate students, administrators, a member of the Board of Trustees, and alumni. This group met every two weeks for two hours over several months and took its leadership charge very seriously, overseeing both process and the development of the evolving strategic planning document.

Six-months into the process another set of teams, what we termed “Topic Team,” were created. They were given responsibility to create reports on the findings and recommendations around eight key themes that had emerged in a variety of listening and conversation sessions. The eight themes included: Student Learning and Academic Success; Innovative Research, Scholarship & Creative Activity; Equity, Opportunity and Access; Campus Climate; Faculty Roles & Structure; Organizational Excellence and Financial Stability; and Global Excellence. Each topic team included members of the SPDT in addition to many other members of the campus community reflecting diverse roles within the university.

Still later in the process during the summer term, a Writing Team was created to craft a preliminary draft of the plan based upon the work, idea generation, and synthesis that took place during the academic year. The team was composed of the SPDT chair, two faculty members, two staff, and three students. The preliminary draft was shared with the strategic planning development team and campus community for comment and revision to in the ensuing fall term. The plan was completed and approved by the Board of Trustees in December 2015.

A key element of the strategic planning process was extensive outreach. Multiple strategies were used to gain both input about elements important to the plan, as well as to emerging goals and actions. These efforts included presentations and consultation with governance groups including the faculty and student senates, listening sessions with other campus groups (e.g., meetings with department chairs, collective bargaining unions), open town hall meetings to which all members of the campus community were invited, and a web-based program to receive input. Perhaps our most innovative, and fun, outreach method was “strategic ice cream,” two events created primarily to reach the campus student body. At these events, a large-scale rendering of evolving strategic plan elements was presented. Students were invited to place notations on plan elements and then were given coupons to obtain a free ice cream cone at the adjacent Ben & Jerry’s (a social enterprise preparing youth from disadvantaged backgrounds about employment, leadership, and entrepreneurship). Over 800 students participated in one or both ice cream events.

These outreach activities provided opportunity for thousands of people to participate in the strategic planning process. In total, there were 3,802 official comments recorded during the planning process (870, students, 469 faculty, 438 staff and administrators, 142 alumni and community members, and 1883 who did not identify). This outreach was designed to provide multiple opportunities for people to become involved and specifically sought out opportunities to interact with as many members of the campus community as possible. It covered campus interest in delving deeper into equity, privilege and fairness of outcomes.

The University spent 14 months to create the new strategic plan. The use of an equity lens was a defining part of the planning process, the plan and its implementation.

Adoption of an Equity Lens in Campus Strategic Planning

Toward the start of the strategic planning process, with the membership of the Strategic Planning Development Team (SPDT) identified, the planning process was launched. This included meetings with campus constituencies. Early in these conversations, a faculty colleague in the School of Social Work, Dr. Charlotte Goodluck (a colleague who exemplified a life-long dedication to social justice and healing), asked a question which caught the planning team a bit off-guard: “Were we intending to use an equity lens as we embarked on our strategic planning endeavor?” While the School of Social Work was already using such a lens in its own strategic planning, the concept was not widely understood or appreciated by the SPDT or the consultants engaged in the process. After further conversations where participants came to better understand the concept of equity lens, consensus emerged that we should indeed broaden our planning work to explicitly employ an equity lens.

The positive response to Dr. Goodluck’s question could have been anticipated. Portland State has a long history of community engagement, consistent with its motto: “Let Knowledge Serve the City.” The lion’s share of this engagement focused on advancing life quality, public policy and governance in Portland and Oregon, and much of this work included a social justice dimension. In addition, the concept of responding to inequality was sweeping across the community at the time strategic planning at PSU began. This community attention grew, in large measure, from a report by PSU’s Professor Anne Curry-Stevens, Senior Research Assistant, Amanda Cross-Hemmer, and the Coalition of Communities of Color which dramatically highlighted substantial disparities between whites and people of color in the county in which the City of Portland is located. This report found that, “Today in Multnomah County, too many people of color face severe social and economic exclusion” (Curry-Stevens, Cross-Hemmer, and Coalition of Communities of Color, 2010: 6).

The propensity to endorse the use of an equity lens in campus strategic planning was also fostered by the recognition that local governments in the area were already at work using an equity lens (for example Multnomah County’s Equity and Empowerment Lens and City of Portland Racial Equity Goals and Strategies). The work of these governments provided insight to the creation and application of an equity lens. Similarly, the region’s largest philanthropic foundation, after suspending grants for a year of introspection, reorganized its entire giving program around the concept of equity. The Meyer Memorial Trust’s mission was reestablished in 2016 to become: “Grounded in a vision of a flourishing and equitable Oregon, Meyer is committed to investing in change at the systemic level to ease inequities and disparities.” See <https://mmt.org/>. Finally, and importantly, campus community members recognized that Oregon’s record in race relations has often not been a positive one. A recent article recognized Portland’s progressive reputation, but also noted this reputation ignores the fact that “racism has been entrenched in Oregon, maybe more than any state in the north, for nearly two centuries” (Semuels, 2016). Many faculty at PSU were committed to undoing injustice and expanding the community’s progressive reputation to include equity and positive race relations.

From Commitment to Equity Lens Development

Fortunate for the campus, extensive expertise regarding utilization of an equity lens was available both among faculty colleagues as well as leaders in public and nonprofit organizations in the greater Portland region. The first step in moving forward was identifying members of an Equity Lens Team that would guide the creation and application of such a lens as an integral component of the strategic planning process. The team was composed of faculty across the campus who had expertise with equity issues and who themselves represented substantial diversity, along with a representative from Multnomah County government. Multnomah County, in which the City of Portland is located, is a leader in creating and utilizing an equity lens in policy making.

As this new team commenced conversations, a critical question arose: how should we focus the equity lens? On the one hand, this work often targets the realm of populations of people who have been traditionally marginalized in American society and governance. The university has a responsibility to serve, support, and empower faculty, staff, and students from all such marginalized groups. On the other hand, it was recognized that race is a pernicious and long-standing source of marginalization. It was argued that including race together with all other marginalized populations would dilute attention from the persistent impact of race on equity and social justice. After further conversations, it was decided that we would form two parallel and interacting Equity Lens Teams, one focused directly upon race, the other attuned to marginalization of people based upon gender, ability, LGBT, veteran status, and tribal sovereignty. This two-team strategy was intended to ensure focused attention upon race as an equity imperative, but also include other forms of marginalization that have reduced opportunities and bred discrimination.

The next step to implement the equity lens into strategic planning was to create a guide to instruct participants about the intent and practice of using the lens. Our guiding document for using an equity lens in campus strategic planning can be found at:
https://www.pdx.edu/president/sites/www.pdx.edu.president/files/Strategic%20Planning%20Equity%20Lens_FINAL%20-%20May%202012.pdf.

This guide borrows heavily from the Multnomah County *Equity and Empowerment Lens* and from *the Protocol for Culturally Responsive Organizations* by Ann Curry-Stevens, Marie-Elena Reyes & the Coalition of Communities of Color. This work in creating such a guide was handled by an 11-member team composed of campus and community representatives. The guide laid out several “guiding principles” for using an equity lens:

1. PSU has a commitment to erase racial disparities in society and advance social justice.
2. At PSU, equity is given the same emphasis as other university priorities.
3. PSU is committed to ensuring that its Strategic Plan reflects the interests of those most affected by our decisions: our students, their future employers, and the service users, customers and/or communities they will ultimately serve. We endeavor to support all students to reach their fullest potential and wellbeing.

4. PSU is cautious of making decisions on behalf of marginalized communities and aims to directly include these communities and their advocates wherever practical. Decisions to not include these stakeholders need to be justified.
5. PSU aims to create a strategic plan, and the processes that lead up to it, that maximizes the benefits for communities of color and for other marginalized communities.

The guide also provided a list of questions that should be considered during planning and decision. Together, utilization of these questions and their answers represents application of an equity lens. These questions included the following:

People

- Who is affected—positively, negatively, or not at all—by the elements of this part of the strategic plan and what are the specific advantages and/or barriers to each group?
- How have we considered environmental justice in this (initiative/plan element)— that is, how will these initiatives support the rights of all people to live in a healthy environment?
- How have we adequately ensured that our operational processes are inclusive, and that the elements of the process have not created barriers to meaningful participation?
- Which stakeholder groups would we like to have included but were unable to facilitate?

Place

- Based on PSU's social, physical, and cultural location, how does this process compensate for access limitations of various stakeholder groups?
- How have we modified our process to support access by marginalized community stakeholders?

Process

- How does this (initiative/plan element) foster the development of processes that address barriers to inclusion and contribute to the development of community capacity?
- How are our processes supporting the empowerment of communities historically most affected by inequities?
- How are processes ensuring that participants' emotional and physical safety needs are addressed?
- How are processes supporting participants' need to be productive and feel valued?
- How are our processes building ongoing community capacity for involvement with PSU (beyond the strategic planning process) by those communities historically most affected by inequities?
- How are we using this opportunity to contribute to the leadership development of those from marginalized communities?
- What types of biases have influenced the work of the groups and how have these been identified and addressed?
- What improvements to team processes can you support for naming and identifying unaddressed bias?
- What have we learned about effective empowerment practice that we recommend being continued by PSU in other program and initiative development processes?
- What recommendations do we suggest for the future work of PSU?

Power

- How will this (initiative/plan element) support the empowerment of people from historically marginalized communities?
- What are the specific ways that this (initiative/plan element) is expected to reduce disparities and advance social justice?

The guide concluded with a description of how implementation and documentation should be conducted as well as a set of definitions for key concepts related to equity and social justice.

Organizing Processes to Incorporate an Equity Lens into Planning

With both a commitment and guide to practice in place, the next step was to infuse use of the equity lens into the overall strategic planning process. This was accomplished in multiple ways.

1. The Strategic Development Planning Team received instruction on the purpose and application of the lens, with the expectation that discussions and decisions would be informed by application of the equity lens as outlined in the guide.
2. The eight Topic Teams were trained in the utilization of the lens and instructed in templates provided to record their recommendations to include equity-based considerations related to each proposed recommendation.
3. One of the eight Topic Teams was organized expressly around equity, opportunity and access. This team embraced the full meaning of the equity lens and focused on strategies that would strengthen the capacity and impact of the university to consistently and persistently pursue equity and social justice.
4. The two Equity Lens Teams—one focused on race and the other on other marginalized groups—reviewed the work of the SPDT and the Topic Teams as work was done to design recommendations for the Strategic Plan. The teams, therefore, represented a second-level equity lens consideration of decisions and recommendations created during the planning process.

It is useful to note that this approach represented both horizontal and vertical application of the equity lens. While one team looked specifically at focused strategies to promote equity and justice (the vertical dimensions), all other teams were expected to consider equity issues in the specific areas they were exploring (the horizontal dimension).

Using the Equity Lens in Practice

While intentions were good, implementation of the equity lens work was a challenge. We were imperfect, we struggled with sufficiently embedding the equity lens consistently at all stages of the planning process, and mistakes were made. We tried to be flexible, respond to concerns, and modify planning processes and timelines as appropriate.

While faculty and staff were pleased to see the creation of the Equity Lens Teams, the members of the teams expressed frustration at the fact that the Lens was created well into the development of the plan. Nearly all the members of the two teams were from historically marginalized

communities, and knew well the possibilities of tokenization. Still, the team members also saw the opportunity to integrate equity thinking into the PSU strategic plan for the first time. Concerns were expressed to the Writing Team that in turn responded in detail about what could be changed mid-process and what could not be changed, an important step in process transparency. In particular, the Equity Teams pushed to have the timeline for writing the plan delayed so that the equity work could be better integrated into the planning process. While the time line could not be extended for long, the Writing Team did pause any decisions about specific initiatives until the Equity Lens teams were able to fully organize and review documents. The Project Support Team, in response to the concerns raised by the Equity Teams, laid out a clear process for the Equity Teams' perspectives and participation would be integrated into the writing process including review processes and guarantees of not finalizing the Writing Team work until the Equity Lens teams were able to review all the components of the plan.

Initially, the two Equity Teams met separately; however, the members realized that several people of color came with intersecting identities and were assigned to the team not focused on race. The team members on the team focused on other historically marginalized groups spoke about their commitment to racial equity. In the end, the groups joined to complete their work. While the groups ended up working jointly for the duration of the process, they agreed it was important to begin their work separately and discuss what it meant to keep racism foregrounded.

The timeline and work plan for the strategic plan presented several challenges for the equity lens teams. First, with much work already completed, the team members faced functioning as equity "police," reviewing work for whether it met the teams' expectations for equity considerations. The team members were not enthusiastic about this role, and worked to offer solutions when they pointed out problems. To accomplish this, the Equity Teams reviewed each set of ideas presented by the other Topic Teams. They then raised questions about the equitableness of the proposed actions. Finally, the teams offered other issues to consider within the given topic area based the teams' knowledge areas. These questions and suggestions were then routed to the topic team or the writing team, and from there included or rejected.

From their work, the Equity Lens teams had significant impact on the final plan. Specific plan elements were modified or changed. For instance, in early plan documents, the Equity, Opportunity and Access Topic Team proposed including study abroad as one of their core actions. The Equity Lens teams discussed that study abroad may be an important goal to further student international experience and expose students to diverse set of people and perspectives. However, study abroad in and of itself was not about equity. The Equity Lens teams proposed moving study abroad to an area outside of the section focused on equity. In the final Strategic Plan, study abroad is discussed under ***Goal 1: Elevating student success.***

Reflecting the vertical and horizontal approach to equity discussed earlier, each topic area also includes a separate set of equity considerations. For instance, under ***Goal 2: Advance excellence in teaching and research***, there are four initiative areas. Equity issues are addressed in three of them including proposed actions such as identifying ways to evaluate teaching that do not rely solely on student course evaluations which research has shown disproportionately negatively rate women and faculty of color, and to ensure research areas that received limited funding opportunities are supported – research areas that often include racial foci. Then, the goal includes

a discussion of general equity concerns that cut across the initiative areas. For instance, the Equity Lens teams proposed: “Consider differentiating PSU in the marketplace by re-branding our scholarly outputs to reflect specific values related to equity, collaboration, and reciprocity—that are community-based and partnership focused” (p. 11).

The New Strategic Plan Addresses Equity

Directly as a result of the attention to equity in our strategic planning process, the final plan itself embraces equity as an ongoing goal of the institution. Further, it commits the campus to using an equity lens in campus decision-making and planning. The plan speaks to equity in the following ways:

1. *Statement of Commitment*: “We commit to equity as a foundation of PSU’s excellence. We define equity as ensuring everyone has access to opportunities necessary to satisfy essential needs, advance their well-being, and achieve their full potential. Our aim is to address the roots of inequities, including but not limited to racism, homophobia, sexism, ableism, classism, and the intersections of these inequities. We commit to inclusion of historically marginalized communities and those underrepresented in higher education. We commit to ensuring that equity is integral to all elements of this plan—in its design, substance, implementation and the metrics used to measure progress.”
2. *One of Four Core Values*: We promote access, inclusion, and equity as pillars of excellence.
3. *Goal 4 of the Plan: Expand Our Commitment to Equity*: Objective: *Create an environment at PSU that is open, inclusive and committed to diversity, and ensure that all students and faculty embrace culturally-responsive teaching and learning.* Three Initiatives of the Goal: (1) Create a more inclusive campus, (2) promote diversity through hiring and retention, and (3) define and measure diversity learning outcomes. Part of this work discusses the development of an equity lens to be used in campus decision-making, and is discussed in more detail elsewhere in this focus issue as well.
4. *Equity Lens Considerations*: Each of the five goals of the plan include an “Equity Lens” section which identifies some key equity issues potentially associated with implementation of the goal. For example, the following equity lens considerations were identified for the *Elevate Student Success Goal* (number one in the plan):
 - a. Recognize that disparities in the retention and graduation rates of underrepresented students necessitate an investment in culturally-responsive advising.
 - b. Support faculty to understand equity issues to foster better relationships with historically marginalized and underrepresented students.
 - c. Develop academic experiences, including community-based learning that use universal design, accessibility and appropriate accommodations to ensure an equitable and inclusive learning experience for all students.

These markers in the new strategic plan demonstrate full embrace of equity as a campus priority and a commitment to sustaining attention to and achievement of greater equity in campus life, learning, collegial relationships, and community engagement.

Lessons Learned, Reflections on Replication

There is a great deal to be learned from the planning process. After the Equity Lens team concluded its work, several members submitted a short “minority report” that detailed reflections, concerns, and lessons for future work on the PSU campus around equity. Based on the authors’ reflections, the Equity Lens team report, and input from other process participants, we offer nine lessons to promote an authentic engagement around equity lenses.

- *Bring in equity at the start.* While the Equity Lens teams believed that the inclusion of equity at any point was a worthwhile activity, the members saw lost opportunities for better equity integration and capacity building across the campus to do equity work. Integrating equity across topic areas where people have not previously thought about equity takes time. Ideally, integration should also include a learning or training component. In some areas, people may not have thought about inequity before. Those individuals must be introduced to the concept of equity, why it matters, and how to identify inequities. Otherwise, campuses risk creating a team of highly specialized equity “police,” and miss the opportunity for all campus members to begin thinking equitably. Incorporating equity early on would also allow participants to develop their own equity lens approach for the consideration of ideas and proposals for the plan.
- *Process transparency.* Participants in planning processes should be able to easily identify how their input was used in a plan. If it was not incorporated, then participants should understand why their ideas, recommendations, or concerns were not included. Generally, those who often asked to do equity work are people from marginalized backgrounds. Their ideas may often be pushed aside or ignored for other ideas offered by people from majority communities. In addition to issues around marginalization, cross-group learning can only occur if people are able to understand how an idea was interpreted, or why it might be better addressed elsewhere. A commitment to this type of transparency provides several logistical issues – namely how to keep track of suggestions, in this case, across writing teams. We suggest using something simple like a spreadsheet where recommendations are logged and how those recommendations are addressed is tracked.
- *Organization and alignment.* If recommendations are to be taken seriously within the plan, then the timeline must include space for equity issues to be considered. Careful organization and scheduling to align preparation of findings and inputs from the equity lens teams into discussions and decision making regarding the contents of the strategic plan must occur. All plans end up off schedule at some time; however, many people underestimate the amount of time applying an equity lens can take when utilizing the tool is new when people are unfamiliar with it.
- *Involving the “right” people.* Questions were raised a number of times during the planning about leadership and participants in process. Efforts were made to be as inclusive and diverse as possible, however, we had to also accept that composition of the university leadership team and the faculty was not as diverse as we would have liked for some of the conversations. By integrating equity thinking earlier into the process, a better

mix of people might have been included in the process. At the same time, sometimes individuals need to learn how to do equity work in smaller groups. If part of the goal of incorporating equity includes building capacity amongst participants new to equity work, then process conveners must think carefully about when and how to bring people together to with different knowledge bases and experiences with equity work. Different people may be the “right” people at different points of the process and the work.

- *Listen and Reflect.* The equity lens does not make decisions for you. Rather, it serves as a guide to think about and consider how equity matters in a particular decision. Those people who commit themselves to equity work can offer significant insights into the inequities surrounding a decision. For those less familiar with equity issues in general or the specific equity concerns for a given topic or community, the most important thing to do is to listen carefully to what the lens reveals and reflect on the solutions that are being proposed.
- *Difficult Conversations:* Opening the door to authentic conversation about equity means that opportunities are made available to people from traditionally marginalized groups to tell their story, report on experiences with discrimination and injustice. These conversations may be difficult in the sense that emotion, anger, and vehement reflections can emerge (Patterson et. al. 2012). Such conversations should be encouraged and supported; those whose background has afforded privilege need to listen to and learn from the experiences of their colleagues who have experienced oppression.
- *Explicit Attention to Process:* One area where those organizing the strategic planning process fell short was in carefully weaving equity lens consideration and review into the process. As we worked to accommodate many timelines, working groups, and stakeholders, there were times when we did not sufficiently include within the planning process the opportunity of the equity lens teams to review emerging findings and recommendations. While unintentional, these process failures raised substantial concerns among equity team members who became concerned that our intention was not authentic and whether work was truly valued in the process. While we overcame most of these concerns, they could have been avoided if we had been more attuned to including the equity teams consistently and explicitly throughout the process.
- *Timelines:* Equity work takes time. When that equity work is new to participants, it will take even more time. Plan to go off the time schedule. Part of authentic and good equity work requires working through racial bias, known and unknown. Equity work demands that new data be examined, and difficult conversations be had. Inclusive processes include flexible timelines (Quick and Feldman, 2011). Unfortunately, the PSU strategic plan process timeline was not radically adapted to accommodate the thorough equity work many of us could envision. While the Equity Lens teams, as well as the writing team, worked hard given their time frame, more and better work, especially around building long-term capacity for equity work, could have occurred.
- *Bring in Expertise when it is Lacking:* The PSU campus was fortunate to have a number of people with experience in developing and using equity lenses. This took on additional

importance as the consulting firm confirmed that they were not experienced in addressing equity issues. If campus expertise is lacking in applying an equity lens, and if you cannot identify a strategic plan consulting firm with equity experience, we recommend bringing in additional outside support to ensure equity fully infuses your plan.

Implementation

Once the PSU Strategic Plan 2016-20 was finalized and given approval by the Board of Trustees, the real task began: taking action to implement and assess progress toward strategic goals. Responsibility for organizing implementation of Goal 4 of the Strategic Plan was vested in the 80-member Diversity Action Council (DAC) composed of a diverse array of faculty, staff and administrators. The work of the Council is supported by the campus office of Global Diversity and Inclusion. Taking its responsibility seriously, the DAC has crafted a new diversity action plan for the campus, known as the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Plan. The title change was intended to identify our commitment to equity as well as to diversity and inclusion. The plan includes a variety of strategic actions intended to advance the individual goals in the plan.

An important element of implementation will be supporting faculty, staff, and students across the full array of campus units to utilize an equity lens in decision making and planning. Our approach is not to project one standard plan for people to follow. Instead, individual units are encouraged to create their own equity lens, appropriate the realm and impact of decisions made by the unit. To support each units' development of an equity lens tool, the Office of Global Diversity and Inclusion developed a guide to walk them through the process of creating an equity lens (Zapata Forthcoming). The guide, written broadly for institutes of higher education, includes an overview of what an equity lens is, and provides a sample lens and questions to consider for each part of the lens. Two real-life examples from applying an equity lens are included in the report, one from the PSU strategic plan process described in this article, and the other from a Portland local government. The guide provides five hypothetical examples for using the lens drawn from decisions and activities commonly conducted on university and college campuses. As our work at PSU moves forward, we are excited to track how the equity lens is used and informs campus decision-making, another key initiative area from the strategic plan.

Conclusion

Portland State's experience in using an equity lens as an integral component of strategic planning represents an early adoption of the use of an equity lens approach to advancing inclusion and equitable outcomes. Signs are afoot of awareness in other universities about the value of explicit attention to equity as a fundamental component of strategic planning in higher education. Evidence of this assertion can be found in multiple quarters including Grand Valley State University's *Strategic Plan for Inclusion and Equity* (n.d.), the *Strategic Planning for Equity, Inclusion and Diversity* Toolkit published by the University of California-Berkeley (n.d.), and presentations at multiple universities about equity lens applications (for example, a presentation by Equity Alliance of the North Coast (n.d.) entitled "Advancing Equity Through a Racial Lens: Putting Theory into Action at Humboldt State University).

At Portland State, we have found utilization of an equity lens to substantially advance awareness of and attention to equity in strategic planning. We hope that our experience may be useful to others. Our next step, one to which we are committed but which will require sustained energy, is utilizing an equity lens on an ongoing basis to inform decisions and policy making at our university. We believe commitment to and evaluation of this equity lens work will help us demonstrate what effective work to advance equity looks like, something we hope will inform university practices around the country.

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Lessons Learned About Inclusion While Starting a New College

Michelle D. Jones

Abstract

Starting a college from scratch presents a unique opportunity to think about how to build an inclusive learning environment from the beginning by selecting people and strategies that do not carry the weight of the traditional academic model and its prejudices and assumptions about who belongs and who does not. This article documents the lessons learned in the first two years of a new college and presents some next steps.

Keywords: alternative college; innovative; new college; startup college

Some Disclaimers

I want to start with an acknowledgment that I am a white woman from an upper middle class background who went to a traditional private liberal arts college designed for people like me and who has a Ph.D. So, as I grapple with the goal of gaining understanding in the realm of diversity, equity, and inclusion, I am relying on listening to other people's experiences and doing the best I can to understand them. I am not an expert in this, just someone who cares a lot and who is trying to build a different kind of college to address some big issues in higher education in a way that might nudge change in the entire system.

Starting a college from scratch—Wayfinding Academy—presents a unique opportunity to take all the things I saw in the higher education system that troubled me during my 15 years of working as a faculty member and to try to avoid those pitfalls. Mostly this looks like embedding a lot of intention into every decision, from the very tiny ones to the much bigger ones.

How to create a higher education experience that is inclusive and accessible is a thing I think a lot about, but only recently have I started digging deep into reading books, watching films, and going to trainings on the topic, and requesting that members of our staff and faculty do the same.

One of the deepest core values we have at Wayfinding Academy is that “education is an investment we all share” (<https://wayfindingacademy.org/creed/>), and that everybody should have access to it if it's a step that will help them to do what they want to do with their life. In all our systems and processes, from the moment we meet a prospective student through the moment they graduate, we have to be careful not to make assumptions about who belongs and who doesn't. We've tried to set up the Wayfinding experience so everybody is valued and respected for who they are and what they bring.

In the Beginning

Our students come from all over the country and have lots of experiences they're drawing from. It is important for all students to have someone they feel they can connect to as a mentor, who can understand them and what they're going through, and relate to what they've experienced in life. One of the things I tried to do from the beginning was bring in a team of faculty and staff who have a diversity of lived experiences.

Finding people who have a variety of lived experiences has been a struggle in the early years. When you start something from scratch, you rely a lot on your friends' network and people you've worked with before whose skills and capabilities you're already familiar with. As a white person from an upper middle class background, most of my immediate network was similar to me, so many people on our founding team looked a lot like me and had similar backgrounds. As a result, in the first year of operations we were predominantly white. In our planning meetings, we were having deep conversations about important and complicated issues related to equity and inclusion, but most people sitting in those conversations were white.

Probably because of the way we appeared to people looking in, the first cohort of students we enrolled were all also white. That was not our intention, and not all of the students who applied nor all the students invited were white, but all the students who ended up enrolling were. Even though we have backgrounds in equity, inclusion, and social justice, you couldn't necessarily see that or tell that just from looking at us.

One lesson I learned from this experience is that in addition to holding the values, you also have to look like what you believe. Both are necessary. We had the inclusivity and equity values in place from the very beginning, we talked about this a lot in the early days when founding Wayfinding Academy, and we built the curriculum around it, but to anybody outside looking in, we didn't look like that was what we valued.

The two-year program of study we offer is in Self and Society. The program title means that half of the courses the students take are about who they are as human beings, what they're passionate about, and what they care about. The other half is about society, what's going on in the world, and what the major issues are. We're helping students find the place where those two things come together, so they can figure out how to be of service to the world or their community. Social justice topics are embedded through just about everything we do in the coursework. When I went to hire the founding faculty to teach the first round of courses, I chose people intentionally who had a very strong background in and experience with social justice issues. Many of them were activists or scholars or researchers who had worked in this area for a very long time, so students who came to Wayfinding were surrounded by those conversations from the very beginning.

At the same time, once people came and spent time with us, were in our space, and had conversations with us, the feedback we got was that it felt like a welcoming and inclusive place. So, once we got someone in the building and into the conversation, we were able to break apart that initial perception that we might not be inclusive, or a place for people of diverse backgrounds.

After spending some time reflecting on this and noting these things, we made the decision to be more blatant about putting our values front and center. We did not change anything in terms our recruitment strategy for students or staff and faculty members—we still posted our openings in the same places and reached out to the same community organizations, but we started putting our Statement of Diversity and Justice on everything we put out publicly. It reads:

We believe that diverse backgrounds and perspectives are not simply ideal, but critical to the Wayfinding Academy, the movement to re-imagine higher education, and to the students we serve. We believe that justice is an active pursuit, not a passive stance. As such, we place special emphasis on candidates from underrepresented racial, ethnic, religious, gender association, sexual orientation, economic, (dis)ability, and cultural backgrounds which will increase the diversity of our organization and help us strive toward justice on those (and other) fronts.

Wayfinding Academy does not discriminate on the basis of race, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, gender expression, genetic information, religion, national origin, disability, previous military service or any other protected category in the admission of students, employment, access or treatment in its programs and activities or the administration of its educational and employment policies.

How it is Going Now

Our second year is looking a bit better. Of our six most recent hires, three were people of color and two were people with a disability. In our second cohort of students, 29% are students of color and 23% are students who identify as non-gender, non-binary or transgender (see Supplementary Figure 1). We now look like we match the values we have held from the beginning in a way that feels authentic, yet we still feel that we have a ways to go.

We get a lot of feedback now that, when people come to visit us, it feels like a place where they can truly be themselves and feel like they belong. I've heard that both from staff members and from students who are reflecting on places they've been before that did not feel that way. Most of our students—80% of them—have gone to a traditional higher education institution before they came to Wayfinding and one of the reasons they left those institutions was because they didn't feel like it was serving them and helping them get to their next steps. Put another way, it wasn't treating them like a whole human being with recognition of their talents and differences. They didn't feel they could just be themselves, they felt they had to fit into a box or some predetermined notion of what a “good” college student is like.

Another thing we do is make sure our pedagogy matches our values. We don't say that the only way to be a good Wayfinding student is to be able to write really good essays. Students are sometimes asked to write things, but often they are given the freedom to do a project in whatever format works the best for them. So, if writing is not their preferred or strongest mode of communicating their ideas, they can make a video, podcast, play, interpretive dance or

something else they come up with. We try not to make assumptions about what it looks like to be smart, or engaged, or able to demonstrate mastery of course material. In this way, we can treat each student as an individual and as a whole human being.

Finally, one of the things we try to do is embed these conversations everywhere. It is a thing we think about and talk about every day, not just at designated times. We start this with students during Orientation week where we give them a “scarf of inclusion” and let them know that if they ever feel excluded, or pick up on one of their cohort-mates being excluded, they should wear the scarf to remind us. We continue the conversation with students in the core courses and Guide Groups, and we weave it into our weekly crew meetings and quarterly Board meetings. We don’t try to steer clear of the hard conversations, we lean into them.

One thing I think about a lot these days is the motto of Dennis Littky, founder of The Met High School in Providence, Rhode Island, and later the Big Picture Learning Schools across the country. He has long said that he believes education should be “one student at a time.” He built his entire model on the concept of treating each student as an individual, meeting them where they're at, and helping them get from where they are now to where they're trying to be (Littky & Grabelle, 2004). Policies, procedures, and statements of nondiscrimination are foundational elements, which need to be in place, but they are not enough. It takes vigilance and intention to make sure there is a culture of paying attention to each individual student and helping them in their own individual journey. And this is probably the way to be as inclusive as possible as a higher education institution.

It is also important to be honest about the challenges that come with this approach. The first few months of our second year has brought some interesting challenges as a result of at least partially achieving our goal of having a more diverse community. We now have more voices at the table and more perspectives represented. This means we all have to learn to see the world from someone else's point of view at least a little bit of the time. This, of course, expands all of our knowledge and our ability to engage with the world in a way that matters. And when you get more diverse perspectives in those conversations, one of the things that comes with that territory is tension and conflict.

We had a few struggles early this year with making sure the conversations are taking place in a way that gives everybody the chance to voice how they feel, even if it's not in line with the majority view in the room. The first course students take with us is Understanding Our World which focuses on how humans have dealt with concept of “difference” over the past 500 years, specifically through the lens of colonialism. There are many complex topics that come up in those conversations, some of which are about the nature of human nature and whether we are inherently good or evil and much of the discussion is about class struggles and race tensions. When our first cohort of students took that class they didn't have a lot of diverse perspectives come up in their conversations because many of them come from similar backgrounds - there are different socioeconomic backgrounds represented in that cohort, but all the students are white and had been raised in the same dominant culture. For our second cohort, which is a more diverse group, when some of those topics came up in class, arguments would sometimes happen. So, lately, we have been having conversations as a community about how to have disagreements

respectfully and recognize and honor others' life experiences and how they influence their perspective.

Now What?

This leaves us with the obvious question: now what? My goal is to build on the foundation we have started and stretch us into the next level of thinking and acting on our values. A few specific things in the works are:

1. The formation of an equity team who participates in a series of workshops to build a common language and understanding, create some additional guidelines and policies for Wayfinding Academy, and puts a longer term strategic equity plan in place. We recently applied for a technical assistance grant to fund the formation of this team.
2. Creating a Civic Engagement and Social Justice track for Wayfinding students who want to focus more on these topics. This track would include taking workshops and trainings specific to these areas, doing internships with organizations focused on these realms, and creating a portfolio full of projects with this focus.
3. Hosting events specifically for communities of color in Portland. For example, when we do our student recruitment events this year, we will have some events that are specifically for prospective students of color and their families.

We still have a way to go to accomplish the goal of being a place that is diverse, treats people equitably, is inclusive of people of different backgrounds and experiences, but we have come a long way in the first two years. And we welcome the tensions and conflicts that will likely come up more regularly as a result of moving more towards that goal. But this is the purpose of higher education and part of the role of a learning community and it's probably essential to the future of our country - and perhaps the world - to be able to have these kinds of conversations with people who have different opinions and experiences than you and do it with compassion.

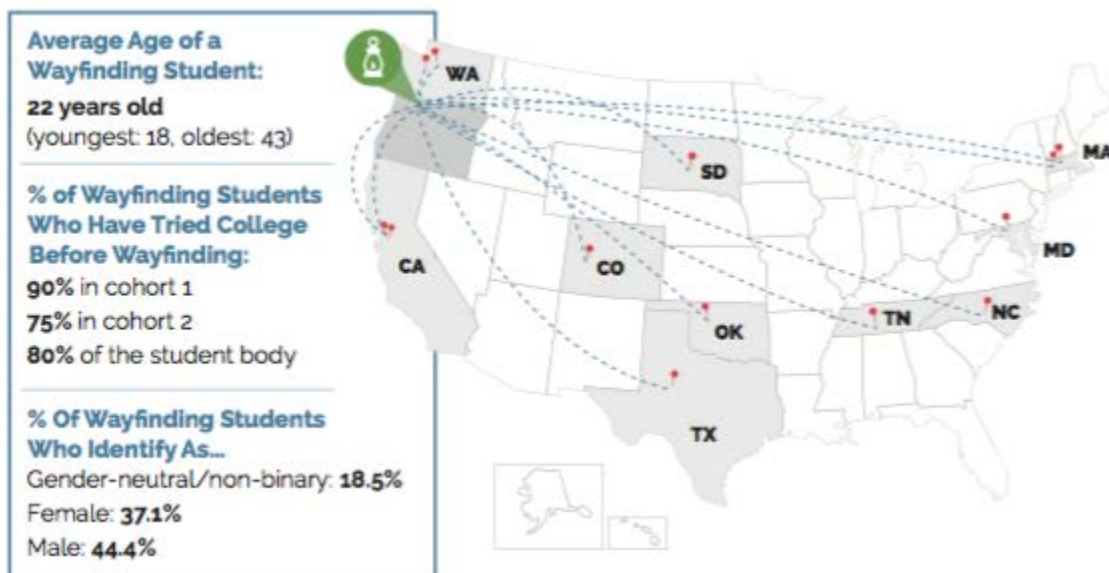


Figure 1: Selected demographics of Wayfinding Academy students.

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Author Information

Michelle Jones is doing her life's work, which is exhilarating and terrifying. During her 15 years teaching Leadership and Organizational Behavior courses in the traditional college system, she had a front row seat for what is broken about that system. About 3 years ago, she gathered a group of like minded folks around a vision of what a revolution in higher education could look like. After years of helping groups and non-profits organize for social impact as a volunteer (SuperThank, TEDxMtHood, World Domination Summit) Michelle started her legacy project and the Wayfinding Academy was born.

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About Wayfinding Academy

Wayfinding Academy is a new two-year college in Portland, OR at the heart of a movement to revolutionize higher education. We believe there's more than one way to do life. And one definition of success is not enough.

The two-year program is anchored by 9 core courses in communication, social change, teamwork, and leadership that will help students on any path. From there, they handcraft their own curriculum with the support of their own personal Guide.

Students get their hands dirty with real-world internships, mentorships, and Learn & Explore trips. All the while, they'll be documenting their experiences and learnings in a portfolio that they can carry with them far beyond college to show the world who they are and what they can do. There are no cookie-cutter tracks. We are humans to be cultivated, not objects to be sorted. It's education by odyssey, with qualified and dedicated Guides helping students choose each next step.

Wayfinding Academy has been approved by the Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Commission to grant Associates Degrees in Self and Society (yes, we're a real college).

Equity, Inclusion, and Beyond: Today's Urban Chief Diversity Officer

Merodie A. Hancock

New forms and shapes of education are the necessary ingredients that can make the substance of education and educational processes more relevant to the individual and more responsive to the needs of society.” Bonnabeau, Richard F. (1996) “The Promise Continues: Empire State College, The First Twenty-Five Years

Keywords: graduation-rate disparities; inclusive campus culture; inequity in access; college completion; underserved students; pluralism in the classroom; stop- or drop-out rate; campus gestalt

Abstract

This paper, based primarily on the author's perspective as president of SUNY Empire State College, will explore the need for, and means of leveraging, the chief diversity officer's role in creating an equitable and inclusive environment within the distributed world that is Empire State College's "campus" and, specifically, within SUNY Empire's urban environments. Empire State College fills a unique role in today's higher-education landscape. It was founded in 1971 by Ernest Boyer, then the chancellor of the State University of New York, to make education accessible outside the confines of traditional curricular and delivery structures, and to better meet the needs of New Yorkers with locations, academic programming, and student services responsive to diverse communities and learners. Today, Empire State College continues to embrace and fulfill that mission, with individualized education as its cornerstone and nearly 18,000 undergraduate and graduate students in 34 academic centers around the state of New York, in several countries overseas and online around the world. The vast majority of its undergraduate students have attended at least one previous institution, are employed, and are likely to have family and dependent-care obligations. The college is purposefully nonresidential, designed to be where our students live and work. Students can choose structured or individualized academic programs, depending on discipline, and have the options of classroom-based, online, or independent study, as well as weekend residencies, or a hybrid of education delivery via these modes.

Introduction

Empire State College hired our first Chief Diversity Officer for Equity and Inclusion in 2016, partly to respond to a system-wide policy but more to ensure we continuously grow and fulfill our mission. As a president, I believe pluralism cannot be achieved until an institution first accepts and integrates diversity into its fabric. With diversity can come equity and inclusion, and only when you have fully embraced all three can pluralism find its roots as a shared value. A good chief diversity officer—in partnership with the college president, provost and cabinet—can progress an institution through each of these levels to a point where mission is melded with practice, empowering all its students to grow and achieve economic independence as a way to

build and improve their diverse communities. Yet, the work is never done. Even for colleges founded on the premise of equitable and available education for all, the urban environment continues to change and colleges face new challenges daily that can quickly undermine even the strongest diversity, inclusion and pluralist foundations.

The Broader Context

With equity, accessibility, personal growth and self-empowerment for all learners at the core of its mission, Empire State College reaches students in outlying rural communities, small towns, medium-size cities, and major metropolitan areas. It is sited strategically across New York to serve the more populous areas, where large numbers of SUNY Empire's students live and work, as well as the more remote communities, where conventional educational opportunities are limited. The college therefore prides itself on meeting students where they are, academically, professionally, personally, and geographically. The college's presence within the integrated communities it serves creates a rich tapestry of students, faculty, and staff, who are diverse in age, race, religion, gender, sexual identity, socioeconomic and marital status, political affiliation, educational background, physical ability, as well as other characteristics, experiences, and cultural influences. The combination of Empire State College's dispersed footprint, inclusive mission and progressive outreach promote a vibrancy that embraces pluralism, not homogeneity, in its community and its pedagogy. As such, our goal is to ensure we constantly strive to improve and hold ourselves accountable to these standards in today's fast paced, dynamic and often contentious world.

The greatest proportion of SUNY Empire's student body resides in the most densely populated areas served by the college, particularly greater Metropolitan New York, as well as Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, and the Capital Region. Therefore, while the chief diversity officer supports the college as a whole, we chose to locate this position within New York City where we have a significant amount of student and faculty activity. By virtue of location, these Empire State College students reflect the demographics of many large urban centers in the United States, including a stronger presence (relative to nonurban areas within New York) of underrepresented groups within higher education. Often, these urban groups reside in highly populated low- and middle-income neighborhoods with people of like backgrounds, with whom they share a language, values, food preferences, religion, social norms, customs, traditions, and other familiar and common interests and activities. These overwhelmingly minority and immigrant urban communities often have not yet acquired adequate social, academic, and financial capital. Their neighborhoods, including their schools, often are under-sourced in terms of government allocated funds, infrastructure, and services, which discourages community activism that could steer positive change. This leads, instead, to a cycle of handicapping that drives academic, health, and political disempowerment, from generation to generation. To put this in terms of baseline academic impact, across the U.S., "Only about one-half (52%) of students in the principal school systems of the 50 largest cities complete high school with a diploma. That rate is well below the national graduation rate of 70%." (Swanson, C.B. 2008. "Cities in crisis: A special analytic report on high school graduation.")

The Chronicle of Higher Education broadens this picture in its report on college completion, (http://collegecompletion.chronicle.com/state/#state=ny§or=public_four), which, while not

broken down by largest cities, reflects the all-too-common racial degree-completion disparity. In New York State, in 2013, 44.7% of white students who first attended school full time graduated in four years, compared to 24.1% of black students, 36.2% of Asian students, 22.6% of Hispanic students and 28.2% of Native American students. Moreover, at the six-year mark, 63% were white, 46.8% were black, 67.9% were Asian, 46.5% were Hispanic and 48.2% were Native American. While, technically, these and most other traditional college-completion studies exclude the majority of Empire State College students, where students are largely part time and bring in transfer credit, the trends resonate all too painfully.

Combining high-school graduation rates within the nation's largest cities with colleges' graduation-rate disparities among racial groups, then factoring in the projected population growth of New York City, other large cities, and the collective growth of minority populations, makes clear that in order to make progress, the status quo must be disrupted. The historic pattern of inequity in educational access, resources, and achievement will further deteriorate the economic, social, mental, physical, and overall community health of America's large cities. However, degree completion cannot be the measure of success without significant attention paid to how these underserved populations experience the U.S. education systems. The chief diversity officer can and should play a key role in planning and executing this productive disruption. Successfully influencing the education-equity equation cannot be treated simply by what is often described as the "massification" of education through increased access.

Massification often is based on the assumption that a college degree will, in itself, level the playing field and eliminate other socioeconomic discrepancies. This simply is not the case. The diversity of current and potential college students is not representative of just race, gender and other common factors. Rather, it comprises: (a) multiple native and home-spoken languages; (b) disparate levels of academic preparedness and confidence; (c) unequal exposure to the arts, travel, literature, politics, civic responsibilities, powerful or connected social contacts; and (d) more inequities that weave singularly and collectively through the common "check box" definitions of diversity. For academic attainment to have a long-term equalizing and empowering effect on populations that are currently underserved, colleges and their chief diversity officers must go beyond measuring degree attainment and address the need for equity and appreciation at the individual student level, at each stage of his or her academic and professional career. In much the same spirit that Empire State College was founded nearly 50 years ago, the college still strives to break down rigid admission, curricular and delivery barriers. In the process we seek to challenge blatant and tacit beliefs within the K-12 and higher education orthodoxy. Furthermore, we create learning environments that identify and thrive on student differences and reinvest in each college student as a capable and deserving individual learner. Moreover, we seek to build college communities into living, learning classrooms that consistently promote the overwhelming benefits of pluralism.

This work is not easy nor fast. It can only be achieved if we expand our expectations for the work of chief diversity officers beyond such tactical areas as compliance tracker, trainer, problem resolver, recruiter, student affairs and human resources expert, activities planner, legal analyst, grant writer and so on. More often than not, they are but one person, with little to no staff, resources, or direct authority. Yet, at a minimum, they are expected to develop and maintain a college culture that proactively meets current compliance and regulatory standards.

More inspirationally, the new culture for which they strive must support and value diversity, inclusion, and pluralism throughout all aspects of the college's environment.

Chief diversity officers often attempt to win a game where the players and rules keep changing. All too often, a new CDO quickly assumes a reactive tactical mode, spending time putting out fires and filing reports, rather than being able to focus on becoming an integral part of the college fabric, or sowing the seeds, through strategy and resource allocation, for sustainable, equitable, and inclusive learning environments that benefit both targeted populations and the college community as a whole. This matters in the long term and beyond the campus, because, ultimately, the college community flows into a larger society, within which the people who comprise it live, work, study, serve, volunteer, vote, spend leisure time, fuel the economy, and raise their children. The balance of this paper, based primarily on the author's perspective as president of SUNY Empire State College, will explore the need for and means of leveraging the chief diversity officer's role in creating an equitable and inclusive environment within the distributed world that is Empire State College's "campus" and, specifically, within SUNY Empire's urban environments.

Meeting Students Where They Are

Like other colleges, Empire State College tracks recruitment, retention, and graduation rates across gender and race and, as part of a larger State University of New York initiative, is working to track similar metrics on multiple other self-declared personal identifiers. Having this quantitative data is invaluable in identifying areas for further review. Fortunately, the college's data shows it performing better than many peer access institutions. Unfortunately, the same way data can identify red flags, it can also lull campus leadership into complacency. College curricula are well thought out, comprehensive collections of learning objectives and experiences that help equip graduates for career growth and community engagement. However, as colleges build these curricula and strive toward common learning outcomes for all students, it is all too easy to build upon the fallacy that students will bring relatively similar sets of academic and life experiences, as well as learning styles, when they enter college. In part, this reflects the fact that, while faculty diversity is growing, it remains largely homogenous, populated by middle- and upper-class traditionally educated scholars. As a result, the development, delivery and learning-assessment protocols of academic programs can be foreign to, and even at odds with, the interests and experiences of diverse and underrepresented student and faculty populations. Even the best-intentioned educator cannot presume to fully understand a student's or colleague's unique life circumstances.

Most Empire State College students are in their 20s, 30s, or 40s; many are first-generation college students, have a family, work, and aim to improve their economic and professional futures. Institutions like Empire State College that serve nontraditional students often assign a large portion of the blame for why students drop out and/or stop out to "life gets in the way." This category encompasses numerous family issues, personal illness, job change or loss, competing demands for limited time and money, etc. It is also the category the college uses when the reason a student has left is not known. The "life gets in the way" bucket has become the presumptive excuse for situations perceived as out of the college's control. Moreover, "life gets in the way" is the dominant reason identified for drop- and stop-outs within Empire State

College's urban, underserved student populations. Therefore, it is critical that Empire State College, and urban access colleges as a whole, assume a proactive and disruptive role and "get in the way of life" for these students. This is exactly where Empire State College is focusing our efforts. Collectively with the chief diversity officer, leadership, faculty and staff, we are striving to assist urban students effectively with each person at each point of contact, listening attentively to each student to understand, in detail, where they are and what challenges they may encounter. We are engaging a college-wide cadre of human resources who understand the many ways life can get in the way for these students, and systematically examining how the gestalt of the campus community can better support learning and student success for all learners.

The Double Life of the Urban Student

The current model of U.S. higher education vastly skews toward students, faculty, and staff from families where academic credentials are highly regarded and supported. Perceptions and support structures are built around students who graduate high school and progress directly to college, where they study full time, as well as work or engage in extracurricular activities. Their families and communities value a college education and typically provide emotional and financial support. Educators often operate under the assumption that all students have this same support system. However, urban students are often commuters, work full time to pay their bills, and try their best to fit school into their already busy lives, commitments and responsibilities. They often live among relatives, friends and neighbors who might not understand, appreciate or support their academic aspirations. This creates the challenge of negotiating two worlds: the aspirational, upwardly mobile life of a student versus a home life that revolves around fitting in, traditions, family, or social responsibilities, and acceptance of the *status quo*. Empire State College's NYC-based director of academic support describes this bifurcated life:

Our urban cohort students are commuters with a lot going on in their lives. They go to class and to work, where they experience diversity, and then go back home, where it's 'all Greek' all the time, as it was for me, or Italian, or Puerto Rican, or whatever. It makes it very hard for them to engage in college life.

In this vein, some SUNY Empire students shared that they could not study at home and that their academic pursuits were not supported by family or friends. Others shared that they are teased at home when they use "school" or "uppity" proper English, so they do not practice. For these students, one or two General Education English requirements will not overwrite 30 years of improper English spoken at home and work.

The urban chief diversity officer can help a college understand how this double life adds an additional level of pressure to students already at risk. Colleges may need to build in purposeful conversation times, where new communications skills are practiced, while helping students understand the value of building these and other professional communication skills. Similarly, assuming all students will be able to go home and complete their assignments or study with other classmates may be misguided. Providing space and time for ongoing student interactions is vital in creating different types of inclusive support groups for urban commuter students. Unlike the student's home community that may (intentionally or unintentionally) undermine academic success, a healthy student peer group will push students to complete homework, discuss a topic

of interest, understand issues from other students' perspectives, and provide needed encouragement if a member of the group wants to leave school. Conversely, students with permanent or situational mental, intellectual, emotional, or physical challenges may not be comfortable disclosing their conditions, but may be more responsive to increased access to materials, faculty, and staff virtually, or in one-to-one settings. These types of considerations are understood by chief diversity officers, but, perhaps, not fully appreciated by others. Traditionally, the chief diversity officer may not be asked to weigh in on building hours, design, staffing, and virtual resources; however, it may, in fact, be the one office that has the most global perspective on what is needed for this growing population of students.

Different Ways of Knowing and Learning

Empire State College was founded on a purposeful faculty mentoring model and prides itself on knowing students as they are, while actively engaging them throughout all aspects of the learning process—though as noted, we challenge ourselves to continuously improve. A requirement in the admissions process is for undergraduate students to reflect, in a short essay, on where they have been academically, where they want to go and why and how they are going to make that happen. At Empire State College, a faculty mentor is partnered with each student, from admission through graduation. These mentors go well beyond the traditional academic advisor role by reviewing the admissions essay and then working with each student to build the student's degree plan. This plan will take into account what the student will study, what he or she may already know and, often, how he or she will overcome potential obstacles from their personal and professional lives. Every faculty mentor is expected to have a sense of his or her students' unique personal and academic goals, as well as personal and academic challenges. When the relationship works, it creates a mutually respectful relationship and establishes the cohesion that results in students feeling valued by the institution and continuously engaged in their education and the college.

However on the rare occasion when it does not work, the student's overall relationship with the college can feel unwelcoming, and both academic performance and the sense of inclusion may suffer. This is an area where the chief diversity officer is strategizing with faculty and college administration to identify improvements in the student-mentor match process, strengthen the college's professional development resources and improve processes for early problem identification and mentor reassignment when needed. Interestingly, the students' perceptions and the college's data agree that it does not matter if the faculty mentor shares an ethnic, racial, sexual identity, or other known group membership commonality. Rather, the success of this mentor-student relationship appears to be based on something less quantifiable. According to a small sample of SUNY Empire students, the success of the primary mentor relationship is frequently determined within the first or second meeting and is contingent on a shared sense of personal understanding, respect, and commitment to that student's particular academic journey.

In addition to access to faculty mentors, the college has created numerous other opportunities for learning support throughout the college. Similar to the findings on the impact of the student-mentor relationship, internal research has found that positive initial meetings with learning support staff greatly influence the student's willingness to continue his or her studies and stay actively engaged with the college. We believe these individualized faculty mentor and learning

support models are at the heart of the college's consistently high student satisfaction ratings (per the ACT Student Opinion Survey administered triennially for the State University of New York) and higher than peer completion rates. However, there is always room for improvement, particularly with underrepresented college completion populations.

While other urban colleges may not share Empire State College's commitment to individualized learning, it is critical that they understand the multiple ways a student may learn and know. The potential lack of learning supports in college, primary and secondary school and, in some cases, the home environment often and mistakenly is conflated with students' intelligence and capability. Similarly, nontraditional and underrepresented students can be unconsciously assigned a "less intelligent" label by misguided faculty and staff. At Empire State College, personal statements from students, as well as ongoing discussions with faculty and staff, help ensure each student is respected for his or her own ways of learning and knowing. In the words of one faculty member,

The faculty must understand there are diverse ways of teaching students who have, themselves, diverse ways of knowing. We talk about students "pulling themselves up by their bootstraps", well, we may have to give them the boots. Our job is to meet his or her needs, level the playing field and treat everyone fairly. This doesn't just mean global awareness of diversity, but also awareness of each individual's differences and what he or she needs to know and how, as a mentor, to teach it. There may be differences in how students learn, based on what they already know or perceive, learning style or cultural information. Access goes hand-in-hand with inclusion and that means helping people feel they belong and welcoming them, through open doors, into the urban ecosystem, which should include higher education. This is not something faculty members normally learn in their own education. The chief diversity officer can be a proactive force at new-faculty orientation and with ongoing professional development initiatives to help our urban faculty and colleges better understand how to level the educational playing field before the student even walks onto it.

Building Appreciation

While today's chief diversity officers need to play a more proactive role in building and operating urban colleges by helping them identify strategies and resources to address diverse students at the individual level, the CDO also plays a vital role in educating the broader community on the social and economic values of inclusion, equity, and pluralism. At Empire State College, the chief diversity officer strives to help faculty and staff understand how college policies, as well as college and individual practices, may support or undermine the learning goals of underserved and diverse students. From how the student is greeted, in person, on the phone, online or in writing to the hours we are open, the resources we use and the assumptions we make, the chief diversity officer should have a lens across the institution from multiple perspectives. As CDOs too come from one background, our CDO engages other voices and perspectives across the college to broaden that lens and strengthen the college's cultural awareness. As Empire State College is a part of the SUNY system, the CDO also works with the president's office as well as SUNY system offices and others to roll up the needs of individual students to a broader message of community and economic appreciation and empowerment.

Conscious and unconscious biases exist in everyone and no one can ever fully appreciate the walk in another's shoes, including and especially detractors who imply that inclusion and equity means lowering academic standards, taking resources away from the overall college community and/or making exceptions to learning expectations. Colleges with strong access missions struggle every day to balance the increasing range of needs of incoming students with the goal of increasing degree attainment rates and strengthening the college community, while living in a world of limited resources. Colleges such as Empire State College always will roll out the welcome mat for diverse students and strive to improve completion rates, while maintaining the academic standards that make graduates proud and successful. Paradoxically, when student-success risk factors go up, as is the case for access-oriented institutions, public resources tend to go down. When colleges face declining budgets and increasing student needs, there is a tendency to focus on the homogenous majority to drive up student success metrics, while minimizing budget impact. Those who lead colleges with access missions often speak of the challenge between staying true to the mission and meeting the budget and regulatory realities. It takes a certain alchemy to integrate the many paths a student may take before coming to the college with the set of learning outcomes and personal development he or she should have at graduation. The more heterogeneous the student population, the more challenging and rewarding this can be. Despite the stress of tight budgets and demand for higher degree-completion rates, colleges cannot understate the value of diversity in strengthening college communities, graduates, and the workforce they enter.

Beyond increasing degree attainment, urban hubs of diverse student, faculty and staff foster the potential for incubators of pluralism, promulgating the value of coexistence and mutual support, while building an interdependent ecosystem. Building on concepts of diversity, inclusion, and equity, college and university chief diversity officers should aspire toward another, more comprehensive level of opportunity, even beyond equity. This is an aspirational, though this author believes very logical, goal that the chief diversity officer cannot accomplish alone. However, they can identify and build on pockets of support. The argument can be made from social, economic, health, religious, and other fronts. The chief diversity officer should identify, understand and promulgate the college- and society-wide value of inclusive and holistic student success. Singing to the choir cannot be the primary tactic, though that is all too often the approach.

The strategic CDO will work across the college community to understand the various perspectives and find areas of mutual value. From program and course design to extracurricular activities and professional development, urban colleges should be called upon to move the needle from equity to mutually beneficial, universally appreciated coexistence. This is yet another challenge to urban schools, the chief diversity officers who serve them, and the presidents who lead them. As campuses further integrate and better represent the world at large, the need has, perhaps, never been greater to go beyond opening doors to diversity, equity and inclusion and move to instilling the value of pluralism, in building societies, driving businesses, developing public policy, and more. Presidents and chancellors must work together to collectively and continuously make this case from an objective, data-informed basis that ties equity, inclusion, and pluralism into lasting economic and community health.

Conclusion

Today's urban and access-oriented college chief diversity officers, in partnership with their presidents, provosts, boards, and councils, are responsible for continuously educating the extended academic, political, and professional communities on the broader investment value of diversity, inclusion, equity, and pluralism initiatives. Educators have learned, repeatedly, that increased educational attainment empowers communities, drives civic responsibility, propels economic development and wealth, reduces crime and recidivism, improves personal and community health, powers entrepreneurship, and strengthens schools, and the list goes on. The chief diversity officer must play an important role in advocating both inside the college community and with external partners among the local and federal governments, employers, K-12 school districts, and other civic organizations. Investing in academic programs that meet students where they are can help the institution "get in the way of life" to offset the demanding commitments on students and alleviate some of the community pressures experienced by diverse populations. Such action yields both immediate and long-term impacts that need the authentic and continuous support and understanding of civic, political, business, and academic leaders to succeed. Institutionalizing this type of individualized equity-based programming and pluralism-based college culture will require a comprehensive strategy, time and resources, but as more and more educated students become leaders and employers themselves, positive changes will emerge. Only then will cities disrupt the continuous, down-spiraling cycle of unequal representation and degree-attainment rates that exist between and within the nation's multicultural population and will educational institutions begin to leverage and support diversity as a social and economic asset. If encouraged to undertake broader responsibilities, the chief diversity officer with the support of college leadership holds enormous power to help change socio-economic disparities in America's urban areas.

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The Changing Roles and Contributions of Campus Diversity Offices and Their Influence on Campus Culture

Carmen Suarez, Myron R. Anderson, and Kathryn S. Young

Abstract

Higher education has struggled to include and support students, faculty, and staff from underrepresented and marginalized groups. In recent years, universities have decided to address these struggles explicitly, using a variety of different approaches to better support these groups from mandatory trainings to optional events, from external audits to internal campus climate surveys. One promising approach to providing support to marginalized groups has been to employ campus diversity officers and offices. These offices operate at the executive level and take on campus-wide leadership responsibilities, incorporating inclusive excellence and an equity perspective throughout campus policies, functions and culture. In this article, programmatic and policy efforts at two public universities are detailed, spotlighting systemic-proactive and individual-reactive policies and programs needed to advance access, diversity, equity, and inclusion across institutions of higher education. Although the approaches each university takes are site and context specific, they use the role of chief diversity officer both to marshal policy and programmatic change to improve the educational experiences for all who work at and learn at these institutions.

Keywords: campus climate; cultural responsiveness; equity; microaggressions; Chief Diversity Officer

Introduction

Higher education has been grappling with the need to address educational inequities and to improve recruitment and retention of diverse students, faculty and staff for at least 30 years (Hurtado, Arellano, Griffin, & Cuellar, 2008). Student activism around the country in recent years has added more urgency to this critical institutional responsibility. To this end, the incorporation of an equity perspective throughout a campus is paramount and can take on many forms. For the purposes of this article, an equity perspective “is a transformative quality improvement tool used to improve planning, decision-making, and resource allocation leading to more racially equitable policies and programs” (Multnomah County, n.d.). It focuses change on multiple fronts simultaneously and includes multiple stakeholders who influence policies, processes and programs in order to move the institutional needle towards thinking about equity in each new and existing context throughout colleges and universities. The equity perspective ensures that it is the institution that bears the burden of creating pathways to success, rather than institutions using a framework based on cultural deficit that assumes the student is solely at fault for academic failure and thus the university bears no responsibility for inequitable outcomes.

Through direct experience and collected data, we know the racial, ethnic and gender demographics of students are changing (Williams, 2013; Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013). In

2014, the nationwide percentage of students of color in public schools was 49.5% (McFarland et al., 2017). Institutions of higher education have ongoing deliberations of how to best recruit, and most importantly, retain, students of color in high schools and also in colleges. The *2017 National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) State of Education* confirms the gaps for students of color. They are not attending college at the rates they should compared to white students, and when they do attend college, they are not achieving degrees at proportional rates (McFarland et al., 2017). Likewise, faculty of color statistics have also not seen marked improvement (Supiano, 2015). There is a need for a continued focus on increasing diverse faculty, another issue of urgency spotlighted in nationwide student activism.

This paper details efforts at two institutions to build an equity perspective throughout campus policies, decision making, processes and programs. Reading through the efforts at two similar but different institutions demonstrates how each place must consider its local context as it strives to implement an equity perspective across its institution.

Metropolitan State University of Denver (MSU Denver) and Portland State University (PSU) have adopted elements of Inclusive Excellence to guide and assist in the advancement of equity throughout their campuses. Introduced by the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), inclusive excellence is the practice of moving beyond numeric measurements as the only strategy to promote diversity. Inclusive excellence involves embedding the practices and philosophies that encourage diversity in every aspect of an organization. Moreover, inclusive excellence involves institutionalizing systemic practices and philosophies, thus generating a broader outcome in regards to: inclusivity, excellence, cultural competence, innovation, synergy, and pride (Anderson, n.d.).

Institutions of higher education generally adapt, to their own environment, approaches that are derived from national efforts such as Inclusive Excellence. They develop policies, practices and programs that advance the diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) missions in unique ways. The two universities highlighted here, MSU Denver and Portland State University, each take differing approaches in developing a university-wide approach to applying an equity lens couched in the concept of inclusive excellence. Structurally PSU is a Research One University and MSU Denver is a Regional Comprehensive University. This fundamental difference has an effect on the faculty and student ratio, resources, hierarchy, and elements of their mission.

When reviewing MSU Denver's instructional practices, you find that they promote an average class size of 19 students with no teaching assistants at the university. This means over 90% of the classes are taught by faculty with discipline-specific terminal degrees. Moreover, the evaluation of the faculty is weighted at greater than 50% on their teaching and advising performance with a much lesser weight on their research performance. For MSU Denver, there is an emphasis on faculty professional development, with an equity focus on increasing diverse faculty. For the culture and climate work, institution-wide DEI professional development and emphasis on supervisory training is critical.

Reviewing PSU instructional practices, you find that PSU has three categories of instructors, tenured and tenure track faculty, non-tenure track faculty with continuing full-time contracts and adjunct faculty. Its average class size is twenty-seven. With a student population of over twenty-

nine thousand, the emphasis on cultural responsiveness in curriculum and pedagogy increased in depth, breadth and urgency. A December 2015 Student of Color Speak-Out raised these issues further. To engage in continuous improvement of campus culture and climate, strategies to advance DEI goals include the use of an equity lens in decision making, and the restructuring of a council of stakeholders, with committees focusing on various institutional needs, policies and practices.

Although each institution is unique, the similarities in their urban locations, diverse student, faculty and staff populations (and the fact that they are at the forefront in systematically infusing diversity and inclusive philosophies throughout their respective institutions) provide a common perspective to share how their diversity offices influence campus culture.

The following section details how each university has developed policies and programs that best meet its individual identity and internal stakeholder needs related to diversity and inclusion. These programs center around professional development, community engagement, mentorship, curriculum and instruction with the collective goal of how to best achieve DEI advancement.

Metropolitan State University of Denver (MSU Denver)

MSU Denver, founded in 1965, is an urban university that takes a proactive approach to diversity. Diversity is reflected in the curriculum; programs, policies; and in the composition of faculty, staff and students. For example, MSU Denver has a curriculum requirement that all students must complete a three-credit diversity course to be eligible to receive their undergraduate degree. This diversity course requirement promotes an understanding of diversity that we hope will continue in the future. Also, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion serves as the facilitator of programs and policies to support university diversity efforts. The diversity initiatives grant process provides \$100,000 for university departments to apply to execute programs that align with the university mission and inclusive excellence. Lastly, the systemic campus climate survey policy provides a continuous stream of data that provides university leadership with constituency feedback informing their decisions in regard to campus climate.

Currently 39.52% of the student body is racially and ethnically diverse, and 24.14% faculty and staff are racially and ethnically diverse. Furthermore, MSU Denver's administrative staff population is made up of 32.85% people from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds. While this breadth in diversity is very much welcomed, managing and advancing the campus diversity interactions must be considered. The Office of Diversity and Inclusion is tasked with supporting and promoting diversity and inclusion in all aspects of campus life, to include the design and development of policies and initiatives that embrace and support diversity, and that move the university down the path of Inclusive Excellence. Below are several initiatives created by the Office of Diversity and Inclusion that embody the move to systemically and individually incorporate an equity perspective throughout the university.

At MSU Denver, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion is called upon to lead and be an integral part of this equity charge. The inclusive excellence framework, grounded in inclusive excellence theory and connected with quantitative and qualitative research specific to MSU Denver, was designed by Dr. Myron Anderson to create a guide while allowing for the promotion of

creativity, authenticity, and flexibility as programs and policies are shaped to advance equity. MSU Denver’s framework includes Campus Climate, Civic Engagement, Retention and Recruitment, Diversity Initiatives, Diversity Development, and Equity in Excellence (see model below). It is important to note that all elements within this framework lead to the aspirational goal of inclusive excellence (Anderson, n.d.). MSU Denver and other campus diversity offices across the country are often being called upon to lead and engage in many of these elements when introducing an equity perspective.



Figure 1. Elements of inclusive excellence (Anderson, 2017).

When incorporating an equity perspective throughout a campus, it is important that each institution’s framework has both system-wide and individual paths. Having this approach allows for an institution to be both proactive and reactive in the development and implementation of policies and programs that promote equity. Both paths are needed to effect change in this regard. The role of the Chief Diversity Officer is to serve as an ally and as a resource in the development and implementation of both system-wide and individual activities throughout the university.

It is important to note that these activities are not solely programmatic in nature. In our experience, there needs to be an intentional effort to develop and implement equity policies and processes as well. It can be a misstep to focus too heavily on programs; then the diversity office quickly morphs into a program office. This is the case when an office focuses too many of their resources on implementing a focus on national holidays, affinity group programs, or general diversity programs classified as an event. We find that programs do not move the equity needle unless they are undergirded by policies and processes that infuse diversity and inclusion throughout the institution.

The implementation of equity policies and processes can take the forms of university-wide professional development. At MSU Denver, it led to the creation of a Center for Faculty Development, the engagement of the Enrollment Management, Equal Opportunity and Diversity and Inclusion Offices. In our experiences, empowering and connecting these areas when it comes to developing and implementing policies and process can systematically advance equity throughout your institution.

Institutions may have different ways and labels for doing this. Some institutions may not be aware that their programs and initiatives can be categorized via this model. However, this model allows institutions to develop a clear inventory of initiatives, and to attach a value to each

initiative confirming the long-term and short-term impact of the initiative in relation to broader equity goals.

To this end, MSU Denver created the Four-Way Implementation Model to illustrate the long-term and short-term impact of diversity and inclusion policies and programs (see model below).

Diversity and Inclusion Four-Way Implementation Model

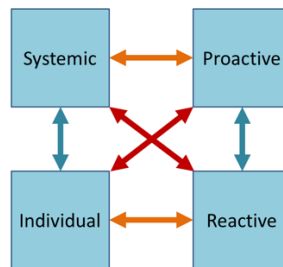


Figure 2. Diversity and inclusion four-way implementation model (Young & Anderson, 2017).

Based on the frameworks above, we share how the Diversity and Inclusion Four-Way Implementation Model provides a platform to create systemic-proactive and individual-reactive initiatives that have had a significant impact on infusing equity throughout MSU Denver. This model can also be used to inform institutional leadership about new initiatives and to establish an accountability instrument to ensure equity goals. Shared below are several MSU Denver equity initiatives that have knowledge acquisition, curriculum development, mentorship and community engagement at their core, are designed to place an institution down the path of inclusive excellence.

Tenure Track Supper Club

The Tenure Track Supper Club (TTSC) is a faculty retention program that utilizes mentorship as a tool in the retention of minority faculty. Given the disproportionately low retention rates of African-American faculty at the university, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion led the development of the Mentorship Program for African-American and other faculty of color. The program now welcomes tenure-track faculty from all underrepresented populations and majority junior faculty, to introduce them to tenured faculty who serve as mentors, help educate new faculty about the hidden curriculum of higher education, and demystify the tenure process.

The TTSC provides a safe environment to share knowledge with new faculty, and in turn have those faculty share with administrators in promotion and tenure review leadership positions, about the subliminal inequities in the tenure process that are experienced by faculty in the classroom and in the office. These inequities arise from valuing differently areas of scholarly activity, to expectations for in-service days and to requirements around advising, to daily interactions with students, other faculty, and staff at the university. This two-fold education

environment (mentorship and knowledge sharing) arms the faculty of color with additional tools to combat received inequities. However, just as important, it educates the university system (the decision makers in the promotion and tenure process) about inequities, thus providing an avenue for removing inequities from the process as well. This program promotes collaboration from multiple fronts and promotes inclusive efforts to remove inequity and promote excellence, thus increasing the diversity of the faculty. At the onset of the program, African-American faculty were earning tenure at 60% while white faculty were earning tenure at 90%. Today, African Americans are earning tenure at 95% and White faculty are earning tenure at 95%.

Supervisory Training

The university engages in proactive voluntary approaches like the implementation of the university-wide Professional Development Conference, the Higher Education Diversity Summit, and the opportunity for staff and faculty to attend learning communities focused on diversity and inclusion to learn about diversity, as in the program above. It also engages in mandatory, proactive strategies to teach people in positions of authority about their role in promoting diversity as part of the university's mission. Dobbin and Kalev (2016) argue that managers advocate better for a diverse workplace when managers become part of the problem-solving team. To foster the development of diversity champions throughout the university, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion facilitated the development of a 90-minute interactive workshop on diversity and inclusion that was woven into a mandatory supervisor-training program. This administrative decision squarely places issues of cultural competence within the broader framework of supervisors' responsibilities within the university. It asks them to be problem solvers for diversity-related questions related. The ninety-minute presentation teaches the fundamental concepts of diversity, inclusion, cultural competence, microaggression awareness and understanding. This interactive session breaks supervisors into groups to share their own experiences of microaggressions on campus. These experiences are incorporated into a larger discussion on diversity, inclusion and equity and its relationship to campus climate.

Microaggressions refer to "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color" (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007, p. 271). This interactive workshop helps supervisors think about their role in reducing microaggressions from individual and organizational perspectives, see the equity disconnect, and develop strategies to advance diversity and inclusion throughout their unit. Based on informal feedback, this training resulted in over 500 supervisors understanding what microaggressions are and having tools and strategies to remove them from their work environment. Although we do not have a quantifiable number of the amount of microaggressions removed from the campus, we have received numerous indicators, positive comments from supervisors, employees, and a significant improvement in MSU Denver's campus climate survey results in the employees' perception of a welcoming environment.

Higher Education Diversity Summit

The Higher Education Diversity Summit (HEDS) is an annual campus initiative that promotes and increases professional development opportunities through the lens of inclusive excellence

(Williams, Berger & McClenden, 2005). HEDS acts as a catalyst to understand others' experiences on campus. It opens communication about how to be supportive to groups and individuals who traditionally feel marginalized at universities. The Higher Education Diversity Summit promotes cultural competence and reduce incivility throughout the university. HEDS educates the campus in the areas of implicit bias, diversity and inclusion, LGBTQIA+ issues, disabilities, race, gender, socioeconomic status, ageism, organizational climate, microaggressions, and much more. This annual conference provides an opportunity for continuous knowledge acquisition, as well as a platform for faculty, staff, and students to engage with one another and transfer knowledge in the diversity and inclusion space. Further, this conference keeps the diversity and inclusion conversation at the top of the university's agenda and provides multiple data and dialog points to make change via education related to equity objectives throughout the university.

Faculty Fellow

The Office of Diversity and Inclusion receives funding from the university to secure a faculty member's time, in the equivalent of a six-credit hour course load, to work in the Diversity and Inclusion Office. The Chief Diversity Officer follows the institution's internal search process to identify and confirm faculty to serve in this role. This Fellow is charged with being a liaison between administration and faculty and lending scholarly expertise to the Office. The Fellow's responsibilities change as the institution's needs change. The Faculty Fellow has shared responsibility for developing and conducting trainings on and off campus (co-writing articles for academic consumption), and for participating in a variety of university-wide initiatives related to diversity and inclusion. The impact of the faculty fellow is linked to how it advances the individual and reactive elements of the "Four-way Implementation Model".

The faculty fellow has designed and implemented many customized interactive workshops within departments and units to improve campus climate issues. The fellow has the ability to work closely with the faculty and staff on individual, unit, and employee bases to resolve issues on the ground. This position promotes the ability to be nimble and react individually to provide skills and strategies to departments on how to resolve negative climate issues. Hosting a Faculty Fellow in the Office of Diversity and Inclusion demonstrates cooperation between administration and faculty which models equity at the university.

These four programs provide a comprehensive, proactive and long-term impact on equity throughout the college campus at MSU-Denver. Portland State University has been very intentional in their quest to incorporate an equity perspective throughout their campus and has done so systemically, proactively, individually and reactively as well. We share some of these efforts below as they differ from the efforts at MSU Denver.

Portland State University (PSU)

Portland State University is a public university located in Portland, Oregon, with a student body of twenty-nine thousand students. Currently, 28% of the student body is racially and ethnically diverse, and there are seventeen hundred international students from ninety-one countries. Its student population is the most diverse of the public institutions in the state. PSU has long had

various resource centers, including cultural resource centers and a Diversity and Multicultural Student Support Services unit in Student Affairs that offers academic support as well as houses the various cultural centers. PSY and MSU Denver have some similarities, a diverse student population, urban locations, a wide range of affinity groups, a diverse faculty and staff, and a strong commitment to diversity and inclusion that is indicated in the mission of the institutions. In 2011, the Chief Diversity Officer position was created. This position was charged to lead the also newly created division of Global Diversity and Inclusion (GDI). In 2015, the position was elevated to Vice-President in part due to the December 2015 PSU Student of Color “Speak-Out” which is described below.

The school’s mission is “Let Knowledge Serve the City” and its new strategic plan “Let Knowledge Serve” has five goals, one of which is “Expand our commitment to equity.” The other four goals each have an equity lens consideration statement as well as equity objectives. During the writing of the plan, an equity lens panel was formed to review all sections and iterations from a racial and equity lens and also to review the goals from other dimensions of diversity. The efforts to inculcate the equity lens vertically and horizontally throughout campus functions, climate and culture is at the core of GDI’s mission, responsibilities and contributions.

The office is structured in four areas of effort: (a) Diversity Education and Learning, (b) Equity and Compliance; (c) Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Advocacy (focused on policies and procedures); and (d) Partnerships and Engagement (internal and external). Structuring the office around these four areas allow for the flexibility to engage with issues and concerns around equity, and provide resolutions. As mentioned in the approach at the Metropolitan State University of Denver, it is very important for the executive diversity office and efforts of the office not to be overly focused on programming. The critical role is to tackle inequities in policy and practice, which can disenfranchise our underrepresented students, faculty and staff ,and provide system-wide and individual solutions to the inequities. Following are three on-going efforts that intend/aim/seek/with the goal of spurring the system-wide change needed to better achieve the strategic plan equity goals.

Equity Lens Use in Decision-making

The equity lens requires an institution to question themselves to see if they are being inclusive and to interrogate the impact their policy and programmic decisions might have on marginalized groups. In its most basic explanation, the equity lens is a way of consciously asking questions when making decisions. Some of the starting questions of an equity lens are: (a) What is the decision to be made? (b) Who is making the decision? (c)How will the decision affect those not at the decision-making table? And (d) what are the benefits and consequences, including thinking through unintended consequences to historically marginalized and underrepresented groups? To operationalize this, and use the strategic plan as a focus, PSU has developed an equity lens panel that will review and make recommendations on the strategic planning process using the concepts of the equity lens in decision making.

GDI and other partners focus on teaching the use of the equity lens in decision-making. This initiative began with the President-led Annual Leadership Planning Session (ALPS), a day-long retreat of both the academic and non-academic leadership with attendance of approximately 120,

including the Vice-Presidents and their direct reports, Deans, Associate Deans, Chairs, Directors and Associate Directors. The 2016 retreat was devoted to the equity lens and went from the presentation model to table-top exercises ranging from practicing using the equity lens at the policy level to directly addressing progress on objectives of the five university strategic plan goals.

Since that ALPS, PSU has engaged in an on-going series of systematic and proactive workshops for supervisor's campus-wide that include work with hands-on scenarios and open discussion on issues specific to the units they represent. Several follow up unit-initiated workshops have occurred, as well as the centralization of the equity lens as a keynote for the annual day long Cultural Responsiveness Symposium.

The President's Annual Leadership Planning Session was the ideal starting point for incorporating the concepts of the equity lens in decision making. However, as it has moved to our strategic planning process the objective is for the university is to institutionalize the use of the equity lens in decision-making throughout all aspects of the university.

Cultural Responsiveness in Curriculum and Pedagogy

PSU students of color held a Student of Color Speak-Out on December 1, 2015, like many students around the country. One strong and often-repeated concern was about what was happening and not happening in the classrooms in relation to cultural responsiveness. Many students emotionally shared stories of microaggressions, the absence of their stories and voices in the curriculum, and the absence of needed classroom management to mitigate microaggressions. Many were listening, and GDI reached out to faculty to explore how PSU might incorporate better the equity lens in the classroom.

The faculty, through the unions, through the Faculty Senate, and through the key faculty academic units already deeply engaged in culturally responsive pedagogy and curriculum, developed and led a partnership with GDI to create a workshop series to address the student concerns. Utilizing faculty as instructors, a large roll-out of sessions on re-tooling individual courses from a cultural responsiveness framework as well as learning more about culturally responsive pedagogy was initiated this past academic year. Having union and Faculty Senate support (and partnership) is a critically important component in curriculum and pedagogical change, as is a modest faculty enhancement grant to participating faculty who complete a course revision. Early results are gratifying, with over 200 faculty participating in a two workshop sequence, one each for curriculum and pedagogy. Participating faculty have revised curriculum and assignments in courses and adjusted their own instructional skills to better manage difficult classroom conversations, learn about different learner types, develop classroom discussion protocols and the like.

Additionally, curriculum processes were changed for new courses. The course submission protocol has two additional questions: (a) one on how the new course will have curriculum content that better reflects diverse learners; and (b) one on the faculty member's plans for addressing culturally responsive pedagogical needs. GDI and faculty partners continue to engage

in how this particular education and learning focus will evolve and continue this academic year and in future years.

President's Diversity Action Council

The PSU President's Diversity Council (DAC) has contributed greatly to the diversity work and progress for over 20 years. In the past two years, stakeholders have explored how better to harness its university-wide representation, its members' collective knowledge, skill sets, advocacy orientation, and energy, to better address systemic and structural change needs, in addition to its ongoing valuable programming. A reorganization was decided upon.

A committee structure for the Council was developed. The committees include three focused on culture and climate (curriculum and pedagogy, workshops and annual symposium, the co-curriculum), recruitment and retention of diverse students, recruitment and retention of diverse faculty, recruitment and retention of diverse staff, communications, the President's Diversity Mini-Grants, and the President's Diversity Awards. Each committee has co-chairs who, with GDI leadership, serve as the steering committee. The DAC meets as a whole with the President at the start of the academic year to consult and hear their charge. The DAC meets again at the end of the year with the President and campus leadership to share their deliberations, recommendations and work going forward.

In the first year under the new structure has been completed, the DAC has grown to over 80 members. The results include significant success in achieving the goal of substantive recommendations per the committee topic areas that will assist leadership in moving forward. Recommendations range from the relatively simple step of improving and encouraging use of a central campus diversity calendar to the more challenging and/or complex goals of significantly increasing funding support for the hire and start-up of new diverse faculty, and including DEI assessment categories on all employee (faculty and staff) performance evaluations.

Conclusion

The roles of campus diversity offices are changing. As indicated in the efforts by MSU Denver and by PSU, the impact of the Chief Diversity Officer and the Diversity Offices that they manage addresses university-wide systemic, structural and programmatic issues throughout the institution. A key point in the changing role of the Campus Diversity Office and the Chief Diversity Officer is that we are no longer overly focused solely on programming. Rather, the role is to tackle inequities in policy and practice that can disenfranchise our underrepresented students, faculty and staff. Our experiences confirm that Diversity Offices that focus too much on programming will see diversity surface gains but experience stagnation in curriculum development and system implementing which can influence campus culture for generations.

A similarity between PSU and MSU Denver linked to our success in influencing campus culture throughout our respective institutions is tied to the fact that our positions report directly to the President at our institutions. It is important where the Chief Diversity Officer resides on your institutions organizational chart, because this communicates a message of the institution's valuing of diversity. Further, it provides formal and informal opportunities for the Chief

Diversity Officer to engage with senior leadership on institutional and national issues related to diversity. Furthermore, this conceptual and physical location provides multiple opportunities to identify, develop and provide recommendations across institutional leadership channels in regard to diversity and inclusion. Finally, this reporting structure promotes opportunities to acquire resources to build, develop, implement, partner, and facilitate crosscutting initiatives involving faculty, staff, students and the community, generating a synergy where everyone is working together to promote an inclusive environment for everyone.

Additionally, the work of this kind of division is multidimensional and incorporates multi-actions. Addressing strategically and simultaneously university issues of recruitment and retention, curriculum and pedagogy, bias, microaggressions, discrimination and harassment, procurement practices, community engagement, fiscal and human resource allocations, fundraising, space use and allocation, research and scholarly activity—in short, the totality of university endeavors—through the equity lens, is essential if equity is to increase in universities.

The initiatives shared in this paper act as part of the infrastructure of continuous learning and improvement related to diversity at each university and as ways to improve campus climate. The initiatives address people at different stages of their professional development. They recognize the urgency of addressing educational inequities and improving recruitment and retention of diverse students, faculty and staff leading to successful outcomes. All have the goal of encouraging a campus who sees diversity as an asset to be cultivated. Chief Diversity Officers are the leaders of these new and exciting changes. Stay tuned.

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Building a University-Wide Agenda for Intercultural Competence and Understanding: Lessons Learned at the University of Minnesota

Andrew Furco and Kristin Nering Lockhart

Abstract

Furthering intercultural competence in higher education requires colleges and universities to establish an intentional, mission driven strategic plan that embeds intercultural understanding and practice across the institution's work. To secure broad-based buy-in and support, this plan needs to consider the various ways that different units within the academy define, interpret, and view intercultural work. For large, complex and multi-faceted colleges and universities, building this plan can prove daunting as different parts of the institution will ascribe different meanings, purposes, and intentions to intercultural advancement.

In this paper, administrators from the University of Minnesota, who represent units that are highly engaged in intercultural competence work, share some of their struggles and lessons learned in their effort to build a comprehensive, campus-wide strategy to grow intercultural advancement. The administrators initiated this campus-wide strategic work following their participation in an international conference focused on intercultural competence. Since that time, they have developed recommendations for the foundational work required to establish a common university-wide framework and comprehensive plan for institutional intercultural advancement.

Keywords: public engagement; equity; diversity; inclusion

Inspiration and Good Intentions

With one of us serving as an associate vice president responsible for addressing issues of equity and diversity across the institution, and the other serving as an associate vice president responsible for advancing the institution's community and public engagement agenda, discussions about the importance of intercultural competence have long been familiar to us. For the Associate Vice President for Equity and Diversity, having inter-culturally competent faculty, staff, and student body is essential for securing a culturally sensitive and welcoming climate for our University's diverse, multicultural community. For the Associate Vice President for Public Engagement, having inter-culturally competent faculty, staff, and students is essential to ensure effective, high quality practice when engaging the University in partnerships with diverse external community constituents. While the issue of ensuring high intercultural competence among our respective stakeholders has remained central for both our offices, we found ourselves engaged in few, if any, focused cross-unit discussions or collaborations on the subject.

In 2011, we serendipitously learned about an international conference focused on exploring the intersection of community service-learning and intercultural development in diverse settings, and we began to consider how we, as senior university administrators, might use the event to join forces and develop a university-wide agenda for advancing intercultural competence and

understanding. Our belief was that such an agenda would bring greater attention to and demonstrate the importance of securing intercultural understanding among our faculty, staff, and students.

Set in the idyllic city of Siena, Italy, this international conference, hosted by Siena Italian Studies and International Horizons, ultimately provided a space for us to examine intercultural competence through a fresh perspective. While the conference focused on exploring intercultural issues in service-learning and university-community partnership work, it brought to the fore the importance of an intentional, strategic agenda focused on securing intercultural competence campus-wide. Intercultural competence does not manifest automatically within college campuses. It needs to be attended to through carefully crafted professional development opportunities (Deardorff, 2009). As we learned at the Siena conference, intercultural competence cannot be achieved unless there is an institutional culture and intentional action that genuinely support its cultivation and development.

Participation in the conference provided us the opportunity not only to articulate, reflect on, and explore our respective perspectives on intercultural understanding, but it enlightened us on how our respective perspectives, while similar in some respects, were quite distinct. The public engagement-focused work, for example, emphasizes issues of developing the intercultural competence of students, faculty, and staff so that they can successfully navigate the cultural, ethnic, and disciplinary obstacles to the advancement of effective community-partnered work. In this regard, having intercultural competence is important for ensuring that partnership transaction is conducted with quality (e.g., high impact work that has mutual benefits).

In contrast, the equity and diversity work focuses on building a community within the University that embraces, nurtures, and takes advantage of the lived experiences, talents, and world views of those holding diverse, and often multiple, identities. Here, intercultural competence is important to establish a campus environment that allows the individuals who research, educate and work within it to belong and to thrive. While the externally focused public engagement perspective and the internally focused equity and diversity perspective differed in their emphases and orientations, both spoke to the University's core value that excellence is achievable only in an environment that fully supports engagement with those from diverse cultures and with differently informed perspectives.

As we began to learn more about each other's approach to intercultural issues, it became clear that to build a University-wide agenda focused on building intercultural competence, we needed to deepen understanding of the nuances of intercultural work within each of our function areas. In addition, our presence at the Siena conference also exposed us to unique intercultural issues that are prevalent in international service-learning experiences. With internationalization as another strategic goal of our institution, we brought in the University's associate vice president for international programs to join our effort.

By the end of the conference, we agreed to form an intercultural development group—Intercultural Competence Work Group—that would bring together the various units and key stakeholders from across the institution for whom intercultural competence and understanding are essential to their work. After a period of planning and development, we invited and gathered

colleagues from across the institution to explore interest in and the viability of building a University-wide agenda for advancing intercultural understanding.

Toward a Collective Agenda

From the start of our journey, it was clear that structure, history, size, culture, and politics of our institution, the University of Minnesota, all influenced the ways in which intercultural work is operationalized within units. As with any institutional change initiative, embracing the essence of the institution, its identity and sense of what it wants to be, would be key to building an institution-wide agenda for intercultural understanding. The first set of phases of the group's work can be characterized as the discovery and unpacking phases during which we spent much time in exploring the definitions and diverse purposes of intercultural work, and the shared goal of creating an institution-wide agenda for supporting the system-wide growth of intercultural understanding.

The University of Minnesota is a multi-faceted public, land-grant research University in the mid-western part of the United States. It enrolls more than 55,000 students across five campuses that each have unique strengths, missions and identities. To establish an institution-wide agenda requires the genuine and full involvement of key administrative and academic units engaged in intercultural work across the University. In order to be sustainable, intercultural advancement could not be the work of only some units or programs, but rather needed be part of everyone's work. Therefore, while the various intercultural work being done across our institution was rich and often rooted in long standing deep partnerships, we were sure that with an intentional, strategic, and collective effort, we could leverage greater impact from all of the resources invested in these efforts.

The group was led by three associate vice presidents (public engagement, equity and diversity, and international programs) responsible for managing University-wide senior-level offices for which intercultural work is central. We convened representatives from key units from across the system who we felt were engaged in intercultural work, beginning with administrators involved in public engagement, equity and diversity, global programs and student affairs.¹ There was strong consensus among group members that the institution was in need of a University-wide agenda focused on building an institutional culture that saw intercultural understanding as central to the University's work. In fact, there was support from the group and great excitement at the prospect of having an intercultural advancement agenda in place.

Phase I: Reconciling Differences

It did not take long for us to realize that the path to our intended outcomes would be more complicated, require more effort, and take far more time than any of us anticipated. We learned very quickly that the participating units did not operationalize intercultural work in the same way or viewed intercultural competence through the same lens. We spent the first part of our group's work learning about the nature and extent of each other's intercultural work, with the shared purpose of finding a way to build a University-wide agenda to advance intercultural

¹ Over time, other members of the university community from administrative and collegiate units asked to be included in this work, and were considered critical partners in this effort.

understanding. As we considered how best to go about engaging the various units and developing with a cohesive, common agenda for intercultural advancement, we identified the specific intercultural-related needs and challenges that we faced at the University and within our respective units. It was during this exploration that the process and prospect of establishing a University-wide agenda began to unravel as the cultural, structural, and historical contexts of the University strongly influenced the ways in which inter-culturalism was perceived and operationalized in different units.

During this initial phase, five steps proved important in reconciling the differences among members’ perspectives and viewpoints on the subject: (1) defining terms and concepts; (2) agreeing on a new term to define the group’s work; (3) building greater cross-unit alignment; (4) securing administrative support; and (5) questioning the validity and value of standardized assessments used in intercultural work.

Defining Terms and Concepts

As each unit representative shared the different frames, lenses, ways of thinking regarding his/her intercultural work, we grappled with the question: “How can we build an institution-wide agenda that leverages our common goals without compromising or devaluing our individual frames and perspectives on intercultural work?” For some time, our group struggled mightily to hone the definition of “intercultural competence”. What exactly did we mean by this term? Our discussions focused not only on the term ‘intercultural’, but also on whether ‘competence’ was even achievable, or whether intercultural competence should even be set as an aspirational goal. Indeed, the definitional issues surrounding the meanings, purposes, and focuses of intercultural competence presented the greatest challenges to our group’s work, causing us to substantially shift directions as the work proceeded. It should be noted that, in hindsight, it was the work of unpacking the conceptual messiness of the different interpretations of intercultural competence that ultimately strengthened the group’s commitment to establishing a campus-wide agenda and to building stronger relationships across administrative units.

Through a series of robust discussions, which included the engagement of the group’s members in a half-day retreat, five primary frames for intercultural development emerged (See Table 1). Each area, while focused on a different set of goals, promotes the development of intercultural competence.

Table 1. Intercultural Competence Development Frames

Frame	Focus
Intercultural Communication	Understanding how people from different countries and cultures act, communicate, and perceive the world around them.
Equity and Diversity	Securing equal opportunities, access, and representation within and across identified cultural, social, and religious groups.
Social Justice	Securing the fair and proper administration of laws and the equal treatment without prejudice to all persons,

	irrespective of ethnic origin, gender, possessions, race, religion, ability, sexual orientation, status, etc.
Social Change- Leadership Development	Preparing leaders as change agents for society’s most challenging issues.
Cultural Interfacing	Interacting with (rather than reading about) new and different cultures in meaningful ways that promote one’s deep understanding of cultural norms and nuances.

One or more of these development frames resonate with, and are a central part of the intercultural work within, the three overarching, organizing units of our agenda-setting group — equity and diversity, public engagement, and international programs.

Agreeing on a New Term

Given that each member of the group had preconceived views on what intercultural competence entailed, it became clear to us that the term itself was problematic, since when used, it would anchor the group members’ thinking to the particular perspectives with which they were most familiar. We encouraged group members to model intercultural understanding by asking them to work to better understand what was at the core of other members’ intercultural competence perspectives and frames. To do this, we dispensed with the term “intercultural competence” and agreed to move forward to develop an agenda for a new construct that would be named at a later time.

Building Greater Cross-Unit Alignment

Within the units represented in the work group, there was much activity underway focused on enhancing intercultural understanding. This suggested that the University was making noteworthy and significant investments to support the issue. Nevertheless, the group agreed that despite robust unit-level efforts, the University lacked cross-unit collaborations that could be used to reinforce mutual goals and promote greater impact through collective action. The group also agreed that the institution needed to bring greater awareness and visibility of our group’s work, demonstrate a more visible institutional commitment to the issue, and provide more widespread support for moving the agenda forward. While the group acknowledged that the decentralized structure and culture of the institution challenged our capacity to build a coordinated and unified agenda, it saw much potential for achieving greater impact through cross-unit (horizontal) alignment and partnerships. To achieve this within the group itself, we encouraged each group member not only to share the intercultural work of his/her unit, but also to explore more deeply how the different units represented in the group define and interpret intercultural issues.

Securing Administrative Support

Our group came to realize that efforts that require more cross-unit alignment, which could transcend institutional siloes, need to be intentional, consistently nurtured, and evaluated. The group acknowledged that an institution-wide intercultural advancement agenda requires having an engine that drives the effort and gives it the fuel and power it needs to go the distance. It was

important to the group to see their discussions as not just another set of meetings, but as an effort that would have true institutional impact. One way that we (as the administrative leaders) sought to demonstrate the importance of the group's work was to provide direct staff and financial support from our offices to facilitate the group's next set of tasks. This support symbolized our continued commitment to the effort as a valued, University-wide strategic initiative. It also helped the group members see that they would have access to the necessary staff support (e.g., staff to coordinate and schedule the meetings, to document the group's discussions, etc.) so that their valuable time would be spent on building the agenda. Securing this administrative support proved to be an important practical and symbolic mechanism that helped recommit members to the group in ways that helped move the agenda-setting work forward. Our efforts were also buoyed by the encouragement and support we received from the University's president and the senior vice president for system academic administration.

Questioning Standardized Assessments

Another issue that helped propel the group's work forward had to do with how to best assess individuals', the group's and the institution's intercultural competence. Some members of the group were very invested in using standardized instruments. They believed that these tools opened the door for conversations with colleagues and provided a means to engage previously unengaged members of our community in self-reflection. However, others were concerned that the use of these established assessment tools made the work seem simple, easily achievable, and led to "intercultural competence lite," because the assessments focused on knowing one's score from the assessment, rather than focusing on what one needed to do to advance his or her intercultural understanding in an ongoing way.

There were also discussions about the limitations of most instruments, suggesting that existing instruments lacked comprehensiveness because they tend to view intercultural issues from a limited set of perspectives. Most instruments do not take into account other important, relevant perspectives. While the group agreed that it was important to have metrics in place, we could not agree on the scale, scope, or nature of the metrics for intercultural competence that would be most appropriate to use on a University-wide basis. However, as the group migrated away from using the term "intercultural competence" to define its work, we agreed that it would be advantageous to have several metrics in play to capture the group's broad-based understanding of intercultural issues.

Phase II: Infusing New Perspectives

As the group's work and discussions continued, we arrived at a point where we began to engage in circular conversations, revisiting previous conversation without moving the agenda forward. We became concerned about where the group's work was headed and how to keep everyone invested and engaged in the effort. We brainstormed various ways to operationalize more strategically the group's work so that we could move our intercultural agenda building work forward.

During the second year of our group's work, there was an opportunity to engage a group of professionals at the University not involved with intercultural work to collect data and

information that we could use to guide our discussions. We seized this opportunity to bring in an outside, neutral perspective that could help provide us some new ways of looking at intercultural issues. This group — participants in a program known as the Presidents Emerging Leaders (PEL) — is composed of mid-level professionals interested in growing their own leadership capacity. Their work is actualized by group work in which they are engaged in new initiatives on campus. We engaged and worked with one PEL group to help us identify a set of recommendations for moving forward the University’s agenda for intercultural competence.

The PEL team worked on a relatively short time table and was charged with two tasks: (1) to identify contributions that the University can make to support development of individual’s intercultural competence; and (2) to assess prevailing attitudes across the University community on *diversity, engagement* and *internationalization* as they pertain to the development of intercultural competence. The PEL team began benchmarking research at peer institutions focused on developing a campus-wide intercultural agenda. After significant effort, they were unsuccessful in finding another higher education institution in the United States that was immersed in this agenda-setting work. Surprised by this finding, the PEL team continued to look for examples at other institutions from which we might learn. But in the end, they were unable to identify any.

The PEL team then designed and administered a survey on the largest of our five campuses to assess the participating community members’ understanding of and involvement with intercultural issues. This survey served as the basis for the PEL team’s analysis and recommendations report to our working group. Of the 758 professionals identified as participating in intercultural work, 43 percent (n=317) responded to the survey. When asked to describe the nature of their intercultural work, 74% of respondents to this survey item reported being directly engaged in some type of diversity-related work (See Table 2).

Table 2. Nature of Respondents’ Work

Nature of Work	n =265
Research, teaching, learning about diversity & engaging the community	31%
Disability and diversity issues	22%
Communication of information and educational opportunities in both international and diverse environments	21%
Community engagement regarding health, social, and human issues.	14%
Outreach to external communities	12%
Total	100%

Responses to other questions on the survey revealed that the primary focus and goals of intercultural work varied substantially among respondents. For example, one quarter of the respondents said that the primary goal of their work is to advance internationalization and address globalization issues; their approach to intercultural work is informed and shaped by national, ethnic, language contexts. In contrast, another quarter of the respondents reported that they see their diversity work focused on bridging gaps by building bridges between groups and

units from different parts of the campus; these respondents acknowledged that there are multiple perspectives to intercultural understanding, and that their approach is intentionally focused on helping units understand the different perspectives and lenses through which they conduct intercultural work.

In sum, the survey findings revealed that, while many individuals at the University are immersed in intercultural-related work, their views toward intercultural understanding is influenced in large part by the perspective of the unit with which they are affiliated. When considering respondents' primary unit affiliation (public engagement, equity and diversity, or international programs), their perspectives on intercultural understanding were informed by and generally aligned with their respective unit's focus. For example, respondents working with the Office for Public Engagement tend to have a community-empowerment perspective on intercultural understanding while respondents working with the Office for Equity and Diversity have more of a social justice and equity focus. Those who work with the Global Programs and Strategies Alliance office (international programs) tend to have a more nationally situated cultural view of intercultural understanding.

Phase III: Accepting the Tensions

Four significant tensions emerged from our discussions, cross-unit education, and survey analysis.

Inclusion vs. Cultural Appropriation

In our attempt to be an inclusive and understanding group, we inadvertently found ourselves engaged in what we term here as “offensive cultural appropriation”. Cultural appropriation is the adoption of some specific elements of one culture by a different cultural group, when not engaged in shared cultural exchange (Rogers, 2006). It can manifest in dress, artistic representations, language, or social behavior. Individuals in our group sought to appropriate into their work the others' definitions or perspectives about intercultural understanding to honor different points of views. However, because the definitions or perspectives are highly situational — that is, their meaning are shaped by the nuanced contexts in which they occur — transporting them to new community or cultural contexts can result in establishing new meanings that are significantly divergent from those originally held. For example, the application of the construct of social justice (e.g., securing the fair and proper administration of laws and the equal treatment without prejudice) in one setting can be viewed in another setting as a perpetuation of injustice. Equal treatment does not equate to equity of outcomes; some might need something more, or something different, to achieve equitable outcomes. While some might see the provision of different levels or kinds of treatments to achieve equitable outcomes as a form of social justice, others might see this as socially and ethically unjust. Acknowledging and accepting the fact that inter-culturalism will manifest differently across different contexts, and with those with different histories and world views, is essential to building a university-wide agenda for intercultural understanding.

Individual vs. Group

Our group struggled mightily to determine where to draw the lines around what we identified as “culture”. As a term embedded in the word “intercultural”, we sought to unpack what was meant by “culture”. Is culture defined by groups and communities (e.g., by race, ethnicity, gender, gender expression or identity, sexual orientation, ways of thinking)? Or is culture an individual construct that is defined by one’s own interpretation? Similarly, is it acceptable to have each member of the group (and the University) have his/her own definition of culture, or should there be a campus-wide set of understandings as to what we mean by culture? These were some of the questions that came to the fore for which we found no answers. Ultimately, we acknowledged and accepted the fact that the concept would remain amorphous and that we would focus on issues concerning both the individual and the group.

Connecting Identity to Inter-Culturalism

As we unpacked the issues of culture and subculture(s), our group realized that identities held within a subculture, particularly those that are marginalized, are key to understanding issues of culture. However, our group realized that issues of identity are generally absent from much of the literature on intercultural development, perhaps glossed over for the sake of making intercultural competence and development issues more simple and understandable. For example, issues of identity were not addressed adequately in most of the assessment instruments we discussed that measure intercultural competence and/or development. Yet, when engaged in various conversations about intercultural issues, whether it was through the lens of public engagement, equity and diversity, or international activities, the discussion of identity was prominent and necessary. This suggested to our group that more needs to be done in the field to link issues of identity to the intercultural advancement agenda.

Difference vs. Commonality

One of the main tensions in our discussions was how to best build commonality of understanding and practice across our cultures as we seek to build an institution-wide agenda for intercultural advancement. How much does focus on building a common agenda enhance or challenge our process? Does building a common agenda impede our ability to engage in critical thinking skills and to compare, understand, and appreciate the different values held across different cultures? Does developing a common agenda perpetuate a form of assimilation that preferences a dominant perspective or set of values? These were just some of the questions that emerged as our work on intercultural advancement began to take shape. We acknowledged that these kinds of questions would continue to be central to our discussions and would surely engage us in deep and difficult conversations.

Phase IV: Refreshing the Agenda

The external input and feedback we received from the PEL team clarified for us the importance of bringing a new, fresh perspective to our group’s work. Such a perspective ultimately stretched our individual and collective thinking about what an institution-wide agenda for advancing intercultural understanding should encompass. To reflect this new phase of work, the group

changed its name from the Intercultural Competence Work Group to the Collaborative for Intercultural Advancement (or CIA). This new name reflected the realization that building intercultural “competence” is just one piece of a multifaceted matrix of issues that need to be addressed if our institution is to build a comprehensive intercultural agenda.

With this new name came a new mission to reflect the shared goal of “advancement”. The new mission statement became:

Building a university that fosters the capacity for students, staff, and faculty to work intentionally across cultures and contexts in creating inclusive, equitable, and reciprocal community and university partnerships for advancing the institution’s mission.

The work of the CIA thereafter focused on achieving this mission through specific attention to addressing issues in four areas: faculty issues; staff issues; student issues; and communication and assessment. Subgroups were created to work through the particular leverage points in each area to further the group’s new mission.

In articulating the next steps for the CIA, the members agreed that the advancement of intercultural understanding is not a time limited endeavor. Rather, it is developmental in nature and needs to be considered and cultivated on an ongoing basis. Also important was the acknowledgement that the work needs to go beyond western and global northern views, and incorporate perspectives from multiple cultures, nations, and regions of the world. The members also acknowledged the important role that language plays in the development of the agenda. Certain terms (e.g., social justice) may be interpreted very differently by different stakeholders, depending on the nature of the stakeholders’ work and their frames of reference. Lastly, the group asserted that issues of intercultural advancement must be approached with an intersectional lens, and encompass all salient identity issues as well as the nuances for those with multiple identities.

With this new mission in mind, the group’s agenda is poised take our University’s intercultural work to the next level. Although the work of the CIA remains unfinished and continues, many lessons have been learned about what it takes to build an institution-wide agenda focused on advancing intercultural understanding. We hope that these lessons can help other higher education institutions interested in developing a campus-wide agenda for advancing intercultural understanding prepare themselves for the initial discovery, unpacking phases of the work, and addressing issues that arise.

Key Lessons Learned

During each phase of our work, we learned many important lessons. As more higher education institutions seek to advance intercultural understanding at their institutions, the following considerations may prove helpful in furthering their efforts.

The Importance of a Campus-Wide Initiative

As we have described, we learned that there is wide-range of intercultural development work underway throughout our University. Yet, despite these various independent efforts, the institution lacked a campus-wide focus for advancing intercultural understanding. This supports the belief that broad-based intercultural advancement among faculty, staff, and students does not happen automatically (Deardorff, 2009). Rather, it requires an intentional effort and attention, through the establishment of a robust, campus-wide initiative, which brings together the various intercultural efforts by engaging key stakeholders in unpacking the various conceptualizations of the inter-culturalism, and organizing the conceptualizations into a cohesive institutional plan. Institutions engaged in such efforts should pay special attention to bringing together individuals and groups who have diverse perspectives and/or who do not necessarily agree on intercultural issues. Acknowledging that there is a broad range of perspectives, and ensuring that all perspectives are considered in the development of the institutional plan, is key to building a strong institution-wide plan to advance intercultural understanding.

Establish a Trusting and Safe Space

For the intercultural agenda to be successful, it is important that a safe space is established in which all stakeholders feel free to express their views no matter how much those views might differ from others. This space must be one that focuses on listening and understanding. It must embrace difference and dissonance. Creating this space was one of the key factors that allowed our group's work to advance because it helped engender a culture of trust that genuinely values every members' voice and participation. We also came to realize that creating this safe space actually required the group to practice intercultural understanding. Some individuals can find it quite difficult to speak openly and freely about sensitive issues in front of their professional peers, especially when senior administrators or other supervisors are present. Having a space for individuals to express themselves without judgment or criticism becomes key to being able to do the deep dive that is necessary to unpack the complexities of intercultural understanding. One the important lessons learned in this regard is to not avoid discussions about different perspectives, contested language, or difficult issues and to take the time necessary for all to feel heard and to learn from one another. In our group's work, differences of opinion were valued and seen as opportunities to educate the group and to garner greater understanding of the complex character and core of intercultural understanding. To this end, institutions that form work groups to build an institution-wide intercultural understanding agenda should consider the extent to which the group itself models the best practices that it is attempting to advance.

Honor existing work

Given that most of the participants in our group had had extensive experience with intercultural issues, it was important to honor the existing experience, expertise, knowledge, and understanding that the individuals and their units brought to the table. The goal of developing a campus-wide agenda was not meant to supplant existing work, by establishing an intercultural agenda that focused on a specific set of principles or practices. Rather the goal was to take stock of the wide range of existing work, assess the differences and similarities in approaches, acknowledge the contribution of each effort, and develop a comprehensive agenda that embraces

all of the work, in ways that leverage the institutional impact to deepen understanding across the institution.

Bring in Outside Perspectives

The use of the PEL team helped our group to provide a mission check and feedback about our group's work. It is not difficult for such work to become biased as the perspectives of those with the loudest or most influential voices sway group members' opinions and viewpoints. Bringing in a team that provides a neutral perspective can prove beneficial to keeping the group grounded in the established mission, and if necessary, help align the group's work to its original intended goals. This external team can also provide data and evidence about the group's process and offer an honest assessment of the group's successes and limitations. Such feedback is a launching pad for infusing new ideas into the group's work.

View Intercultural Understanding as a Strategy, Not a Goal

At one point in our group's work, we began to lose sight of why we were engaged in the effort. We were so immersed in trying to understand each other's perspectives regarding intercultural understanding that our goal had turned to defining intercultural competence, development, and understanding. However, we arrived at a point where we started to question *why* we were doing this work and *why* establishing a campus-wide agenda for intercultural understanding was important. Through this reflection, we reaffirmed and re-anchored our group's focus to our initial goal: creating an institutional agenda for intercultural understanding for the purpose of strengthening the quality of relationships that members of the University held with each other and with various external partners and communities. If we achieved these stronger and deeper relationships, our University would be able to enhance individuals' and groups' sense of belonging, secure a more inclusive and accepting institutional climate, and further the impact of the University's community engagement, equity and diversity and international programs efforts. In sum, keeping these broader goals front and center is essential for maintaining the initiative's institutional value and for realizing the initiative's contribution to advancing the institution's overarching mission.

Acknowledge the Limitations of Campus-wide Efforts

Despite senior leaders' support for developing the agenda, and despite the participation of committed and knowledgeable campus stakeholders, our experience with the work group suggests that the real leverage for change takes place within the individual units for whom intercultural work is primary and central. As our effort revealed, the operationalization of intercultural work is widely distributed and situational. While a campus-wide (or institution-wide) effort can provide guidance and expectations, it is less likely to be able to set influential institutional policy or to affect actual practice. Such impact will likely depend on the extent to which the individual programs legitimize and promote intercultural advancement within the work of their units. In the end, the leverage for real change does not reside at the campus level, but back within individual administrative and academic programs and the individuals within these programs who operationalize intercultural practices every day.

Give it time

Lastly, perhaps the greatest lesson of all, is that establishing and cultivating a robust institution-wide agenda for advancing intercultural understanding takes a great deal of time. Since the initiative is about changing the institutional culture, it requires staying the course over time and throughout changes in leadership and personnel. It requires digging deeply into complex and sensitive issues, and the work necessarily will expose many of the institution's shortcomings and limitations. The discussions and process are often difficult and challenging. In the end, however, it is being able to stay the course to work through these challenges that will bring the institution to a new level of intercultural understanding.

Looking to the Future

The effort we undertook has catalyzed additional conversations about the importance of understanding the different frames and perspectives that undergird intercultural understanding. Specifically, we have seen the implementation of a series of forums that are engaging different stakeholder groups, both within and outside of the University, in critical conversations about a variety of intercultural issues (i.e., race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class, language). These conversations have taken the form of scholarly presentations, debates, roundtable discussions, invited speakers, artist renderings, and theatrical and dance productions. Examining the issues through multiple forums and modalities has proven effective in attracting a broader range of stakeholders to the conversation. These critical conversations appear to have also engendered a greater comfortability among some who have previously found it difficult to hold frank discussions on intercultural-related issues.

The increased polarizing rhetoric we are finding within our society has made it even more crucial for our higher education institutions to provide much needed spaces for groups and individuals to reflect on their intercultural understanding, attitudes, and behaviors. Moreover, with the discourse and debates becoming increasingly political, there is an urgent need for higher education institutions to provide education, training, and skills development on how to build and strengthen one's intercultural competencies and understanding. As we had learned from our work, such competencies and understanding do not manifest automatically. Intentional, concerted, and strategic efforts that engage faculty, staff, students, and key administrative units are required in order to secure an institutional culture that genuinely embraces and values interculturalism. As Deardorff (2009) reminds us, building such a culture within higher education institutions takes strategic commitment and time. As our University's commitment to this important work persists, we continue to search for the nodes of opportunity that we can leverage to further the intercultural advancement agenda.

Conclusion

We realize that we were, and are, engaged in work that needs to be done slowly, patiently, and with the understanding that the *how* is as important as the *why* and the *what*. And while our goal to work with University partners engaged in fostering intercultural awareness and understanding to support the development of competency in others, our work to date has in large part involved deepening our own intercultural awareness across our own different fields and philosophical

approaches to the work. It is our hope that in sharing the story of our journey thus far, others will be encouraged to take on the challenge of establishing bold agendas for advancing intercultural understanding at their institutions, and secure on their campuses a foundation for deep intercultural understanding that enhances each institution's mission and maximizes the potential for the success of all members of the community.

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A Systemically Collaborative Approach to Achieving Equity in Higher Education

Richard J. Prystowsky

Abstract

Colleges and universities have long recognized the need to address inequities affecting students from underrepresented or underserved groups. Despite efforts undertaken by dedicated individuals, large-scale, national change in this area has not been realized. In this article, we address two major factors underlying this disappointing result (the structures of isolation common in our institutions of higher learning, and the inadequate addressing of our own implicit biases) and offer a model of systemic collaboration aimed at ameliorating these problems so that colleges and universities throughout the nation can achieve the equity goals that have proved so elusive for so many of them.

Keywords: equity; diversity and inclusion; implicit bias

In recent years, we have seen an increasingly urgent call to action for higher education institutions to meet the needs of underrepresented and underserved students. Though disturbing equity gaps and related disparities have persisted for decades in our institutions, the increasing numbers of such students on our campuses has made it difficult for us to avoid seeing the problems faced by these students. Inequity, long a higher education problem hidden in plain sight, in good conscience can no longer be ignored. (For excellent, trenchant explications of both the equity-related issues at stake and cogent ways of addressing these issues, see Witham et al., 2015, McNair et al., 2016, and Ramaley 2014). In order to address this urgent problem, higher education institutions need to embrace “a paradigm shift in thinking about equity, diversity, and student learning” (McNair et al., 2016). In this new paradigm, “campus educators understand and value the assets that students bring to educational experiences, as well as the importance of institutional change and continuous improvement to better meet the needs of students, whatever they may be” (McNair, 2016). In short, instead of seeing underrepresented or underserved students’ underperformance or other struggles through a deficits-oriented lens, “equity-minded individuals reflect on their own and their colleagues’ role in and responsibility for student success” (Bensimon, 2007). Ultimately, as McNair (2016) and McNair, et al. (2016a), suggest, this paradigm shift should help colleges and universities enact “equity-minded” policies and practices, enabling them to become “student-ready” and thereby be well-positioned to help *all* students experience inclusiveness, a quality education, and academic success.

Operation 100%: Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence, and the Problem of Implicit Bias

The need, if not the urgency, to ameliorate the problem of persistent equity disparities in higher education is not new. However, despite the best intentions of many of our colleagues—in many cases, over the course of years—we have yet to witness industry-wide excellent results. To address this issue substantively, our institutions must enact radical, scalable, sustainable, comprehensive changes to our thinking and practices, however uncomfortable such changes

might be for us. Without such introspection and concomitant actions, our good-faith, conscious intentions to create meaningful, lasting change could be severely undermined by our unexamined biases and initiative-crippling self-deception. Such important, courageous self-reflection must occur within an institutionally supportive, trusting environment. For if institutions do not provide such an environment in which this difficult work is to be accomplished, even highly committed employees might feel defensive or even threatened, and could very likely stop engaging in the work.

When I was Provost at Lansing Community College (LCC), we faced the problem of low student retention and completion rates, a common problem in America's community colleges. In response, we developed and implemented a bold, comprehensive, culture-changing initiative called "Operation 100%." I had introduced this initiative to the college after having observed persistently limited success, by faculty and others, with good-faith, yet often more or less isolated, attempts to address student success barriers. For example, dedicated faculty had been attempting to reform developmental education, an area that, nationally, is particularly prone to disparate impacts related to equity gaps. Student Affairs personnel had been working hard to assist struggling students (with tutoring and advising, for example). IT colleagues had been trying to improve instructional delivery options. However, these and other efforts were not coordinated under a college-wide, unifying, centralized, integrated, comprehensive approach to addressing student success barriers at the college. Thus their effects were limited. Operation 100% presented the vision and outlined practices for just such a unifying approach.

The goal of Operation 100% is to ensure that every student in a certificate, degree, or transfer-pathway will succeed in realizing her or his educational dreams. Emphasizing, and grounded in, collaboration among individuals across all areas of the college, this initiative has, among its outcomes, enabled cross-functional teams to design guided program pathways for all students and to begin designing a guided registration process that will keep students on track, and it has led to the hiring of a cadre of specially trained academic success coaches who, working with students and collaborating with college personnel, have the laser-focused task of helping students overcome non-cognitive impediments to the students' success in courses and programs (Prystowsky et al., 2015). Indeed, Operation 100% has galvanized the college and brought together colleagues from Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, IT, Financial Aid, and other areas to work towards the common goal of helping all students succeed at LCC.

As I led this culture-changing initiative, I found that colleagues from across the college were eager to join the effort. What became clear, as well, was the extent to which higher education is systemically structured to facilitate employees' separation (or even isolation) from rather than their collaboration with other employees. For example, normally, we hire faculty to teach courses or sections of courses, to be part of a department, division, and school, and so on. We do not normally hire faculty to be employees of the institution, charged with cross-functional teamwork responsibilities. The same holds true for other employee appointments in other areas of the college. Clearly, institutions need to divide workloads and assign responsibility and accountability accordingly. Commonly, though, we find it difficult to break out of our silos. In leading Operation 100%, I discovered that, because this initiative is grounded in the concepts and practices of cross-functionality and collaboration, it provides employees with a systematically solid way to work together towards the common goal of helping all students succeed. As I have

noted, colleagues from across the college were eager to embrace this opportunity. The problem, I discovered, was not that they had been unwilling to engage in this kind of comprehensive, collaborative effort or that, in more limited ways, they had not already engaged in collaborative work; rather, they had not yet been given the chance to do so by working towards achieving a focused student success goal in a college-wide, comprehensively unifying way.

And yet, despite our enthusiasm, we also found ourselves faced with the discomfoting data indicating that students from underrepresented groups were not performing as well as other students in, for example, key gateway courses or developmental education courses. Looking at these outcomes through an equity-minded lens, we realized that we had to be honest with ourselves concerning the extent to which our own implicit biases might be undermining our efforts to be a student-ready college for *all* of our students.

Fortunately, having become involved with the Association of American Colleges and Universities' (AACU) "Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence" project, we were well positioned to carry out this examination. (For a sampling of AACU publications addressing the equity imperative, see AACU, 2015a; AACU 2015b, and Witham et al., 2015.)

For example, in discussing how to close equity gaps for African American and Latina/Latino students—the focus of our AACU work—we reminded ourselves that, in light of the United States' history of racism, sexism, heterosexism, and similar societal ills, no one growing up in our country could likely escape the messages and influences of these problems. Were we not to confront this problem in ourselves, then, we could jeopardize our equity-minded work insofar as we might limit our ability to see the extent to which our own attitudes and behavior could be contributing to the persistence of equity gaps for underrepresented students. Key to doing this work well was our coming to terms with our own implicit biases, an endeavor that required us to understand that, compared to explicit biases, implicit biases are or can be especially problematic precisely because they are unconscious, not easily recognized, and thus difficult to address. As noted by researchers Mahzarin Banaji and Anthony Greenwald, even good people have hidden biases (Banaji and Greenwald 2013).

We thus decided that we needed to take a deep dive into addressing this problem, lest we undermine our work with Operation 100% by failing to close the equity gaps in student success that we were seeing. A number of us who were already familiar with scholarship on the effects of implicit bias thus felt that a good starting point would be for the college to engage in implicit bias awareness training. (For detailed information concerning LCC's implicit bias awareness training in particular and the college's diversity-related work in general, see Prystowsky, et al., 2017a; Prystowsky & Heutsche, 2017b. For information on how other higher education institutions might use knowledge of implicit bias to effect meaningful, diversity-related change, see Davies, 2016.) To maximize the benefits of this self-reflective work and minimize persons' discomfort with it, we decided to hire an outside consultant who could lead train-the-trainer sessions for us. We also agreed to create and sustain an atmosphere of "no blame, no shame." In such an atmosphere, we would work from intentionality and good faith. Furthermore, we would support each other, even when—and sometimes especially when—our efforts were not producing desired results. As alluded to above regarding the need to create and sustain a trusting, supportive environment in which to carry out this work, we worried that, if persons confronting

their own possible implicit biases felt that they were being blamed or shamed, they could become defensive and stop engaging in the work.

Given this understanding, from general meetings open to all (such as semester-opening events) to smaller meetings with specific groups (such as search committees), from time to time we reminded each other that none of us is born with implicit biases, that both victims and non-victims have learned and internalized such biases to greater or lesser degrees and in various ways, and that, without blaming or shaming, we needed to carry out our equity-related work in a supportive context. From my own observations in numerous meetings, colleagues responded well to this approach, engaging in the self-reflective work openly and honestly.

Implicit Bias Training

We engaged the services of a consultant from “Project Implicit,” a research organization that contributes to the public’s awareness of hidden biases (see <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>). We involved our consultant twice. On his first visit, he worked with the “Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence” steering committee; on the second visit, he worked with advisors, support staff, and others from the college. For each training, I asked participants to prepare for the meetings by familiarizing themselves with Project Implicit and by taking one or more of the Implicit Association Tests (IATs) offered on its website. Knowing that results from these tests might be disturbing (again, even “good persons” have implicit biases), I asked that participants take the tests privately. In his work with us, the consultant had us take a few of the tests as a group so that no one would feel personally implicated and vulnerable.

Perhaps not surprisingly, when the steering committee took the IAT on race, as a group we associated “good” with Whites more than we did with Blacks and “bad” with Blacks more than we did with Whites. This result reinforced for us that even the steering committee for the college’s equity project—that is, the choir of the choir—could not escape the nefarious influences of racism in our culture. Again not surprisingly, when the larger group of participants took the IAT on race, the outcome was similar. The conclusion for us was obvious: None of us is immune from having implicit biases, which we needed to confront if we were to advance our equity-oriented work.

Faculty Involvement

To be as inclusive as possible in our work, we engaged in implicit bias awareness training with faculty, support staff, and others. I offer two examples here to illustrate the nature and outcomes of this work, the first of which involves faculty, and the second of which involves search committees.

In LCC’s program review process, faculty analyzed data related to race and gender disparities in program enrollments, degrees awarded, and the like. In the post-review discussions, we then focused on examining the extent to which implicit biases might play a role in these disparities. The college is currently following up on these discussions with additional implicit bias awareness training for program faculty and staff and with annual improvement action plans that incorporate efforts to improve diversity-related outcomes—for example, efforts to strengthen the

recruiting of students, advisory committee members, and program faculty from underrepresented groups. At this point, the work is in initial phases of development; anecdotal evidence suggests promising results in addressing targeted concerns, though.

Impact of Implicit Bias Training on the Curriculum and Campus Policies and Practices Curriculum:

Faculty have been actively involved in other equity-minded and diversity-related efforts as well. For instance, during start-of-semester professional activity days, faculty led seminars on implicit bias barriers to student success and held a college-wide meeting on ways that LCC might continue to strengthen its work in committing to equity and inclusive excellence. Seminar discussions involved ways to revise curricula, teaching methods, and assignments so that classes would effect inclusiveness along with high quality education.

In a college-wide meeting, participants discussed ways in which the college as a whole could remove barriers to student success. For example, by making it easier for students to find academic and non-academic support, by revising payment policies that address the needs of first-generation, low-income students, and so on. Still in the beginning stages, this work bodes well for student success at the college. It also has yielded professional development opportunities for faculty, who have expressed that they feel both energized by and supported in continuing to do the work.

Gateway Courses

The effects of our work are perhaps nowhere more apparent than in the exciting work being undertaken by faculty participating in the college's newly developed Faculty Institutes, an outgrowth of the AACU-related equity work that has benefited from LCC's ongoing implicit bias awareness training. Led by the college's Chief Diversity Officer (CDO), these Institutes focus on helping faculty understand how to maximize their efforts to engage at-risk students. Because LCC's retention data indicate that students from underrepresented groups are particularly at risk in key gateway courses (which LCC defines as courses having both high enrollments and high DFWI rates) the college initiated the Institutes with faculty teaching these courses (Accounting and History at first, with additional courses to follow). The CDO helps faculty learn how to engage in authentic communication with students, create alternative lessons that are relevant and meaningful to students, and the like. Student evaluations indicate positive satisfaction, faculty feedback indicates enthusiasm and engagement, and course completion data indicate positive increases. LCC will continue to assess this work as it scales up faculty involvement in the Institutes. The results thus far bode well.

Search Committees

To help ensure that LCC apply diversity awareness to its hiring processes, I led implicit-bias awareness training as part of search committee orientations. Search processes at colleges and universities often result in "the appointment[s] of persons who look, think, or otherwise seem like the faculty and staff already employed by our institutions—despite the diversity training received by search committee members, and despite a professed institutional commitment to

diversifying the faculty and staff.” Indeed, the “message often sent by the practical results of our thinking and behavior can be summed up as follows: ‘It’s okay to be different, as long as you’re not’” (Prystowsky et al., 2017a and Prystowsky, 2008). As is the case with challenging what Ronald Takaki refers to as “the master narrative” underlying dominant culture thinking and practices, challenging the general and often unexamined mindset that “it’s okay to be different, as long as you’re not” has proved to be quite difficult (Takaki, 2008).

To help ameliorate this problem at LCC, I oriented search committees on implicit bias awareness, helping them both to understand its root causes and to see how they can keep biases from affecting the search process. Some specific examples of this work follow.

After reinforcing the notion that none of us is immune from having implicit biases, I asked that the search committee members see themselves as a confidential, trusting support network for each other as they engaged in their work to hire personnel. Among the pieces of information and advice that I discussed with search committee members is that which reflects another key takeaway from the training that our consultant did with us at the college: to wit, that implicit biases are more likely to emerge when decision-making criteria are not clear. Thus, I advised search committee members to be sure that they were working with clearly stated criteria. However, I also advised that they not be too restrictive in criteria development, lest they unintentionally undermine their efforts to be open-minded and inclusive during the search. For example, I recommended that, unless an accrediting body requires specific numbers of years of experience, search committees require that candidates have “experience” rather than a specific number of years of experience. This seemingly slight change can have major consequences in developing an applicant pool that widens the net of inclusivity for candidates from underrepresented groups.

Although this work, too, is new to the college, preliminary results are again promising. For example, search committees have revised interview questions accordingly and personnel are investigating ways to make initial applicant screening “blind.” By talking about cultural biases that favor individualism over the community, I helped search committees avoid constructing interview questions that could unintentionally either advantage or disadvantage particular groups of persons. In this regard, I assisted search committees with developing relational questions, which candidates from any culture ought to be able to answer and which allow search committee members to evaluate how a candidate might work with others to effect a common good (for a department, the college, or the community, for example). However, I also cautioned that search committees be careful about looking for “fit” in a candidate. Not uncommonly, a search for “fit” leads to the hiring of persons just like the persons already employed by the college, even though other, less conspicuously “fitting” candidates might help the college grow in positive ways not yet recognized.

One particular interview danger related to “fit” manifests itself in the still commonly asked question “Why are you the best candidate for the position?” A candidate from a culture that emphasizes community and not individuality might be disadvantaged by this interview question, whereas a candidate whose culture promotes, for instance, rugged individualism might be advantaged by it. In any case, if we are honest about this all-too-common interview question, we would have to admit that no candidate could answer the question accurately who has not reviewed all of the applications first and somehow discovered that, objectively, she or he is the

best candidate. Suffice it to say that this question is at least culturally biased and at most disingenuous. I strongly recommend that search committees never use it or any variant of it.

There are other good equity-related recommendations for search committees to follow: for example, their asking open-ended questions and listening with an open mind, not predetermining the “right” answer to the question; and their having the candidate sit among the search committee members rather than at the head of the table (this arrangement helps to emphasize the importance of relationships, and it de-emphasizes a valorization of the self). Different search committees at different institutions will need to develop equity-related questions and search practices appropriate to their own institutions’ needs. If they are guided by equity-mindedness, though, and if they are willing to address their own hidden biases, all search committees ought to be able to engage more consistently than before in fair-minded, equity-oriented hiring practices.

Conclusion

Lansing Community College’s equity-minded, self-reflective efforts can be summed up by the vision statement for Operation 100%, which derives from the college’s work to strengthen equity, diversity, and inclusion at the college: “100% Success Through 100% Inclusion.” To be sure, this kind of work is sometimes challenging. However, given the potential for higher education to change lives and communities in dramatically scalable fashion, especially with respect to individuals and communities traditionally underrepresented in or underserved by our institutions, in good conscience we have no choice but to engage in these efforts. Indeed, this endeavor is a matter of conscience, and our work in this regard is the work of justice. Our students have entrusted us to help them achieve their higher education dreams. We have a moral obligation to help them—*all* of them—including, and perhaps especially, our students who have not been well served either by our society or by institutions of higher learning.

To be sure, meaningful, lasting change takes time. But we cannot wait. We need to act now. On our campuses are entire groups of traditionally underrepresented or underserved students, faculty, and staff, whose individual and collective strengths and attributes are waiting to be fully realized. These fellow citizens can do so much to help enrich us all. In the final analysis, we need to ask, at whose risk can we truly afford to wait any longer—and at what cost to us all?

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Transforming Higher Education through Organizational Meditation: A Story of the Executive Learning Series on Equity & Empowerment

Sonali S. Balajee and Joshua Todd

Abstract

Equity, diversity, and inclusion are frequently on the lips of higher education professionals yet we struggle to infuse these concepts throughout the academy as evidenced in challenges recruiting faculty of color, graduating students of color, and hostile environments reported by students. The authors posit that this is because, to date, most efforts focus on transactional engagements like training and recruitment to achieve racial equity when what is also needed are transformational strategies that fundamentally shift how higher education is envisioned. This article describes the Executive Learning Series on Equity & Empowerment (ELSEE), which works not to just promote these values but to embody them and transform the academy (and those within it) through a deeper set of interventions, emphasizing the integration of holistic health, spirit based practice, mindfulness, and other practices of decolonization.

Keywords: decolonization; racial justice; transformation; leadership

Introduction

This article could not exist without the spiritual, intellectual, physical, and emotional labor already expended by those who came before us. To mirror the process we use in trainings, which integrates a healing- and trauma-informed approach (Yatchmenoff, n.d), we want to start by acknowledging that labor as well as the violence and loss on which all of higher education and indeed this country are built upon. We honor the indigenous peoples of this land who live here and whose homes were forcibly and violently taken so we could call this land Oregon/United States/ours. We honor the indigenous, African, and Caribbean peoples who were enslaved and murdered in order for our economic system to survive. We acknowledge the broader movements for social, racial, gender, and economic justice that informs our knowledge.

An important part of context-setting is to ground our narrative in a few key terms and processes of focus. At its core, the Executive Learning Series on Equity & Empowerment (ELSEE) and the Equity & Empowerment Lens with a racial justice focus (E&E lens or “the lens”) works to identify the existence and perpetuation of colonization, whiteness, and racism at the individual, institutional, and systemic levels, while also highlighting areas to expand and enhance that are moving in the direction of racial equity (Balajee, 2012. p. 8 & pp. 62-68). Colonization can be defined as a system and set of processes that define how knowledge, material, and aesthetic resources are organized and distributed, and what ways of being are rewarded and institutionalized. This occurs in three primary ways: the expansion and conquering of land, the elimination of difference (assimilation), and the owning and production of knowledge deeply connected to geography and politics (De Oliveira Andreotti, 2015).

Decolonization, while putting forth clear strategies at times, can be a messy, nonlinear process, which seeks to interrupt harm, deconstruct existing frames and structures that perpetuate harm

and injustice, and elevates alternate frames and strategies that run counter to the status quo and colonization (De Oliveira Andreotti, 2015. p. 22). Decolonization occurs via the presence, and commitment to, deeper critical analyses, elevating the connection between spiritual wellbeing and social wellbeing, as well as what John Powell (2011) calls spiritual suffering and social suffering and engaging and leading with multiple ways of knowing and being (to name a few).

While working to achieve equity within higher education, we must also acknowledge the history of higher education in the United States as a tool of colonialism and a producer of knowledge used to maintain slavery and white supremacy, not deconstruct and subvert it (Wilder, 2013). In acknowledging this history, our approach is shaped into one that strives to not just provide training as a transaction (you give us time, attention, money—we give you strategies, knowledge, solutions) but indeed to guide personal and institutional transformation so that higher education can more deeply fulfill its public purpose and generate equity and justice, instead of reinforcing inequity by elevating only a narrow understanding of what constitutes knowledge and scholarship. The E&E Lens must also be acknowledged for its limitations, being birthed within a public bureaucracy which had to consider what politically was acceptable to include in the tool and was challenged in how to deeply include the necessary connection to spirit and spirituality. We must acknowledge our own limitations as authors. We are limited by the restricted field of vision we inherit from our socialization, privilege, and lived experiences. Finally, there are limitations to this format both the written word and limited space which do not allow us to go deeply into all of the knowledge and concepts necessary to fully implement transformative strategies centered on justice and equity.

The ELSEE, as well as key foundational assumptions of the Lens upon which it was based, prioritize the practice of a holistic worldview and frame, the representation of the Relational Worldview, embodied by many communities of color (Balajee & Cross, 2012). This frame puts forth a vision for health that incorporate all aspects of life (the physical, emotional, mental, contextual [socioeconomic, cultural, family, experience with oppression, etc.], spiritual [connection to wholeness, sense of purpose and meaning, what brings breath]), and promotes a way of being that emphasizes balance, sustainability, and spirit-led practice.

The purposes of this piece are to: (a) provide a counter-story to racial equity education based in colonized practices; (b) share a working case-study of a growing transformative racial equity effort in higher education; (c) show how other ways of knowing and being can be embodied in academic spaces; (d) elevate belonging, mindfulness, decolonization, integrity, spirit-led practice, and transparency.

To these ends we have chosen a more conversational tone for this article, one that values the use of first person, and one that reads as if we were in the room speaking with each you. Throughout this piece, we also highlight how we have used multiple perspectives and methods of communication that prioritize visual and inward communication and reflection (De Oliveira Andreotti, 2012). We also will “lift the pedagogical veil,” (Balajee & Todd, 2016) a term we coined but very much influenced by bell hooks (1994), to not just share our learnings but share why we are sharing them in the way we are and the reasons behind those choices.

We invite you to sit with multiple, at times conflicting, ideas and allow them all to be true and not true simultaneously. We invite readers to engage with multiple forms of media for making meaning, including art, both verbal and nonverbal expression, ritual, and text and open this piece with these acknowledgements as a way of both maintaining the humility necessary to do the work of racial justice, and embody multidimensionality (De Oliveira Andreotti, 2015. p. 25 & 27). As authors, we are not experts, only conduits for sharing experiences we have had facilitating institutional change efforts within higher education. We invite you to critique us, challenge our assumptions (and yours), and hold our truths even when (especially when) they disagree with yours. We invite you in.

Sonali's Story: What the Lens is and is not, History of the Lens

The E&E Lens was borne as part of an emerging field of racial equity analyses and transformational initiatives within local governments. Fifteen to twenty years ago, public health departments such as those based in Louisville, KY, and Boston, MA, began to conduct equity-based mapping in their communities according to zip code. The mapping confirmed that life expectancy varied in many places by zip code, and that decreased life expectancy could also be connected to the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age, also known as the social determinants of health (Balajee, 2012 pp. 6-7 & p. 54). These social factors or determinants are largely responsible for systemic inequities, which are unfair, avoidable, and represent systemic differences in population outcomes.

In 2008, the Multnomah County Health Department (based in Portland, Oregon) joined other jurisdictions that had already begun this work by officially investing in and carrying out a Health Equity Initiative, heavily focused at the time on creating an Equity Impact Review Tool (EIRT) that measured the impact of decisions towards equity, conducting 'Undoing Institutional Racism' training sessions for leadership, and conducting a baseline assessment of current equity efforts in all departments (Multnomah County Health Equity Initiative, 2009).

I became Program Manager of HEI in 2009; between 2009 and 2011, the development, piloting, and implementation of an EIRT was my primary focus of work. While leadership supported the creation of such a tool and put forward initial resources to staff the effort, the organizational culture did not support the actual conditions necessary for mindful decision-making, data-gathering, analysis, and follow-through. Instead, speed, efficiency, and brevity in the use of such a tool and treating the whole process as a “checklist” were valued, resulting in several initial failed attempts to achieve more racially just outcomes and outputs. What saved this effort was the intentional public outreach done by a key department leader, who offered to invest time, energy, and resources into doing a deeper dive, to pilot the EIRT in a more meaningful way. This deeper dive, protected by an authentic champion in leadership, was conducted by working in three more pilot projects with “early adopters,” using an expanded version of the EIRT, providing greater staff support in facilitating equity-based conversations around the use of the tool, and having an evaluator document and analyze the process, identify what was missing, find where harm was being perpetuated, and determine what worked well to get at different results.

At the same time, I began to engage leaders from communities of color and other experts from various disciplines. The leaders from communities of color told me that they didn't see their

values, their models, and practices reflected in the tool. Mental health professionals from Portland State University also critiqued the work, saying that there was no mention of mental health as an outcome, nor was it considered to be a real impact of unjust and unfair decision-making processes and practices (Balajee & Lindahl, 2012). To address these areas of critical feedback, taking the lead from Terry Cross, the now former Executive Director of the National Indian Child Welfare Association, I integrated the representation of the Relational Worldview. The Relational Worldview leads with a paradigm, outcomes, and practices calling for elevating spirit and mental well-being, alongside physical, socioeconomic, and cultural well-being when doing equity analyses (Balajee & Cross, 2012. pp. 70-74).

The Equity and Empowerment Lens and the 2014 expanded materials (available online at <https://multco.us/diversity-equity/equity-and-empowerment-lens>) were created and grounded in these critiques. Multiple disciplines inform the Lens, and are included as white papers within the document such as quality improvement (Balajee & Johnston, 2012. Pp. 79-82), mental health (Balajee & Lindahl, 2012. Pp. 89-93), trauma- and healing-informed content (Balajee, 2014), empowerment theory (Balajee & Wiggins, 2012), and more.

Between 2012 and the time when I left Multnomah County in 2016, the E&E Lens was introduced and applied in a variety of settings. These included a transformative community school system, a probation program and system in the Department of Community Justice, a capital improvement plan, and more (Balajee, 2013). In the last two years of my time at Multnomah County, I and other staff began to see the need to deconstruct and revamp the Lens. We sharpened the level of analysis to include questions that sought to address where colonizing behaviors and practices existed, and emphasizing the need to integrate trauma- and healing-based approaches. Josh, in his role as Executive Director with Campus Compact of Oregon, continued to learn from me about the Lens—the most transformative ways to apply and embody it—and the ways it hindered improvement of processes, policies, relationships, and structures. In 2014, Josh decided to begin the first ELSEE cohort, and hired me to help him develop and facilitate it.

The Lens was radical at the time, for where and when it was born, but once I left government, Josh and I had the opportunity to think through how to more deeply integrate the foundational pillars of racial equity work, including decolonizing theory and practice, spirit-led strategies, racial healing, and concepts like belonging coming out of the Haas Institute in Berkeley (2016). While the E&E Lens and other racial equity analyses, tools, and processes, help begin the conversation, analysis, and process of transformation, they can be limited by bureaucratic conditions that continue to devalue mindfulness, healing-informed approaches (W.K. Kellogg Foundation, n.d.), critical thinking, cultural responsiveness (Curry-Stevens, Reyes, & Coalition of Communities of Color, 2014), spirit-driven practice, and addressing white supremacy culture (Okun, 2001).

We built upon what the Lens puts forward, critiqued and improved its capacity-building strategies, with colleges and universities as part of the group learning process, and strove to integrate mindfulness and spirit-led discussion and practice as much as possible. What we have found in ELSEE, and what I have found in my numerous years doing equity work within government, is that what people have stated they have feared or actively disengaged with the most (integrating reflection, mindful and spiritual practice, critical analyses, and fellowship),

they end up yearning for and benefiting from the most. With this in mind, the ELSEE was created and started from a place of deep integration between mind, body, spirit, and environment.

Campus Compact of Oregon's ELSEE, adaptation from government to higher education

Campus Compact of Oregon is part of the national Campus Compact movement which has worked for 31 years nationally and 21 years in Oregon to support higher education institutions to more fully live out their public purpose through the advancement of community engaged learning, civic engagement, and service. As part of Campus Compact of Oregon's new strategic plan, launched in July of 2014, the compact sought ways to support member institutions' efforts to improve their programs, practices, and policies to address educational inequities. The first significant investment was the creation of the ELSEE as a neutral convener of public and private institutions, as well as 2-year and 4-year institutions. This year-long, cohort-based, professional development series was created to help institutional teams develop a more nuanced understanding of race, racism, power and privilege as it impacts and shapes student and staff outcomes, and to provide training on how to apply an equity lens to institutional decision-making to prevent further harm and improve outcomes for students, faculty, and staff of color.

We created an application which incorporated a shortened version of an organizational assessment for equity created by the Coalition of Communities of Color (2014) in partnership with Ann Curry-Stevens at Portland State University. We required that the teams include at least one staff at the Vice-President/Provost level or higher, who had authority to create institutional change, and at least one student-facing member who knew the lived experience of students of color and first-generation students on campus. Much to my surprise half of our member institutions applied (we had 20 members at that time). We created a learning cohort of 8 institutions and within the cohort were seven presidents.

The first cohort was made up of Chemeketa Community College Yamhill Valley Campus (led by Campus President Jim Eustrom), Marylhurst University (led by President Melody Rose), Pacific University, Portland Community College (including all four campus presidents Suzanne Johnson and then Lisa Avery, Sandra Fowler-Hill, Karin Edwards, and Jessica Howard), Portland State University, Southern Oregon University, Umpqua Community College, and Warner Pacific College (led by President Andrea Cook). We would go on to host a second cohort, which launched in September of 2016. This cohort included Blue Mountain Community College (led by President Cam Preus), Chemeketa Community College Main Campus (led by President Julie Huckestein), Concordia University-Portland, Mt. Hood Community College (led by President Debra Derr), Oregon Coast Community College (led by President Birgitte Ryslunge), and Warner Pacific College (back for a second year with an all faculty team). At the time of this writing, the members of the third cohort are preparing to go into retreat. These include Green River College (led by President Suzanne Johnson), the Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Commission (led by Executive Director Ben Cannon), Mt. Hood Community College (led again by President Debbie Derr), Warner Pacific College (back for third year with a team of student services staff), and Willamette University.

Grounding the series in the Lens provided a rich foundation for the work but also unique challenges in translating a tool intended for government into one focused on higher education. In

my experience, government tends to elevate technical skills and prioritizes results and action over scholarship and knowledge creation. The Lens, as it was created, provides many tools for bureaucrats to analyze decisions and critique investments and has several white papers which describe foundational assumptions and paradigms. However, in a higher education setting these would not be considered scholarly, peer-reviewed publications. Co-founder of Black Lives Matter, Alicia Garza, has often stated the importance of both good theory and good action in the work of racial equity, and the connection between the two (2016). We have found through our years of practice that the former, theory and concepts, is often not given the necessary time and space to develop; government most often prioritizes what is deemed as 'strategy' or 'action'. Equity analyses and reflections call for a critical inquiry-based approach that seeks to identify, unearth, address, and heal root causes of racial inequity and suffering, while enhancing and promoting creative alternatives that bring about greater wellbeing and health (Johnstone & Macy, 2012). Being able to address such root causes in their various manifestations requires strong theoretical understandings; conversely, being able to put forward alternative practices and strategies requires a similar grounding in key principles and practices.

Another serious hurdle we faced was owning our own knowledge and wisdom we had developed over almost two decades in this work because of the cult of expertise and credential that exists within higher education. Neither Sonali nor I hold doctoral degrees. Sonali has accepted a label given to her by others as a public intellectual (who ascribes to non-traditional methods of learning and knowing) but I spent most of my career in community organizing and youth development actively rejecting any attribution of myself as an academic. Yet I found myself the Executive Director of a network of higher education institutions about to lead a year-long professional development series on equity for highly educated academics.

In journaling (one form of mindfulness practice), I was struck by how much I had internalized the way that we needed to “teach” because we were working with a higher education audience. In government and community work I could be funny and casual but somehow as we approached the ELSEE that felt unprofessional. I realized how I defined knowledge and what knowledge was valuable had been colonized. I had one narrow definition of valued knowledge. Sonali understood deeply the need for us to incorporate both scholarly journal articles but also blog posts, art, imagery, music, movement, and meditation. When we sat down to plan our first session of ELSEE, Sonali said firmly that we had to open the day with a meditation and that we would meditate throughout the day together. I worried that we had seven presidents in the room and if I asked them to take deep breaths and meditate as part of a professional development session that not only would they not take the rest of the content seriously but that it could jeopardize their membership in Campus Compact.

Sonali won the day with the simple argument—we know mindfulness is required; how can we do the heavy lifting of equity work if we don’t build that muscle? We did meditate, and continue to at every ELSEE session, multiple times per session, and in fact it was the presidents who most frequently said that was one of their favorite parts of the ELSEE. They so infrequently have time to take a breath—to reflect deeply, deliberately, slowly, and with intention on something. The thing I most feared became what they cherished and most needed. It took being vulnerable for that to happen, on our part and theirs. Vulnerability is critical to achieving equity.

Lessons Learned

We gleaned rich data from these first two ELSEE cohorts, as we lived out the struggle to embody racial equity and empowerment principles, apply a decolonizing lens to our content and processes, and integrate more spirit-driven and mindfulness practices. The following are a few of our key learnings here;

It's not [just] about the quick fixes. Applying an equity lens is a long term, iterative quality improvement process not a quick fix or one-time intervention. While there are many shorter-term strategies that need to occur, addressing the root causes of racial inequities demands a more holistic, planful, and systemic approach. Shorter-term strategies need to be set in context within this larger frame, and additionally analyzed for how they perpetuate the very issues we seek to dismantle and interrupt. The language of “quick fixes” or “quick wins” has also been used as a way to settle for more “Band-Aid” types of strategies, and keep the focus away from identifying deeper issues of power, and the perpetuation of white supremacy. We have to develop a tolerance for process and a willingness to go slowly. Inequities have developed from hundreds of years of violence, ignorance, and neglect. To think we can fix them within a 5-year strategic plan is hubris at best and foolishly naive at its core.

Racial equity and empowerment require the practice and integration of mindfulness practices. To effectively work toward racial justice in any field we believe it is essential to practice mindfulness (Chodron, 2013). We must develop the skills necessary to see our own thoughts, as they are happening. To witness our thoughts before or in the process of creating emotion and be able to choose our response instead of just reacting is what we mean by mindfulness and can include meditation, connecting with nature, self-reflection, journaling, or artistic expression in many forms. Mindfulness practiced at the individual level (reflection, spirit-led work, breath work, meditation, silence, arts creation, etc.) and at the institutional level (group and team reflection, equity analyses, etc.) bring about greater focus, resiliency, attention to and willingness to make the deeper more transformative shifts necessary to bring about sustained change (Johnstone & Macy, 2012. pp.28-33). Mindfulness can also happen at both an individual and institutional level and at its core the E&E lens is just that, an institutional meditation. In living systems, there is a converse relationship between tension, and the ability to receive vital information (Butler-Detman, 2017). In groups, teams, interpersonal relationships, and within individuals themselves, mindful approaches and strategies can help ease and even prevent tension, allowing for necessary information (both quantitative and qualitative) to enter, be meaningfully considered, and to positively lead to more just decision-making.

A commitment to developing a more nuanced understanding of race, racism, power, privilege and whiteness is required, at each of the various levels these exist (individual/ interpersonal, institutional, community, systems). To do this work requires a deep dive into the scholarship of critical race theory, especially for white participants for whom conversations about race and racism have for too long been seen as issues for people of color. Understanding whiteness, how and why it is created and maintained, and centering ourselves in why this work matters to us and how racial inequities harm us is central as is decentering whiteness so that other ways of being and knowing can be highlighted, elevated, and celebrated.

Expect resistance to the work and expect it to look differently for participants who are white and those who are people of color. Over the many years we have engaged in institutional change efforts we have seen consistent and predictable resistance to the work of advancing equity and racial justice. We have also developed a partial framework (see Table 1) for how this resistance shows up based on our positionality (placement within the constructed social/racial hierarchy):

Table 1: Resistant responses to the work of engagement

Dominant Culture	Targeted Identities
• Disillusionment: ‘been there, done that’	• Disillusionment: You can’t & won’t understand
• Discomfort v/s safety	• Engagement vs Trauma
• Cult of expertise, devaluing lived experience	• Tone Policing or Minimization
• Focus on action- More is more	• Focus on action-More is more
• Invulnerability-Shut down	• Invulnerability- Protection

When asked to engage in this work, white participants can respond with disillusionment that boils down to “I already took that diversity class once, I know all this” but for people of color who have engaged in this work for years the disillusionment comes from engaging in efforts where colleagues bring ignorance or outright disbelief that these issues of inequity are even real. We haven’t found clear solutions to disillusionment. People have to be willing to engage but tapping into metaphor, narrative, movement, and art seems to spark renewed engagement.

This connects to the next form of resistance which is framed very well by Robin DiAngelo’s concept of “White Fragility” (2011) where discussing issues of race makes people feel uncomfortable but what they share is that they are feeling unsafe. The lack of confidence and experience talking deeply about racism feels unsafe and those who force the conversation are creating “unsafe environments” when really it is perfectly safe just deeply uncomfortable. For folks of color, though, they must choose when they engage to expose themselves to further trauma, microaggressions (Sue, 2007) and pain so resistance can be a reasonable avoidance of further trauma. The importance of a multicultural training team is critical here. I can say things to white people that Sonali would get push back on. Sonali can say things to people of color that is trusted and heard differently than when it come from me as a white man.

Another form of resistance from dominant culture perspectives can be the cult of expertise which devalues knowledge and lived experience based on the credentials the speaker holds or even where the credentials come from (“oh, you got your degree at XYZ college, I wonder what a scholar with a more rigorous academic background might say about your findings...”) for targeted identities the resistance can come in the form of tone-policing or minimization. Being accustomed to combatting flat-out racist or uninformed thinking, we can attack an idea before deeply engaging it because it is presented in a way that triggers those past experiences. We can also choose to go along to get along and mask our own unique perspective and lived experiences

because we don't believe they will be valued by the institution, a process called minimization (Hammer, 2008; Okun, n.d.).

One form of resistance shared by both is also a manifestation of white supremacy culture- a focus on action, more is more (Okun, n.d.) So many participants will resist a call for spirit-guided practice, mindfulness, or other decolonizing practices with requests for checklists or "deliverables" and evaluate efforts as just a "bunch of talking." It takes courage and institutional will to avoid this trap. In both cohorts of the ELSEE usually by the third session there would be calls for us to move into "action." The challenge is understanding that reflection, analysis, and meditation *are* the "work."

Finally, and probably the most detrimental form of resistance, is invulnerability. As we mentioned, vulnerability is crucial if we are going to create change. For dominant culture participants, when things get too hard vulnerability looks like complete disengagement and shutting down (Brown, 2012). Participants may stop responding or they may "vote with their feet" in which they stop attending sessions or have schedule conflicts come up when meetings have been planned. For participants from targeted identities, invulnerability can be a form of protection. To be vulnerable is to open up to the possibility of being harmed. For many people who have experienced multiple, recurring harms from racism and white supremacy, self-protection can be a reasonable and expected form of resistance. The moments of "spiritual hydration" and going slow are required to be able to sit with these painful moments. These are just some forms of resistance we have witnessed. We invite you to consider in a quiet moment how have you experienced these and demonstrated resistance in the past.

Lifting the pedagogical veil/breaking down hierarchy: We have talked about how we lift the pedagogical veil in our training by inviting the participants into our thought process and sharing with them the choices we made before they entered the room. This helps to dissolve some (though not all) of the hierarchal power inherent in the facilitator/trainee dynamic. It is also a way to model teaching techniques which can create more dynamic and equitable classrooms (Hooks, 1994). Additionally, requiring ELSEE teams to have both an upper executive-level staff (many times the President) and a student-facing staff member was intentional and a powerful strategy. In institutions, moving towards racial equity requires multi-disciplinary and multi-level teams (Balajee, 2012. Pp. 18-19). This helps break down hierarchical silos, and also drives the effort to be accountable to multiple perspectives. This helped inform leaders with the knowledge of the lived experience of students and those without positional authority became more involved and felt uniquely valued. It created opportunities for rhetoric and reality to be bridged.

Arts Engagement Shifts How We View Knowledge

Art has the power to help us undo harmful ways of relating to each other. It allows us to not only value certain perspectives over others, *but also* promotes multiple voices and forms of wisdom to inform our efforts. When deliberately curated art can help us lead with voices that speak truth to power, decentering paradigms of conquest and assimilation, and may not be present or as present in formal academic literature. Yinka Shonibare's work, *The British Library* (2014) viewable at <https://www.turnercontemporary.org/exhibitions/yinka-shonibare-mbe>, does both. His work includes 6000 books, covered in colorful wax fabric (seen as a symbol of pride in parts of

Africa), with each book spine holding the name of an immigrant to Britain, poignantly highlighting the multiple voices that did, indeed, contribute to British society. In this stunning work, he helps us view 'knowledge production' in a different and necessary light, helping us recognize and realize that this vast society that has colonized so many would benefit from leading with and not subjugating the myriad of voices who have tirelessly made contributions through the years. We invite you to sit with this work and reflect on the following: Where do I contribute to holding one form of knowledge more valuable over another? How can my institution or group incorporate multiple paradigms and voices in curriculum /instruction/administration? What do I feel when I view this work?

Conclusion

Over the course of the past two and half years, Campus Compact of Oregon's Executive Learning Series on Equity & Empowerment has endeavored to move the conversation about improving outcomes for faculty, staff, and students of color into new and deeper territory. The systems and structures which generate and maintain inequity must be challenged. Higher education as a sector was built by and on these systems and structures so if, as a sector, it is committed to advancing equity and justice, a grand reimagining of higher education must happen. The ELSEE and the Lens which it is built on, propose just one approach and working model to reimagine higher education, one grounded in spirit-led practice, infused with art, breath, music, and silence, dependent on developing the skill of multi-dimensionality, and one which models, supports, and promotes a holistic vision of health. The work necessary to see true improvements on equity must be at a personal, institutional, community, and systemic level.

Through the ELSEE we have learned that the work cannot only focus on quick fixes and tangible results but must invest in transformative ways of engaging which ask us to change not just what we do but how we do it and how we do it together. We must do better on developing what France Winddance Twine calls racial literacy (2004), so all faculty, staff, and students understand race, racism, power, privilege, and whiteness, using the scholarship of critical race theory as a guide. We must expect resistance and understand where and why it manifests. We must incorporate mindfulness and meditative practice into both our individual lives but also our institutional structures so that we can more fully and clearly see ourselves, our thinking, and our reactions which all lead to our policies, practices, and programs. We must work to break down hierarchy, if not in institutional structure, then in institutional practice, so that all within our college and universities can bring their full selves to the task of achieving equitable educational outcomes and racial justice. We have to continue learning, the journey is never done. Equity is an iterative and nonlinear process of quality improvement, which includes problem definition, analysis, reflection, action, and evaluation and can be maddeningly complex. We invite you to share your thoughts and learnings with us as we all work towards a transformed academy that promotes equity, justice, and holistic wellbeing for all. We hope to partner with you in this cycle because in the words of James Baldwin (1962) "...a higher level of consciousness among the people is the only hope we have, now or in the future, of minimizing human damage."

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Equity-Minded Faculty Development: An Intersectional Identity-Conscious Community of Practice Model for Faculty Learning¹

Kimberly A. Costino

Abstract

Equity-minded institutional transformation requires robust faculty learning. Research has shown that the single most important factor in student success is faculty interaction. Positive, supportive, and empowering faculty interaction is particularly important to the success of female students, poor and working class students, and students of color, but most faculty are not prepared to offer the kind of support that has been shown to be most effective for marginalized students. If institutions are serious about equity and about transformation, then they are obligated to provide professional development that will support the learning necessary for faculty to fulfill these important roles and to support faculty financially or by buying their time to participate in it. An effective way to do this is to align such professional development with the urgent needs of the campus and their related campus-wide initiatives. This article describes a community of practice model of identity-conscious professional development that engages faculty in a scholarly approach to the science of learning and evidence-based teaching and curriculum development while at the same time insistently and consistently incorporating critical reflection on and exploration of how systems of power and oppression impact learning. We believe this faculty engagement is key to transforming our institution into a more equitable and inclusive learning environment for students and faculty alike.

Keywords: faculty development; faculty communities of practice; identity-consciousness; learning as social participation; equity-minded institutional transformation

The Role of Faculty and Faculty Learning in Equity-Minded Institutional Transformation

For more than ten years, the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) has been working to help colleges and universities throughout the country transform themselves in ways that will better prepare all students to meet the complex demands of the 21st century. Toward this end, the association has developed and promoted “Essential Learning Outcomes,” as a “guiding vision” for learning in higher education, emphasizing the need for ongoing, authentic

¹ Participation in multiple communities of practice has helped me, in collaboration with many others, to develop the program for faculty professional learning described here. I was first immersed in a community of practice model of professional learning in my work with Nika Hogan and the California Community College Success Network (3CSN) on the Threshold Project and Reading Apprenticeship Communities of Practice. Since then, I have worked with my colleagues on my own campus to adapt this statewide model for CSUSB’s transformation work. My most significant CSUSB collaborators include Davida Fischman, Kirsten Fleming, and Qiana Wallace. All of these colleagues have made significant contributions to the work described here. I am grateful for the opportunity to work with and learn from them all.

assessment of student learning at all levels of the university. This information supported the implementation of high-impact practices that have been shown to increase student engagement, to foster deep learning in students, and to therefore improve retention and graduation rates. More recently, it has launched the LEAP Challenge, which asks universities to embed “signature work” into the curriculum in an effort to prepare students to productively address the unscripted problems that will characterize the world in the 21st century and beyond. As Carol Geary Schneider (2015), the AAC&U president who launched this initiative, put it,

The best way to prepare students to create solutions in a complex world, the LEAP Challenge affirms, is to actively involve students in working on problem-centered inquiry from the time they enter college (and, optimally, before) until they successfully complete their degrees—two-year and four-year degrees alike. The “challenge,” then, is to prepare every college student—yes, every one of them—to engage complex problems and questions and to ensure that they develop facility in evidence-based inquiry, analysis, and decision-making.

Schneider’s emphasis on “every” college student, as well as the organization’s oft-used phrase “inclusive excellence,” highlights AAC&U’s efforts to encourage colleges and universities to make attention to equity central to their transformation work.

This means focusing explicitly on fostering both the willingness and the ability to understand the historical and systemic roots of students’ differing needs, and to respond effectively to those needs in ways that will ensure equality in outcomes and opportunity, as well as in access.

Indeed, much of the recent research and scholarship in higher education argues that improving student success, fostering deeper learning in students and increasing retention and graduation rates, cannot be achieved unless we create more equitable and inclusive institutions (Elrod & Kezar, 2016; Pendakur 2016; McNair et al., 2016). A substantial body of research indicates that the most significant factor in student success, particularly for students who do not enter the university with the kind of social and cultural capital most valued in academia, is faculty-student interaction (Bensimon, 2007; Kezar, 2014; Pendakur, 2016; Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005). With respect to classroom practice, research indicates that holding students to high academic standards, engaging them in culturally-responsive, student-centered, problem-centered, active-learning strategies, and providing ongoing formative assessment about their progress on learning goals and outcomes can have a significant impact on student learning and success. It also suggests that interactions outside the classroom, such as working on research projects, serving on committees together and chatting informally can be equally impactful on retention. According to Pendakur (2016) the key ingredient in all of these interactions is faculty members’ willingness and ability to serve as “empowering agents,” in students’ academic lives.

[empowering agents] call into question the race-blind, gender-blind standards of a meritocracy by naming and challenging the extant stratification in U.S. higher education [and who] leverage their positions and capacities to either directly transmit or negotiate access to highly prized, key forms of institutional resources, support, and opportunities while concurrently working to alter the institution from the inside.

Building from the work of Bensimon (2007), Pendakur (2016) argues that serving as successful empowerment agents entails critically reflecting on one's own position, power, privilege, experiences and beliefs, challenging deficit-minded representations of students, and recognizing, acknowledging, and building from the cultural and community wealth students bring with them to our institutions.

While Pendakur (2016) makes a convincing case for the effectiveness of these empowerment agents within his broader "intersectional identity-conscious approach to student success," the ability to successfully serve in this capacity (and to integrate this approach in ways that are helpful to marginalized students) requires sensitivity, support, and expertise that faculty members do not necessarily acquire as part of their academic preparation. Indeed, as Bensimon (2007) points out, "institutions have difficulties producing equitable educational outcomes partly because practitioners lack the specialized knowledge and expertise to recognize the racialized nature of the collegiate experience for African-American and Latina/o students and adjust their practices accordingly" (446). We are, therefore, obligated to provide the kind of professional development that will support faculty to develop this sensitivity and expertise as part of the work of institutional transformation.

The purpose of this article is to describe a "community of practice" model (Wenger 2000) of identity-based (Pendakur 2016) professional development being implemented at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB) that is intended to foster this kind of sensitivity and expertise among its faculty. Rooted in the theory of learning as participation, communities of practice are groups of people who interact on an on-going basis, within a series of loosely structured learning environments, in order to deepen their knowledge about a particular topic. Identity-based approaches to professional development seek to deepen participants' understanding of their own and others' identities in an effort to foster more equitable and inclusive learning environments. CSUSB's identity-conscious community of practice leverages existing institutional initiatives and relies heavily on a faculty learning community model for depth of learning, while simultaneously offering multiple levels or tiers of participation in the community of practice as a whole. Building from the assumption that because faculty are scholars, they must be engaged in a scholarly approach to learning, the model positions and engages faculty as learners, first by asking them to inquire into the science of learning and disciplinary habits of mind, and then recursively extending this inquiry into equity, inclusion, and exclusion. In so doing, it embeds attention to, and serves as a model for, the kind of curriculum and pedagogy that research suggests fosters inclusive excellence.

The curriculum and content are structured in ways that reflect what research tells us about how people learn (Bransford, et al., 1999; Kober, N. 2015). It focuses on helping faculty think more metacognitively about—to become more consciously aware of—their own disciplinary ways of thinking and practicing and how to effectively apprentice students into these ways of thinking and doing (Cousin, 2006; Meyer and Land, 2006; Middendorf & Pace, 2004). And it consistently and insistently incorporates critical reflection on and exploration of how racism, sexism, and other systems of power and oppression impact learning, exposing the ways that our interactions with students both in and outside the classroom can either work to create and maintain or to challenge and dismantle institutional and cultural inequities (Bensimon, 2007; McNair et al, 2016; Pendakur, 2016; Steele, 2010; Yosso 2005). Taken together, these strategies are gradually

building a campus culture that nourishes ongoing and transformative faculty learning about how to create more equitable and inclusive learning environments for students.

Institutional Context

CSUSB, a federally designated Hispanic-Serving Institution, is one of 23 institutions in the California State University (CSU) system. It serves approximately 21,000 students, the majority of whom are first-generation college-goers (80%), female (62%), Hispanic (62%), and Pell Grant recipients (63%) (ir.csusb.edu). Eighty-five percent of the student population comes from the Inland Empire of Southern California, a diverse, economically depressed region that ranks last in terms of educational achievement among communities with more than 1 million residents (Brown, 2017). In aggregate, the four- and six-year graduation rates for our students are 12% and 55% respectively. The four- and six-year graduation rates for White students are 21% and 59% and for students of color they are 10% and 53%. Further disaggregation shows even greater disparity in outcomes for African-American students at 9% and 47%. Such data indicates that CSUSB is precisely the kind of institution that needs to think about transformation in terms of equity and inclusion. It is a clear example of an institution that needs to proactively address the “opportunity gaps” for low-income students and students of color and to become the student-ready campus its student population needs it to be.

The equity-minded transformation work currently being undertaken at CSUSB is part of the larger CSU system’s Graduation Initiative 2025 (GI 2025), which aims to add 100,000 more baccalaureate degree-educated citizens to California by 2025 (CSU, 2017) and our campus’s local efforts to convert from quarters to semesters (Q2S) in Fall 2020. The two initiatives are related because the Q2S conversion provides an opportunity for the faculty to completely rethink and realign the curriculum in more equity-minded and pedagogically sound ways. Given that CSUSB is a predominantly female, minority-serving institution, explicitly addressing equity issues as part of the Q2S curriculum transformation will undoubtedly work toward the goals of GI 2025. However, embedding attention to these concerns at the program, course, and faculty-student interaction levels in meaningful ways requires expertise regarding equity-minded teaching and learning that Bensimon’s work suggests most faculty members do not necessarily possess.

The Q2S team has therefore leveraged the CSUSB administration’s need to meet the Chancellor’s Office GI 2025 goals to garner a significant amount of funding to encourage and support faculty to participate in professional learning opportunities intended to foster “equity-mindedness”—defined here as a way of thinking and practicing that draws attention to and seeks to actively address patterns of inequity in student outcomes—as part of the quarter to semester curriculum transformation process. More specifically, faculty members can choose to convert their programs by adapting their existing program to fit the new semester calendar and requirements or apply for a grant to completely transform their programs. Grant money is contingent upon faculty participation in learning opportunities that ask them to: a) study the scholarship regarding how people learn, including the impact that drawing on students’ cultural wealth has on learning; b) think metacognitively about their disciplinary identities and disciplinary habits of mind and how this intersects with other aspects of their identities, such as their race, class, gender, religion, etc.; and c) explore and implement equity-minded, evidence-

based teaching practices that allow students to bring their various identities to these disciplinary habits of mind in ways that might work toward a more equitable and inclusive culture and society. Before funds are dispersed, faculty must submit their new programs with a narrative that explains how the new program embeds equity-mindedness in its structure and how attention to equity in outcome, to closing the opportunity gap for poor students and student of color, will continually be assessed and addressed. To date, 80% of our programs have chosen to transform, which means that the vast majority of the faculty at CSUSB (including adjunct faculty members, who are also eligible for funding to participate in this community of practice) will engage in a significant amount of professional learning regarding equity-minded teaching by Fall 2020.

Theoretical Framework for our Approach to Faculty Learning

Much research and scholarship in the field of professional development has indicated that the traditional model of one-shot faculty professional development workshops is not substantive enough to foster the kind of systemic, equity-minded institutional change CSUSB seeks. Genuine transformation of this nature requires deep learning within and culture change among the faculty (Beach & Cox, 2009; Cox, 2001; Desrocher, 2010; and Hubball and Beach, 2004). The literature regarding the science of learning suggests that deep, transformational learning for faculty, like deep, transformational learning for students, requires actively grappling with concepts, ideas and problems, organizing one's own knowledge and meaning-making related to these problems, and testing this new knowledge against one's prior knowledge over a sustained period of time with multiple opportunities for feedback, support, reflection, and revision (Bransford et al. 1999; Kober, 2015). This kind of intellectual work is absolutely consistent with faculty culture. This is important because the research regarding how institutions change (Kezar, 2014) suggests that meaningful change is more likely to come about if change agents intentionally work in ways consistent with the culture in which they are trying to make change. The approach to faculty learning geared toward equity-minded institutional transformation at CSUSB, therefore, is intellectually challenging, engaging and sustained; it acknowledges and leverages faculty members' identities as disciplinary experts who are used to developing their own scholarly inquiries in an effort to contribute to the knowledge-base of their fields. In short, it assumes that if scholars in our institution are expected to engage and learn and grow, in terms of their ability and willingness to teach in equity-minded ways and to serve as empowering agents for students, then the professional learning in which they participate must position them as scholarly learners who conduct scholarly inquiry into equity-minded teaching and learning in order to contribute to equity-minded institutional transformation in meaningful ways, over an extended period of time.

We have chosen to employ a community of practice model to structure our identity-based approach to faculty professional development and learning at CSUSB. Research shows that they have been used effectively in educational, business, and governmental sectors to "steward" knowledge within organizations and, in so doing, to profoundly transform institutions (Childs et al, 2011; Cox, 2005; OEAS et al, 2012; Reed, 2014; Wenger, 1999; and Wenger et al, 2002). Such effectiveness, however, largely depends on how they are designed. According to Wenger et al (2002), in order for a community of practice to sustain and develop learning and to "steward" knowledge throughout the institution in transformative ways, the community of practice must be designed for "aliveness." When designed appropriately, communities of practice are, and are viewed by the community, as relevant, valuable, and "alive" enough to continually attract new

members, while continuing to engage more experienced members in deeper ways (Cox, 2005; OEAS et al, 2012; Reed, 2014; Wenger et al, 2002). According to Reed (2014), communities of practice are best cultivated by: “(1) allowing for organic evolution in their structures, (2) opening a dialogue among people with both inside and outside perspectives, (3) inviting different levels of participation over time and depending upon current topics, (4) providing both public and private community spaces, (5) focusing on the value of the community (likely both sharing problems and needs and building a body of knowledge), (6) combining familiarity and excitement, and (7) creating a rhythm for the community.”

The identity-conscious community of practice model of professional learning at CSUSB was created with these design principles in mind. It is intended to embody the social theory of learning as participation and to raise consciousness about how identity, power, and institutionalized racism, sexism and other oppressive power structures impact learning, opportunity and success. CSUSB’s community of practice consists of a variety of professional development structures and activities—faculty learning communities (FLCs), mini-conferences, book clubs, speaker series, peer class visits and observations, and roundtable discussions—that allow for differing levels of participation. However, all focus in some way on these two core concepts/learning goals: a) learning requires active social participation that inevitably structured by power dynamics and asymmetries; and b) institutional racism, sexism, and other forms of institutionalized oppression impact learning, opportunity, and outcome. How faculty interact with students matters to the kind of impact these forms of injustice ultimately has. However, while all of the aforementioned activities are offered as part of the overall community of practice, the primary structure for faculty learning in CSUSBs model is the FLC.

In “Introduction to Faculty Learning Communities,” Cox (2004) defines FLCs as groups of cross-disciplinary faculty who “engage in an active, collaborative, yearlong program with a curriculum about enhancing teaching and learning and with frequent seminars and activities that provide learning, development, the scholarship of teaching, and community building” (8). According to Beach and Cox (2009), when implemented with integrity, FLCs, compared to other forms of faculty development, are “more (a) structured, (b) intensive, (c) focused on completing the deliverables, (d) focused on the social aspects of building community, (e) focused on the scholarship of teaching and learning, and (f) focused on the team aspect while developing individual projects” (as reported in Desrocher (2010), p. 3). They break down silos, build community, provide a safe, supportive, and effective environment for faculty learning, and, in so doing, they have been shown to create the grassroots networks needed to create and sustain cultural shifts and systemic institutional change (Beach & Cox, 2009; Cox, 2001; Hubball & Beach, 2004).

While the FLC structure is the core of our community of practice model, the variety of activities mentioned above is necessary to keep the overall community of practice “alive.” According to Wenger et al (2002), “alive” communities generally have three main levels of participation (1) a core group of people who take on leadership roles by “identify[ing] topics for the community to address and mov[ing] the community along its learning agenda”; (2) an active group who attends meetings regularly and occasionally takes on leadership roles; and (3) peripheral members, “who keep to the sidelines, watching the interactions and listening to the dialogues among the core and active members.” Rather than require particular levels of engagement or participation, successful

communities of practice create opportunities for semiprivate interaction and learning that still has impact and might ultimately draw these members into more active participation.

Within the CSUSB model, the roundtables function to introduce and attract potential faculty participants to the questions, ideas, and activities central to the community of practice. These functions provide a venue for the active members to share their projects with more peripheral faculty members. They emphasize the value of the work of the community of practice both to the faculty participants themselves, as well as to the institution more generally. Similarly, full-day workshops serve to introduce faculty to the ideas and questions that will be more fully explored in the FLCs, by allowing workshop participants to experience equity-minded, evidence-based teaching practices and engage in discussion about them before committing to the time the FLCs demand. In addition to attracting new members, these activities, among others, such as brown bag lunches, also provide a way for faculty who have already participated in an FLC to stay connected to the project and to share and develop their expertise, even if they are not participating in a different FLC.

The Inquiry-Based, Identity-Conscious Curriculum

Given the active, participatory nature of learning and the commitment to scholarly inquiry that characterizes faculty culture, the two concepts at the core of our community of practice—1) learning requires active social participation that inevitably structured by power dynamics and asymmetries and 2) institutional racism, sexism, and other forms of institutionalized oppression impact learning, opportunity, and outcome; how faculty interact with students matters to the kind of impact these forms of injustice ultimately have—are not something we can simply tell faculty and then expect these ideas to significantly impact how faculty interact with their students both in and outside of their classrooms. Instead, we must engage faculty in scholarly inquiry around four essential questions that will reveal and reinforce those two key ideas in deep and meaningful ways. The four essential questions that explicitly guide our entire community of practice are:

1. How does learning work?
2. How can we make our disciplinary habits of mind, the ways of thinking and practicing that contribute to complex wicked problem-solving visible to students and invite them into our disciplinary communities in ways that allow them to integrate the identities, values, and commitments they bring with them with the new ways of thinking and doing that they are developing at the university?
3. What are equity-minded, high-impact, evidence-based curricular design and teaching practices and how can we implement them in ways that engage how people learn, foster disciplinary habits of mind and build from the cultural wealth and connections to community that our students bring with them to their university experience?
4. How can we change the discourse about student learning and success from what students *can't* do to what they can and will be able to do with our support, guidance, and apprenticeship?

As the facilitators of the professional learning opportunities provide resources and activities that enable faculty to explore each of these questions (as well as the ones they develop on their own, in the context of their own needs and interests), they bring attention to the roles that identity and

power dynamics play in learning and in access to opportunity. They also ask faculty to reflect on their own identities, learning experiences, and access to opportunities and to bring the substance of these reflections to bear on the questions and curricular and pedagogical work they conduct as part of their participation in the community of practice.

Threshold Concepts

One resource the facilitators bring to many of our professional learning activities regarding curriculum and course design is Meyer and Land's (2006) notion of "threshold concepts." According to Meyer and Land, threshold concepts refer to the ideas or concepts that are absolutely core to the ways of knowing and doing in a discipline. Mastery and use of these concepts is indicative of an individual's membership in a disciplinary community; it identifies them as a disciplinary expert (as, for example, a historian, a mathematician, a chemist, etc.). Conversely, if an individual does not understand these ideas well enough to use them, s/he cannot move forward in the discipline, will not be recognized as an "insider" within the community, and will be unable to credibly contribute to the field's knowledge base.

Many of the professional learning activities, particularly the FLCs, begin with a threshold concepts approach to curriculum design and pedagogy, because it is so intricately reflective of the research regarding how people learn. It engages faculty where their passion lies—in their discipline and content knowledge—and because by explicitly engaging the faculty members' disciplinary identities, it provides a nice bridge to talking about student identity, what it means to be a community "insider" or "outsider," what the markers are of "insider- and outsider-ness," and what it entails and sometimes costs to become an "insider." This then allows the facilitators and the participants to engage the more political and affective dimensions of learning, the role these dimensions can and should play in how we design our courses, assignments, and pedagogical approaches, and the impact they might have on the opportunity gap.

The way the topic is initially introduced is to ask faculty to read about the notion of threshold concepts and then, in order to engage their background knowledge before discussion and to establish reflection as a norm for our work, we ask them to reflect on their own learning, to describe an "ah-ha moment," or a shift in thinking. We also ask them to consider how and why such a shift was transformative and the impact this transformation has had on their identities, on the ways they see and interpret the world. The initial responses to these prompts are not usually very substantive, but participants revisit these same questions multiple times as we delve deeper into research about how people learn and the ways learning intersects with issues of power and identity. They also have the opportunity to develop them further throughout their professional learning experiences and to hear from other members of the community who may have considered these issues in a previous professional learning setting.

After this reflection, participants work in disciplinary groups to identify threshold concepts in their disciplines. They brainstorm a list individually first, then come together as a disciplinary group to identify a common one to focus on, and then to work through the characteristics of threshold concepts. They then describe for the other groups outside their discipline what the disciplinary threshold concept they have chosen is (what it actually means), why it is "troublesome" for students, what is "counterintuitive" about it, what a students' work might look

like when they are in the process of productively grappling with the idea, but have not yet mastered it, what pedagogical moves an instructor might make to foster such mastery, and why, when mastered, the threshold concept is “transformative” and “irreversible.”

Participant feedback from our FLCs indicate that faculty members generally find this activity useful and engaging and are surprised to discover that although these concepts are central to their fields, they rarely address them explicitly in their courses and curriculum. They see this as a “problem” that is somewhat easily addressed. From here, participants delve more deeply into how these threshold concepts shape disciplinary habits of mind, the ways of thinking and practicing in a discipline using Middendorf and Pace’s (2004) “Decoding the Disciplines” model. More specifically, faculty participants reflect on their learning in graduate school and identify one assignment or project they needed to complete that was typical of the work they now do as a disciplinary expert, to describe how they approached the task (what they needed to do to address the task, how their approach evolved as they moved forward, etc.), and to identify what they needed to know, understand, and be able to do in order to engage productively in this work. Once they’ve reflected individually, faculty members share their responses with a partner outside of their field in a structured “pair-share” activity. The listening partner is to focus on and ask probing questions about the language his/her partner uses and processes that s/he describes that are unclear. Participants then regroup by discipline and share their responses and their experiences working with a partner outside their field, focusing on the similarities and differences in the task, approach, and required knowledge and skills, as well as on the language and processes their partners asked them to explain. These lists (of disciplinary problems, disciplinary ways of thinking and doing, and the knowledge and skills necessary to engage in this disciplinary work) form the basis for curriculum design, course design, signature assignments, supporting students’ successful completion of signature work, and/or whatever the focus of the faculty learning community might be.

The Shift to Equity

As noted above, in the process of engaging faculty in these explorations, attention is paid to identity and to “insider-ness” and “outsider-ness”; faculty participants discuss the distance that must be crossed in order to become an insider, what one must acquire and give up in order to cross this distance, how the distance—the quantity and the quality of it—came to be. Participants further discuss how this often varies for different students based on their identities, and how we can best help students cross various disciplinary thresholds with dignity and without losing the connection to who they are and where they come from and who they would like to be and where they would like to go. In short, the FLC members begin to broach the topic of the role identity and power (including institutional racism, sexism, and other –isms) play in educational access and outcome and in learning more generally.

To support this exploration, participants are asked to describe, in a private, informal written reflection, how they think learning works, what supports it, and how these assumptions about learning are made manifest in their teaching practices. Facilitators then introduce Wenger’s social theory of learning as participation and various frameworks for and research regarding how people learn. They ask participants to discuss each theory/framework individually, to identify similarities and differences, and to compare them to their pre-conceived ideas about how

learning works. Once they follow-up on participants' questions and observations, they delve more deeply into the affective, social, and political dimensions of learning (Bransford et al.'s first principle regarding the need to surface and engage the knowledge, ideas and assumptions students bring with them and Schoenbach et al.'s "personal" and "social" dimensions of learning) and the role identity, power, and politics play in learning, opportunity, and "success."

To begin these discussions, participants read articles or excerpts from books regarding the impact various forms of oppression can have on learning and engagement. They also explore the "deficit language" that pervades so much of the discourse in higher education regarding working class students and students of color, and discuss the negative impact this can have on faculty interaction with students both in and outside the classroom. Ultimately, the FLC explores the question McNair et al (2016) raise in *Becoming a Student-Ready College* about what a "student-ready college" might look like and what it would mean to value students' cultural wealth, what they bring with them to the university, rather than to put the onus on students to be "college-ready" and to speak almost exclusively in terms of what they lack. In the process, faculty participants reflect privately on the ways in which their own identities and cultural wealth were or were not aligned with and valued in their own university experiences and how and why that might matter to the work they now do with students.

Establishing Community Norms

Engaging meaningfully in these conversations, going deeply enough to really uncover and engage honestly with some of the unconscious biases that shape how the participants think about and interact with their students, is not easy because it requires taking the notion of faculty as *learners* seriously. This means recognizing that people's prior experiences and knowledge will shape how they interact, engage with, and absorb material and creating space for this knowledge and experience to be brought to bear on the conversation at hand. Doing so often feels dangerous for different people, for different reasons. For example, we have had the experience where those who occupy more privileged positions deny or dismiss the ways that racism, sexism, and other systems of inequality influence learning, because they have not experienced it and/or because they cannot see it. Even if no one in the group explicitly takes this position, those who have and continue to experience the exercise of unequal power structures often say they fear that such denial and dismissal will happen. Experience has also shown that calling attention to the "deficit language" often used to describe students, to language many of the participants use and have used in conversation within the community of practice and elsewhere, can put some faculty members on the defensive, ultimately alienating them from the content and the community of practice. Those faculty members who share identities and experiences with the students being described in those deficit terms, those faculty members who themselves have and continue to experience racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression, may also feel further wounded and alienated. Losing members from either group (even if they stay, but disengage) means we limit the amount of genuine progress towards equitable transformation we can make as a campus.

In order to avoid this fate, and to create conditions in which productive engagement is most likely to take place, the facilitators try to name and engage these possible tensions prior to going into these conversations. At the outset of all of the professional learning work at CSUSB, we establish "community agreements" for the work we will do together. These agreements,

generated in response to reflective prompts regarding participants' best and worst learning experiences and what made them so, usually include things like "be willing to take risks"; "stay present/be here"; "don't monopolize the conversation—watch your air time," but on days when we know we are going to address the more difficult conversations about power, inequality, and social (in)justice, we intentionally revisit the community agreements we established earlier. We propose a version of the agreements that Singleton (2016) argues are necessary in order to have the kind of productive conversations about race that bring about equity in schools. According to Singleton (2016), participants in these conversations need to be willing to "stay engaged, experience discomfort, speak [their] truth, and expect and accept non-closure." To help frame our conversations productively, then, we try to address the danger of disengagement upfront by proposing a variation on Singleton's agreements that we have found to be both productive and provocative.² We put the following six agreements on the board and ask the participants to reflect privately on what they think each agreement means and why they might be relevant to a conversation about the role racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression in learning, at our institution, and in the world of higher education more generally:

1. No shame
2. No blame
3. No guilt
4. Call out "the ouch"
5. Stay engaged
6. Experience discomfort

During the discussion of their reflections on these agreements, and before the facilitators ask if they can be added to the pre-existing community agreements, participants often share their fear or experience of saying or having unknowingly said the "wrong thing" or having been misunderstood and feeling frustrated and guilty. Others have mentioned the frustration of needing to figure out whether and how to call out something they find racist or offensive in some way, of having to weigh both the personal and professional costs of "saying something" and then running the risk of, for example, being seen as or accused of being "the angry Black woman." This then leads to a discussion of why it might be important in this context to try to push through this, to what it would take to "stay engaged" and to "experience the discomfort" in order to make genuine progress toward our goal of a being a more equitable institution. Presenting these ideas and asking the participants to unpack them, before engaging in explicit conversation about the deficit language commonly used to describe so many of our students, creates a space to name what is likely to be in the air and something to point to as a way of opening a dialogue about what is happening in the room if/when things do get tense, but it still does not necessarily go far enough in preparing faculty members who are unfamiliar with a lot of the work around the role which identity, power and privilege plays in learning to engage at the level necessary to be truly transformative.

² A version of this strategy was introduced to me by my colleague Lauren Servais at Santa Rosa Junior College, who adapted it from the National SEED project (<https://nationalseedproject.org/about-us>).

Identity Consciousness and Racial Justice

To help deepen participants' understanding, then, we also explicitly frame the conversation about deficit language and cultural wealth with an exploration of the notion of identity-consciousness. According to Singleton (2014), movement to a more racially just world requires that both people of color and white people develop racial consciousness, which entails a shift in thinking from "I don't know I don't know"/"I don't know, but I think I do" to "I know I don't know" to "I know I know." Thus, after the conversation about adding the additional community agreements, facilitators present Singleton's claim and ask the faculty participants to reflect individually on what each of these stages might mean, to provide examples that might fall under each category and why, and to make connections between this kind of consciousness and the work we do with students. They also ask participants to think about how such consciousness-raising might be relevant to other aspects of identity and/or to the intersections of our multiple identity positions. From there, we engage in an experiential activity in which the facilitator asks a series of questions and the participants respond to each prompt³. The responses include:

- I think most about this identity.
- I think least about this identity.
- I have the most fulfilling relationships with people with whom I share this identity.
- This aspect of my identity makes me feel shame.
- This aspect of my identity provides me the most access to wealth.
- This aspect of my identity has had the strongest impact on how I see myself.
- This aspect of my identity has had the greatest impact, positive or negative, on how others see me.
- I feel the most at ease with this aspect of my identity.

Debriefing this activity as a whole group entails asking the faculty participants what they noticed, what was difficult and/or easy about the exercise, what, if anything, made them uncomfortable and why they think these things were so, and what they learned. They are also asked to link any insights they gained from this activity to the previous conversation about the importance of identity consciousness to a more equitable and inclusive institution and to the role that identity and power play in learning, opportunity and success. Some of the most powerful insights have come from participants who are willing to share how difficult it is to admit to some of their colleagues that they have never thought about any of this before and how different it must be to move through the world feeling the need to (or being free of the need to) think about how others perceive you and trying to account for or subtly counter such unspoken assumptions. This has often led to conversations about Dubois' (1903/1996) notion of double-consciousness, the notion of unconscious bias, and back to Steele's notion of stereotype threat and the impact this can have on faculty interaction with students and student success more generally.

These conversations also often lead to discussion about the ways unconscious bias is not only reflected in the deficit language often used to describe our students, but also in our own interactions with students and within interactions among the students in our classes. This leads to

³ This activity and these prompts were developed by my colleague Evelyn Knox.

a larger discussion of the role identity and power plays in classroom dynamics, in how we might structure the classroom, our syllabi, our assignments, and the moves we make in the classroom when we operate with more identity consciousness: what issues do we need to think about? What questions or issues do we need to address? In short, what can we, as instructors, do to dismantle the types of power imbalances that often prevent marginalized students from succeeding to their fullest potential?

Within the context of this conversation, we also revisit the notion of threshold concepts and their reflections about why these might be troublesome and/or why the irreversible transformation they bring about might be problematic for some students. We talk about ways to help students see and/or create connections between the identities student bring with them, the communities to which they already belong, and the disciplinary communities they wish to join and the work they hope to do. With all of these conversations in mind, we then ask faculty to identify an evidence-based teaching practice that they would like to study and implement, one they think might help students engage productively with the threshold concepts in their field and is consistent with what they now understand about how learning works in all of its complexity. We then support them to implement it in identity-conscious and equity-minded ways, by asking them to continually reflect on the following questions and discuss these reflections with other members of the community of practice:

- What opportunities are you creating for students to engage in authentic disciplinary (and interdisciplinary) problem-solving?
- How are you making the threshold concepts that shape these disciplinary habits of mind explicit?
- How are you supporting students' understanding of these concepts? How are you engaging the knowledge and assumptions they bring with them? How are you building from their cultural wealth?
- What formative feedback and other pedagogical moves are you making to support the recursive nature of learning, as students attempt to cross these disciplinary thresholds?
- How are you asking them to organize their knowledge and integrate their learning?
- What opportunities are you providing for them to think metacognitively about their learning and to engage in metacognitive conversation?
- How are you ensuring that all voices are included and heard in the classroom?
- How are you inviting students into this work and helping them to see/imagine themselves as authentic, authorized members of the disciplinary community?
- How are you helping them to see/make connections between who they are and who they wish to become and to navigate the conflicts inherent to this process?

Of course, all of this content cannot be fully addressed or explored in any one particular professional learning opportunity. Thus, as noted before, we offer a variety of professional learning structures and activities within the overall community of practice: faculty learning communities (FLCs), mini-conferences, book clubs, speaker series, peer class visits and observations, and roundtable discussions that allow for differing levels of participation, but all focus in some way on the ideas and questions outlined above.

Impact

It is too soon to measure the impact our community of practice is having on graduation rates and in closing the opportunity gap for poor students and students of color at CSUSB because much of the revised courses and curriculum will not be implemented until Fall 2020, when the campus converts to semesters. That said, we are beginning to see evidence of the growth of such a grassroots network dedicated to equity-minded institutional transformation in the increased participation in the various professional learning activities that make up our community of practice. In the last year of the traditional “one-shot” workshop model of professional learning on our campus, the number of total faculty participants in professional learning opportunities was 107. The first year we began to implement faculty learning communities as part of a larger, more coherent community of practice model, the number grew to 176. The year we began implementing greater attention to identity, diversity, equity, and inclusion and their relationship to teaching and learning, the number was 193. In the last two years, since work on GI 2025 and Q2S has begun, the numbers of faculty participants are 421 and 726 respectively. These numbers indicate our community of practice is very much “alive”, interest is growing, and participation is ongoing. In keeping with Wenger’s idea of differing levels of participation, we are also now seeing many faculty members who participated in earlier FLCs taking on leadership roles by facilitating their own FLC and by participating in a “Facilitator Learning Community,” an FLC that explores best practices for designing and implementing faculty professional development.

In addition to this increasing and ongoing participation in the community of practice, participants’ comments and reflections on their experience in our community of practice and the impact it is having on their teaching now, even before the semester curriculum work can be implemented, suggests that we are well on our way to transforming our institution into a more inclusive and equitable learning environment. When asked immediately after participation in an FLC about their learning, participants noted that they had learned “strategies for fostering more equitable interaction and engagement of students,” “ways to think about bias and perspective differently and how this is relevant to [their] teaching,” and “how to teach for depth, rather than breadth, that it’s worth taking the time to get students to engage on a personal and interactive level.” Two years later, when the same group of faculty participants was asked to reflect on how their work in the community of practice has impacted their work with students, we received the following comments:

Through exposure to issues of microaggressions, bias and understanding better what is meant by social justice, I find myself trying to address these issues in all of the classes that I teach. An example of how what I learned in the Institute has affected my teaching is I now start every class talking about how different perceptions that result from our different identities and experiences are brought to the study of all phenomenon. I use the exercise we did for this in all my classes with an object from home. It tends to get all the students thinking about their own bias and it is a great place to start every class.

The institute helped me to recognize that I am guilty of unconscious bias. As a junior faculty member, I am constantly reflecting on my own teaching practices and looking for ways I can improve. It was eye opening to see that my own unconscious bias can affect how I teach and how I may unknowingly exclude a group of students from a class

discussion. After the institute, I have tried to be more conscious of my behavior in my interactions with students.

Redesigning this course through scaffolding and approaching the design by working backwards through the big course learning outcomes has changed my perspective on how I teach all of my courses. I think it is important to have the big picture in mind and it is important for the students to get to the point where they can see the big picture. Part of this big picture relates to what students should really get out of college and how each class I teach can contribute to this outcome. As a mathematics teacher, diversity has not always been a big part of my curriculum. However, this institute and the incorporation of ideas concerning diversity into the course redesign has really opened my eyes to the important opportunities I have to impart a perspective onto my students as they continue their journey to become more aware of their diverse environment and their actions within it. This, I feel, is such an important outcome for our students as they progress through college. Thus, it really should be an important outcome for my students as they progress through my class.

While these comments suggest that the faculty members, two years after their original participation in an FLC (referred to here as the “institute”) continue to see an impact on their work with students, we realize these assessments are informal and indirect. One FLC, funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF) Widening Implementation and Demonstration of Evidence-Based Reforms (WIDER) grant no. 1347671, was more formally evaluated as part of the grant work. The community was dedicated to studying and implementing evidence-based teaching practices in large STEM courses and to developing a strategic plan for increasing the understanding and use of evidence-based teaching methods within the College of Natural Sciences. The external evaluation of this grant found that the project was:

successful at creating an active and intensive Faculty Learning Community [...] All FLC participants reported that the experience had been extremely valuable for them, particularly the community aspect of the FLC. [...] Observations confirmed that FLC members were actively using their chosen strategies in the daily implementation of their classes, as well as a variety of student learning support strategies and instructional techniques to meaningfully engage students in course material. [...] The majority of students rated the piloted courses highly. In particular, most students felt that their instructor was well-prepared, responsive to students, enthusiastic about their teaching, and successful at creating an environment that was conducive to learning. [...] FLC members identified a number of changes in their students related to their EBTPs (evidence-based teaching practices) including increased engagement, a more positive learning environment, deeper thinking, communication skill development, higher final grades, and more positive attitudes toward STEM disciplines.

The strategic plan developed as part of this grant by the FLC members has led to a new five-year NSF Improving Undergraduate STEM Education (IUSE) grant, which will extend the work begun as part of the WIDER project on evidence-based teaching. The new project will have a much greater emphasis on identity, equity, and inclusion and to closing the opportunity gap for students in the STEM fields. Funds from this grant will be used to evaluate the impact of the

project on student success. Evaluation will help us to better understand, evaluate, and assess the impact of our identity-conscious community of practice on the institution as a whole and the extent to which it has transformed into a more equitable and inclusive learning environment.

Conclusion

The work at CSUSB is predicated on the notion that robust faculty learning is required for equity-minded institutional change. The model described here stands in stark contrast to the “one-shot” workshop model that has historically characterized faculty development in higher education. Indeed, CSUSB’s nascent community of practice for faculty professional learning asks the faculty participants to reflect on their own learning, identities, and experiences; to draw on these reflections to develop and research answers to these questions; to experience and engage in the kind of equity-minded, evidence-based teaching practices they are exploring; to reflect metacognitively on their engagement with these practices; to develop curricula and assignments based on this work in their own classrooms; and to give and receive feedback on these assignments and their implementation from facilitators and their peers.

In the end, what unifies this identity-conscious community of practice is a desire to transform the institution into a more inclusive and equitable space. In this renewed institution, all students are prepared to bring their identities, interests, and experiences, along with multiple disciplinary lenses and approaches, to the unscripted questions, problems, and tasks that define the 21st century. In keeping with the theory of learning as social participation at the heart of community of practice model, we create space for faculty participants to co-construct the knowledge discovered, developed and shared within the community of practice. Doing so, while modeling the kind of equity-minded teaching practices and interactions we hope our faculty will engage in with our students, is key not only to keeping the community of practice alive, but also to enabling it to function as a driver of the institutional change we hope to effect.

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Fighting for Equity and Community in an Urban Research University

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Abstract

The equity lens evaluates institutional barriers that prevent students of color from gaining access to resources for college success (Bensimon, 2005). The first-generation college students at the University of Southern California are 16% of the total student body and students of color comprise two-thirds of this population. Since 2008, how to support first-generation college students of color in their academic achievement and college success once in college has expanded the discussion beyond access. By evaluating institutional structures through the equity lens, the response has been to create intentional academic and social programs for first-generation college students of color that bridge the academic and student services divide. Through descriptions of actual programs and stories from students affected by these programs, this essay will discuss innovative approaches to serving first-generation students of color at predominantly white universities.

Keywords: first-generation college students; students of color; equity lens; institutional support; faculty of color

Iris V entered college a confident, working class Latina who had been an environmental activist in high school.¹ Iris was a strong student from South Gate High School, a largely Latino high school in southeast Los Angeles County, and she entered the University of Southern California (USC) as a full scholarship student and a Topping Scholar, a competitive scholarship program that provides additional support to first-generation college students. But Iris' first year was difficult, academically and personally. Struggling in science courses, she began to doubt her own abilities, and most of her courses seemed far removed from the realities of her own urban family and community life. At the end of that first year, Iris was unsure whether USC had been the right choice for her, and she wondered what she was going to be able to do with the disjointed education she was receiving.

The Office for Diversity and Strategic Initiatives (ODSI) of the USC Dornsife College of Letters, Arts & Sciences oversees programs that generate success for first-generation and underrepresented minority students like Iris. The two authors of this essay ran this office together and established programs that utilized the equity framework developed by Bensimon (2004, 2005) to fully serve this burgeoning population at USC. Although USC is an expensive, private university, it strives to create access for large numbers of first-generation college students. Currently about sixteen percent of USC's eighteen thousand undergraduates are the first in their families to go to college, Twenty one percent are underrepresented minority students, and one out of four are eligible for the Federal Pell Grant program. Initially, most of the efforts were focused on creating access to the university. More recently, the focus has shifted to providing

¹ Pseudonyms are used throughout this essay to refer to actual students described.

programs that enable first-generation student of color to succeed, bridging the divide between academic and student services.

The discourse on equity is complex in the higher education setting. Equity in education is focused on creating systems that address unequal education and resources for students of color due to institutional discrimination, racism and bias. The equity framework developed by USC Professor Bensimon is a new paradigm, which moves the conversation away from the deficient framework to analyzing systems that create barriers for students of color (Bensimon, 2005). There are four dimensions in this framework: (a) access, meaning conditions of how students of color gain access to resources, programs, scholarships and services, (b) retention, meaning retention of students of color; (c) institutional receptivity, meaning the scorecard measures of institutional support for students of color; (d) excellence, meaning the integration of access and achievement, to understand how they may prevent students of color from getting the best education possible (Bensimon, 2004, 2005).

In this essay, four such programs developed by USC's ODSI will be featured. A study-abroad program done in partnership with a student service organization for first-generation college students was the first program developed. A course for career planning for first-generation college students enabled a wider group to benefit from reflection and strategies to connect curriculum with career choices. A broader first-generation student task force was created to pull together academic and student service providers from throughout the university to collaborate on best practices and connect with a larger number of students, including a welcoming dinner for newly arrived first-generation students and their families. Finally, a civic engagement model helps first-generation students connect to communities like the ones they come to campus from, and establishes direct connections that bridge academic learning and community networking for student development and advancement.

In the development of all these programs, the input of first-generation students of color was critical in program implementation and revision. Often, Dornsife ODSI was trying to address real issues of educational inequity between students based on race and/or income that led first-generation students of color, often low-income, to make certain decisions about their education that did not lead to student success and achievement. ODSI directly promotes equity by fashioning programs that meet this learning gap, but also directly engages students of color in making academic decisions that broaden their outlook on what is possible to achieve academically, personally, and related to their careers after college.

Study Abroad for Equity and Success

Study abroad would not normally be perceived as an area to promote educational equity because of its costs and limited reach. But at USC, university officials pride themselves on creating global leadership among the student body, and global issues are regularly part of on-campus curriculum discussions. Students from low-income backgrounds who have not travelled before arriving at USC often find themselves left out of these academic discussions, and trying to compete with high-income students were traveling abroad is viewed as commonplace. Because USC often provides resources for low-income students to travel abroad in organized programs, this effort was established in concert with a student scholarship fund and program to promote the

concept of learning around the globe through travel, reflection and research, connecting the local interests of students with global concerns and problem-solving.

The Norman Topping Student Aid Fund (NTSAF) supports about one hundred students throughout their undergraduate years. Along with the Dornsife ODSI, they partnered to create a high-impact program that would affect Iris' trajectory of achievement for the rest of her undergraduate career. The Japan Summer Immersion Program (SIP) was developed by the Topping Program and the Dornsife ODSI, to give students like Iris an immersive three-week study abroad experience that would capitalize on her student strengths, encourage her to do research, and relate the new experiences of study abroad in Japan with topics more related to experiences that were already familiar to her. In short, this is a program that started with student strengths, not deficits, and capitalizes on USC's commitment to create global leaders that can take on world problems, but explicitly for first-generation students of color that can blossom in a supportive, collaborative experience abroad.

Iris was accepted to this program in her sophomore year and took part in it during the end of that school year in the "Maymester," a time still linked to the spring semester but after final exams when the course can be the student's sole focus. This arrangement was critically important for these low-income students because it did not require additional financial aid for tuition beyond their regular yearly packages. Iris decided to do research on environmental issues in Japan, and both read about Japanese environmentalism and asked questions to Japanese faculty members about issues of pollution and water safety. In her presentation to the group, Iris showed, through photography, how decisions to publicly utilize the rivers that moved through urban Kyoto as areas that could bring families together for leisure activity and reenergize night life, could be contrasted to the lack of use in her native South Gate. There, neglect had allowed environmental pollution of its waterways and kept the largely Latino public from making use of the potential beauty of the nearby river. It was a masterful performance that brought academic confidence back to Iris, and reconnected her to the political and social interests she had before USC. This project helped Iris decide to major in History, Law & Culture, an interdisciplinary major in Dornsife College, and set her on a path to write a senior honors thesis on the history of environmentalism in South Gate. The Japan SIP also encouraged her to do semester abroad in Brazil as a junior, something that over eighty percent of students who have participated in SIP have also done. Iris is poised to graduate at the end of fall 2017 with honors and go on eventually to law school or graduate school in environmental studies.

The Japan SIP program was established to apply an equity framework to first-generation college students from underrepresented minority backgrounds at USC through high impact practices related to study abroad and research opportunities. When the program was started in 2010, statistics on study abroad participation at USC indicated that first-generation college students were at least twenty percent less likely to participate in traditional study-abroad programs. Because of funding availability for studies abroad in general at USC, and specifically funds available to Norman Topping Scholars, the offices involved knew that this gap was not a result simply of lack of funds by low-income students. Rather there were deeper issues that kept students like Iris from participating in study abroad opportunities in traditional programs. First, the rough start of her academic career at USC meant that a minimum 3.0 GPA requirement often left excellent students from participating in traditional study abroad and research programs, even

if they were the individual students who might benefit most from these experiences. Secondly, students who came from low-income backgrounds and families in which parents did not go to college shied away from leaving campus for experiences abroad because they did not understand how it might benefit their own academic and career trajectories.

Rather than see these obstacles as deficits in the student's training or desire for studies abroad or research, the Japan SIP program concentrates on the particular experiences and perspectives these students possess that would enhance the overall experience for them. These experiences could be put in service of promoting achievement that would benefit the educational trajectory of students of color for their entire time at USC. It was critically important that the Japan SIP would involve fourteen underrepresented minority undergraduate students who were part of the same fellowship group, along with a team of instructors who were all well-versed on academic success strategies for first-generation college students of color. For most undergraduates selected, this would be the first time they travelled outside the United States or their nation of birth; for some, it would be their very first time on an airplane. Japan was selected as a non-Western nation that had substantial ties to Los Angeles, the home of the University of Southern California, and as a country that was safe to travel for foreigners. For many of the Latina students for whom this was the first time traveling away from home, and especially for their parents, safety concerns were serious issues that kept them from venturing into study abroad. Unlike other programs, we involved the students' parents and families into the planning, by both meeting with them ahead of time so that they could get a taste of what their children would learn and experience, and also setting up a blog so students could post photographs and reflections each day while we travelled abroad. The blog made it easy for family members to follow our progress in Japan, while encouraging many younger siblings of the students to want to pursue college at least in part for the opportunity to study abroad like their older brothers and sisters.

As in Iris' situation, the research component of the Japan SIP was essential for each student to integrate the study-abroad experience with their own academic and personal interests. Almost none of the undergraduates had ever taken an academic course on Japan or East Asia, so it was important for each of them to work on a topic that had salience with their previous interests, and develop a cross-national comparison that would allow them to explore the topic in a region that was new to them. Each of them worked closely with a faculty mentor, often striking up a relationship with a professor that was new around a topic of mutual interest. Furthermore, graduate research assistants helped them focus their research, and develop skills in "research on the go" that would be useful as travel in Japan commenced, including ethnography and interviewing techniques, participant-observation, and photographic documentation. Each student wrote reflections after each day of touring, lectures, and sight-seeing in Japan, and from these initial reflections each was able to craft a research paper and presentation upon their return. For most this was their first research experience. They learned that with attention to detail and their own observations and constant writing, they could craft an analysis that would have interesting things to say about a society that was new to them. Moreover, connecting that research to future courses they could take in their respective majors was a critical component that made the impact long-lasting in their academic maturation.

Japan SIP also broke down barriers between academic and student affairs. Having a critical mass of faculty of color is important in a university. Faculty of color play a vital role in undergraduate

education because they add value to students and to the university. According to Umbach (2006), faculty of color are more likely to interact with students than their White counterparts, and faculty of color bring a richer experience to the classroom through their contributions of diverse perspectives and pedagogical approaches (Antonio, 2002; Umbach, 2006). Faculty of color also apply more interactive and collaborative teaching with the students and integrate diversity exercises and activities in their courses when compared to White faculty (Umbach, 2006). Although the student body is increasing in diversity over the last 30 years, the faculty of color population has reflected insignificant changes (Antonio, 2002; Umbach, 2006).

Dornsife ODSI operates in an academic unit and was led by a Vice Dean for Diversity, George Sanchez, who is also a full professor in History and American Studies & Ethnicity. Each of the four Japan SIP trips to date involved Ph.D. students as academic advisors, who helped the undergraduates craft their ideas and provide feedback on their research and writing. This team collaborated with student affairs professionals that knew the students intimately and provided continuity between the Japan SIP course and the life the students led before and after the Maymester experience. The faculty and Ph.D. students are important role models for the students, and connect them with other faculty members upon their return from Japan. Indeed, according to the extensive feedback provided by the undergraduates who have participated in the program, the fact that this collaboration was led by scholars of color and student affairs professionals of color made the instructors more approachable. This aspect allowed undergraduates of color to ask questions they were unlikely to ask of other faculty members, just because of their academic interests.

Unique Pathways to Career Success

Japan SIP was only the first initiative promoted by Dornsife ODSI to go beyond access approaches to reach low-income, first-generation students of color at USC for student success. First-generation college students are a population that has lately received more attention from the University of Southern California, but the conversation on support for first-generation college students dates back to 2008. Dr. George Sanchez identified first-generation college students as a population on which he had an interest in focusing, when he was appointed in spring 2008 as Vice Dean for Diversity and Strategic Initiatives in USC Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences.

Initial data collected by the Dornsife ODSI in 2008 indicated that first-generation college students at USC faced unique challenges to succeed that were different than those faced by other USC students and different than those faced by first-generation college students at other colleges and universities. Unlike the situation at other universities, there seemed to be no gap in graduation rates between first-generation college students and those whose parents did attend college. First-generation college students had the same six year graduation rate over ninety percent as other students, and a similar four year graduation rate, close to seventy-five percent. While there was not a “graduation problem” to address, it did seem clear that many first-generation college students approached their college graduation without a clear direction of what would come next. Through countless conversations with graduating seniors, Dr. Sanchez and the Dornsife ODSI developed an approach to help first-generation college students better prepare themselves for career success early in the undergraduate years.

A 2-unit sophomore seminar in “Pathways to Career Success for First Generation College Students,” to be taught by Dr. Sanchez, was begun in fall 2013. It was aimed at sophomores and juniors in all majors and all schools who were the first in their families to attend college. Utilizing intense publicity to low-income students through student organizations, transfer student activities, and university offices, combined with a process of clearances before enrollment, the course was limited to students who were the first in their families to attend college. Between forty and fifty students enrolled each time the course was offered each fall semester. The first part of the course was intended to allow students to feel at ease as first-generation college students by discussing initial reactions to USC and its wealth, as well as reading personal accounts of students from similar backgrounds negotiating university life, such as the autobiography of Supreme Court justice Sonia Sotomayor. One group that particularly appreciated this section of the course were transfer students from community colleges in their first or second semester at USC, who were often in shock over the privilege they saw among their classmates and the assumptions of privilege by certain faculty members they had witnessed.

The second half of the course introduced students to services provided at USC for students to explore career options. For students who had worked consistently since they were teenagers, the notion of unpaid internships to advance careers was a foreign, confusing subject. Yet many needed to take unpaid internships to explore the potential careers and to avoid fatal mistakes of planning towards a career that they did not know and would find out they did not enjoy. USC had only nine career counselors at their Office of Career Services, and would often send students to explore options online, but first-generation college students often needed one-on-one counseling about career options and pathways of exploration before they committed. As a result of these discussions, students often changed their majors or made other academic changes to their trajectory because they had not realized that they had more freedom to choose among subjects that they connected to, rather than thinking that there was only one path to obtain financial security through college attendance and graduation.

One of the most challenging issues for many first-generation college students of color was how to balance obligations to families with personal desires for intellectual growth and academic excellence. This class created a “safe space” to discuss these often contradictory impulses for undergraduates trying to plan out their lives. At one level, many students confessed that they were sending substantial portions of their financial aid home to support family finances while they were in college, just like they had with earnings as teenagers to support family economies. Others continued to act as translators for monolingual non-English-speaking parents dealing with landlords or medical professionals, spending as much as time on these actions as they would on a part-time job. Both activities kept students from fully immersing themselves in the high impact practices that would lead to student success in college. The course allowed them to strategize alternative approaches to balancing family obligations with academic commitments and college experiences.

Other balancing acts with family obligations required new commitments to career exploration and discovery. One student who enrolled in the fall 2013 course was Mitzi G, an undergraduate communication student from northern California. Both of Mitzi’s parents were undocumented immigrants from Mexico, and Mitzi successfully worked hard to legalize both parents’ status

while she was an undergraduate student. But Mitzi also returned home each summer to help her father with his gardening business like she had throughout high school. In her major of communication, she realized that summers were often the time when other students were taking advantage of valuable internships to establish themselves in their careers. After a heart-to-heart discussion about her options, Mitzi confessed that her dream was to work for Univision, the Spanish-language media empire affiliated with NBC-Universal. The sophomore seminar course had visits to several employment and internship sites embedded as part of the curriculum, including one to NBC-Universal. Dr. Sanchez encouraged Mitzi to approach them about possible internships at Univision, and talk to her parents about how critical this would be to launch her own investigation into career paths in communications.

Mitzi successfully approached NBC-Universal and was able to secure an internship at Univision the following summer at the end of her sophomore year. Dr. Sanchez had raised funding, which allowed low-income students to take unpaid internships, dedicated for students who take the course. This resource was able to financially allow her to take that initial summer experience. That opportunity led Mitzi to paid internships with other media companies, both big and small, but almost always Spanish language or Latino-oriented organizations or departments. When Mitzi graduated from USC Annenberg School of Communication in 2016, she was offered a coveted position at Facebook, in a new division looking to increase the company's presence among Latino-oriented businesses, both in the United States and in Latin America. Her outward, gregarious personality and her academic success in her courses, coupled with her substantial experiences as an intern for multiple companies put her in a prime position upon graduation for work in her intended field. Success in a field she loved, not just graduation from college, was her goal from the start, and the course was able to get her set up for that pathway.

Mitzi now returns to the course every fall semester to talk to current students about the importance of internships in setting new career pathways for first-generation college students. She explains that internships are one of the few ways that students can learn first-hand about the culture of companies and the skills necessary to be successful in a work setting that requires a college degree. Students listen intently to these real experiences, which often have a greater impact on them than professors or staff encouraging them in the classroom or reading about why high-impact practices are important. Graduates who take the course as undergraduates become a new network of contacts for first-generation college students anxious to meet someone like them, who has used their education for career success.

While the sophomore seminar for career success and the Japan SIP affected a significant set of first-generation college students of color at USC, the Dornsife ODSI also searched for ways to affect the larger culture at USC and reach a greater number of students. This required new networks of faculty and staff professionals, who could collectively affect the culture of the University of Southern California, by emphasizing best practices. Most importantly, the university needed to be pushed to recognize first-generation college students as a population that needed an equity framework, to make the best use of their college education for academic and career success. Moving beyond established ethnic centers and departments of ethnic studies, the First-generation College Student Task Force would be established to organize and publicize best practices for first-generation students at USC, particularly students of color.

First Generation College Student Summit and Task Force

The First Generation College Student Task Force was formed in 2013, with the core mission of creating programs and evaluating existing structures through the equity lens. The First Generation College Student Task Force initiatives work to serve all first-generation college students at USC however students of color comprise of two-thirds of the first-generation college students. The total population of first-generation college student is 16% with transfer students making up one-third of this population. In fall 2016, thirty two percent of first-generation college students were Hispanic/Latino, twenty-one percent were Asian, and six percent were Black-identified. The intersectionality of being first-generation and being a student of color is complex, due to the student having to carry both identities of being the first in their family to attend college and being a racial/ethnic minority at USC.

Since the formation of the First Generation College Student Task Force in 2013, the initiatives under the Task Force have grown and expanded. Five committees were formed under the Task Force to meet specific programmatic goals and needs:

- Data and Assessment Committee was formed to focus on first-generation college student data, assessment and research in order to developed strategic initiatives addressing issues of access, retention and support for first-generation college students of color.
- The First Generation College Student Parent Programs Committee was formed to develop programs to support parents of first-generation college students.
- The First Generation College Student Summit Planning Committee was formed to plan a summit for students, faculty and staff at USC. The summit reframes the conversation on access and opportunity for first-generation college students through education.
- The First Generation College Student Gathering Committee was formed with the goal of educating faculty and staff about the first-generation college student identity and how their roles at the university can engage and support students who are the first in the families to attend college.
- The task force and committees focus on institutional structures and gaps which prevent first-generation college students of color from academic and college success.

The conversation on excellence for first-generation college students of color, through the lens of the equity framework, is only productive with vital staff partners at the table. Informal initial conversations with staff who themselves identified as first-generation were followed up by formal appointments to university-wide committees that for the first time took first-generation college students as their prime focus. Staff partners from the undergraduate programs office are members of the task force and committees. The conversation around excellence for first-generation college students of color generally centered on academic and research opportunities, but started with the very first experience that students had on the day they began at USC on move-in day.

Feedback from first-generation students of color directed the development of several efforts of the Task Force. Students shared that many of their parents were not comfortable on campus, and often did not come onto campus until their student's graduation day. Indeed, parents who did not attend college often dropped their children off on move-in day without attending any event

sponsored by USC Orientation officials, leaving their children alone in dealing with initial experiences in university housing or first meetings on financial aid or academics. Many first-generation college students expressed surprise that other parents were there to help their children with move into the dorms, and asking important questions of university officials, making them feel behind other students even before classes started. So the Task Force decided to begin each year with a welcome dinner for first-generation college families on move-in day, keeping parents on campus and reaching out to each family to celebrate this important day with other parents and undergraduate students experiencing college for the first time.

Beginning in summer 2015, the Task Force sent invitations in multiple languages to families, welcoming them to USC and inviting them to stay for a collective dinner at the end of move-in day. Staff, faculty and advanced undergraduates of color were there in August 2015 to sit at tables with families that had come to drop off their children at college. In addition to a dinner for over 300 individuals, the Provost of the university welcomed these families to the “Trojan family” and a panel of advice for parents was organized by the Task Force, including a first-generation faculty member, staff member, undergraduate student, and parent of a USC undergraduate. New USC parents and families were able to ask this expert panel questions about USC undergraduate life, college academics, and financial aid. Dr. George Sanchez, Dornsife Vice Dean for Diversity, delivered a passionate welcome to the university, stressing the journey of excellence that had gotten their students into USC and celebrating their accomplishments to date.

The importance of this welcome was made clear when the parents of Alejandra F came up to Dr. Sanchez at the end of the 2015 family welcome dinner. Alejandra’s family was from Coachella, California, a rural area in the desert about 125 miles outside Los Angeles. Alejandra is the oldest child in the family, with three younger brothers, and she was a star student and valedictorian of Coachella High School. Her parents are both Mexican immigrants who had worked their way up from farm labor. Their border community remains highly differentiated by race and class, with rich desert communities like Palm Desert, sitting next to very low-income communities like Indio and Coachella, dominated by Mexican immigrant families. Attending USC was a dream that Alejandra was able to achieve, and this was the first time her parents had ever stepped on any college campus.

“Senor Sanchez, I want to introduce you to my daughter, Alejandra, who is starting here at USC,” said Mr. Franco said in Spanish as they met. “I want to ask you to personally take care of my daughter. Can I entrust her to you?” This sort of introduction and transfer is uncommon for most university deans and faculty. However, it is a common way, a very personal way, that a working-class Latino parent would place responsibility for his blessed daughter in the hands of a university official. “I will do my best to take care of your daughter,” answered Dr. Sanchez, knowing that this was a solemn promise. The father then turned to his daughter Alejandra and instructed her to stay in touch with Dr. Sanchez. After a firm handshake between the entire family and Dr. Sanchez, Alejandra said goodbye to her parents, who then drove back three hours to their home base while Alejandra spent her first night in her college dorm.

What resulted from a successful welcome reception for parents of first-generation college students is the creation of the First Generation College Student Parent Committee and an

institutional partnership with USC Parent and Family Engagement. USC Parent and Family Engagement traditionally caters to legacy families and families of non-first-generation college students. Families who attend the welcome reception can attend Trojan Family Weekend for free. ODSI covers the fee at a discounted rate from Parent and Family Engagement. The partnership with Parent and Family Engagement reframes the conversation on access and inclusivity for parents and families of first-generation college students, particularly parents and families of low-income students.

As a follow-up to her parents' introduction, Alejandra regularly checked in with Dr. Sanchez during her first semester in college, coming in for advice about her classes and discussing her transition to college life at USC. This mentorship situation may have been initiated by Alejandra's father, but it blossomed because both individuals lived up to the promises they had made. In her second semester when she started looking for on-campus employment, Sanchez offered Alejandra a job in Dornsife ODSI, and Alejandra began meaningful employment, working on issues to insure success among diverse undergraduate populations. In her academic work, Alejandra explored several majors, but finally settled on the new Contemporary Latino and Latin American Studies major, an academic program launched through activities by Dornsife ODSI. Because she landed well at USC, Alejandra had a strong academic record after three semesters at USC, so she applied to the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship Program, a research program aimed at creating new faculty by identifying talented undergraduate researchers. With a strong interview in front of a team of faculty, Alejandra was selected as a MMUF scholar, focusing on research on the cultural transfer in border communities, hoping to apply to Ph.D. programs and eventually become an interdisciplinary faculty member.

Alejandra, supported by her immigrant parents, successfully made the transition to USC in part because the Task Force for First Generation College Students had decided to set up a process by which parents who did not go to college could be introduced to key staff members they could reach out to address their questions and concerns. Later in fall 2015, when USC student leadership had protests over racial tensions on campus—like so many other campuses that semester—these first-generation college students and their parents had contacts they could utilize to address their specific concerns. One of the demands made by students that semester was an increase in faculty of color and greater attention to the needs of students of color by the USC administration. In reaction, the university demanded that each of the nineteen schools at USC establish diversity liaisons, who could listen to the issues of students, faculty, and staff of color and push their respective administrations and USC central administration to respond to these concerns. These school diversity liaisons have become a new set of potential advocates for meeting the needs of first-generation college students of color.

The equity framework assesses conditions of how students of color gain access to resources, programs and scholarships and measures institutional support (Bensimon, 2004; Bensimon, 2005). The equity framework for first-generation college students is applied by educating those who have influence with students and influence at the university. The First Generation Gathering Committee's primary goals are to educate the staff and faculty community on the first-generation college student identity and to have them reflect on how their units or departments may prevent first-generation college students of color from succeeding due to institutional barriers. In fall 2016, the First Generation College Student Gathering Committee worked with the Data and

Assessment Committee to present data on first-generation college students to the USC diversity liaisons. The diversity liaisons are charged with addressing and meeting the University's diversity goals in their academic schools. The data presentation was paired with a best practice presentation. This new consciousness on the needs of first-generation college students is now taking root throughout the nineteen schools that make up the USC campus.

Civic Engagement Disrupting Traditional Divides

Another institution that has been established at USC to positively affect success for first-generation college students of color is the USC Center for Diversity and Democracy (CDD), also run by Dr. George Sanchez. The CDD was established to combine the issues of diversity in higher education with democratic civic engagement in the communities surrounding the University of Southern California. As a center for civic engagement, the CDD hopes to modernize traditional "town and gown" discussions, which assume that the university "gown" is worn by high income white faculty and students at a research university like USC, while the "town" is not embedded in university cultural life through low-income first-generation college students that come from immigrant and racialized backgrounds, including those from urban communities surrounding the university. As a research center, the CDD hopes to support academic research by faculty and students that directly contributes to the civic engagement literature and public programming that takes into account the growing diversity of student and faculty populations in the university environment and addresses the new American "public", which is often rooted in racialized communities that often do not speak English and are relative newcomers to U.S. society.

Over the past decade, the CDD has engaged in several creative civic engagement projects, each of which centrally involved undergraduates of color who were the first in their families to attend college. In 2010, the CDD celebrated the one hundred year anniversary of the beginning of the Mexican Revolution in Los Angeles, a city where half of its population comes from Mexico, with a friendly competition to write "A Corrido of Los Angeles." Students from middle and high schools throughout southern California could submit songs they had created through any music genre that celebrated the history and culture of Los Angeles, as long as it told a story in the "corrido" tradition. Over thirty entries were submitted, and a group of university faculty and community partners selected the top ten to perform live with the Grammy-Award winning urban group, Ozomatli. After a powerful and moving rehearsal with the group, students performed their original songs for parents and teachers at the auditorium of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, which had a related Mexican Revolution exhibition that families could attend.

Another program funded by USC's Good Neighbors Grant is "History in a Box," which involved undergraduate researchers developing "boxes" of artifacts and lesson plans for elementary schools in Boyle Heights, a working class Latino neighborhood adjacent to the USC Health Science campus. The CDD partnered with the Breed Street Shul Project to carry out this work, a project of the Jewish Historical Society of Southern California working to restore the most important synagogue in the neighborhood as a community center for the current population. Working with all first-generation college students of color, Dr. Sanchez, with the aid of graduate research assistants, guided undergraduates through research to shape an "immigrant" box that introduced third and fourth graders to the variety of immigrant groups that have made up Boyle

Heights in the past. The undergraduate researchers place a yarmulke in the box to represent Jewish immigrants, a small bento box to represent Japanese immigrants, and so on, while preparing lesson plans for elementary teachers that allowed them to further explore the history of these groups with their students in class. Teachers in Boyle Heights were so enamored by the boxes and lessons that they asked the “History in a Box” team to develop other boxes that explored science subjects like pollution in the neighborhood or the Los Angeles River, and culture boxes like one that explored the musical diversity among Boyle Heights population in the past.

In the wake of the election of Donald Trump to the U.S. presidency, a candidate that called out Mexican immigrants to the U.S. in derogatory fashion and sought to send many of Boyle Heights residents out of the country, the CDD decided to pursue a new project directly related to teaching the history of Boyle Heights to the local population. The Boyle Heights Museum of History and Culture (BHM) is a project of the CDD in collaboration with CASA 0101, a community-based theater in Boyle Heights founded by Josefina Lopez, the writer and producer of the award-winning play and movie “Real Women Have Curves.” In addition to the current strains in the urban neighborhood, due to the changes in immigration policy brought about by the Trump administration, Boyle Heights is also in the middle of a gentrification process that is putting its local residents at risk of displacement and homelessness. The BHM project hopes to use the history of its own neighborhood to provide guidance for local residents and to teach local history to residents who are often newcomers to the forces that have long been at work in Los Angeles to create disharmony and oppression, as well as the collaborations and coalitions that have fought back for community preservation and empowerment.

USC undergraduate students of color are critical components in the formation of this history museum, and the research they do is central to the public history that is being formed in Boyle Heights. One such student is Kathy P, who joined the group as a freshman student, after beginning at USC from Granada Hills, a suburban neighborhood north of Los Angeles. Kathy is the daughter of two immigrant parents from Ecuador, and her journey to USC has been challenging for a set of reasons that are both unique to her but also representative of the diversity of the urban experience at schools like USC. Before going into her senior year in high school, Kathy institutionalized herself due to severe depression, a result of hiding the fact she was gay from her parents (she also suffered abuse from her partners.) This institutionalization forced Kathy to become a ward of the state, and almost kept the ‘A’ student from starting her senior year in high school. Because of help from a Latina nurse in the mental institution into which she was assigned, Kathy was able to find the words that got her released, although the courts committed Kathy to LGBTQ therapy with her mother. After she got into USC, Kathy needed to find a supportive community for her burgeoning identity as a Latina lesbian, as well as continued therapy.

Kathy took advantage of Trojan Guardian Scholars (TGS), a program of the Dornsife ODSI for foster care youth, previously homeless students, and those that have been wards of the state. In particular Kathy was able to take advantage of an on-call counselor/mentor, provided by TGS, who was a counselor in training at the USC School of Social Work. Moreover, this put her in touch with Dr. Sanchez, and he eventually became her academic mentor. He first worked with her to change her major from International Relations to Gender Studies and Contemporary

Latino and Latin American Studies because Kathy expressed an interest in majors that allowed her to continue to explore her complex and emerging identities. Secondly, Kathy explicitly wanted to become a professor, so Dr. Sanchez hired her as his research assistant for his academic work and the BHM project. Kathy applied as the only freshman applicant to the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship program, and so impressed the faculty selection committee that she was accepted as only the second freshmen in the last twenty years to become a MMUF scholar. Kathy is now working on her individual research on Latina lesbian history in Los Angeles, as well as her work-study job on archival research for the Boyle Heights project.

Institutional programs such as the Trojan Guardian Scholars supports former foster youth by approaching access to resources through an equity lens. The staff coordinator assesses and evaluates the program each year since its launch in 2013, to ensure that barriers preventing scholars from gaining access to resources for college success are removed. The staff coordinator works with a set of staff from vital student support service departments across USC to ensure that their life experiences are integrated when they meet with the scholars.

Recently, Kathy travelled to Washington D.C., along with seven other undergraduates and two graduate students as part of the research team for the BHM project. These students explored Smithsonian and other museums to concentrate on how material objects, photographs, and archival materials become narrative objects for public history. They applied this knowledge to constructing the first exhibition for the Boyle Heights Museum in fall semester 2017 on Mexican repatriation, deportation, and unjust banishment of U.S. citizens of Mexican descent from Boyle Heights during the 1930s. All the students have been doing archival research in the Los Angeles area during 2016-2017, and now translated this work into a public history exhibition. And each of the students involved is Latina/o or African American, from immigrant and working class backgrounds, and also each is a student who wants to make a difference in his/her community by introducing historical research for public consumption.

Conclusion

The Boyle Heights Museum of History and Culture is a training ground for the next set of professionals that will emerge from USC's first-generation college student community of color. Like the other projects mentioned in this essay, this work at the University of Southern California has prioritized the academic and personal strategies for success among a unique group of undergraduates that represent the future of academia in the twenty-first century. The equity approach, used in all these projects, attempts to respond to the dynamic gifts that these students bring to the campus that both challenge the university's traditional approaches to learning, as well as enhance the setting with new perspectives and trajectories of success. The Japan Summer Immersion Program, the sophomore seminar for "Pathways to Career Success for First Generation College Students," and the larger initiatives launched the First Generation College Task Force, all work to push an equity agenda at USC. These programs have been largely successful in transforming the lives of current and past low-income undergraduates who are the first in the families to attend college.

Together with faculty, staff and student members of the USC community, these efforts have broadened the atmosphere of inclusion on the campus and led to the institutionalization of

critical programs for change. The University of Southern California continues to change as attempts to meet the changing needs of a more diverse student body in the twenty-first century, and the Dornsife Office for Diversity and Strategic Initiatives, as well as the USC Center for Diversity and Democracy, have led the way on campus for new, creative ways to meet this challenge. Our philosophy has been to make USC more responsive to being a critical institution for Los Angeles itself, and to become a leading innovator in diverse student programming across the nation for a twenty-first century student body.

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The Heavy Lifting of Diversity: A Need for Scholar Administrators

Jacinta R. Saffold

Abstract

Technological innovation and new economic terrain of the twenty-first century has called for higher education to re-examine how interdisciplinary ethnic studies and minority serving programs are positioned in the twenty-first century. This essay considers the utility of spaces like Black Studies departments and programs like the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship within the structure of Liberal Arts education today from the vantage a recent graduate. In the wake increasing hostility towards minority students and unfavorable media coverage of incidents on campus, colleges and universities must consider how rolling back minority-focused academic and programmatic offerings alongside dramatic increases in contingent faculty and administrative staff hiring has left cultural voids. As Liberal Arts educators grapple with narrowing budget constraints and changing campus climates, the call for higher education employees who understand why disciplinary and programmatic offerings are tied to campus climate, and how to use such resources, grows louder. Scholar Administrators, in their ability to straddle the historic dividing line between faculty and staff, can help usher in a type of diversity that allows each student, faculty, and staff person to bear witness to the humanity in others, which ultimately is the heavy lifting of diversity.

Keywords: diversity; scholar administrator; contingent faculty; minority programs

Introduction

As a beneficiary of spaces won by college student activism during the Civil Rights Era, my place in academia is more than forty years in the making. I am the intellectual product of Liberal Arts education, two African American Studies departments, and several diversity and inclusion initiatives. In reflecting on my scholarly “up-bringing,” I have come to understand that the lessons I learned on how to survive and thrive in Liberal Arts spaces as an African American woman were just as important as the academic training I received. I was fortunate enough to matriculate through departments that demanded students who would aspire to be more than diligent researchers, brilliant writers, and uncompromising knowledge producers. My professors unhinged the rigid boundaries of academic disciplines, so that I could freely explore the interconnectedness of history, literature, culture, politics, and beyond. In handing me intellectual freedom, African American Studies has also called me to produce scholarship that has meaning outside of the halls of academia, that can make the world a better place, and that will, in turn, free others from intellectual restrictions.

African American Studies at Emory University, the University of Massachusetts Amherst, and other colleges and universities were the result of undergraduate student protests and positive administrative responses during the late 1960s (Bradley, 2009, p.112; Hine, 2001, p.51; Christian, 2006, p.698-700). Demands for the inclusion of voices from the African Diaspora in

all sectors of Liberal Arts education was an outgrowth of a national discourse on civil liberties. The spirit of the civil rights protest tradition influenced how newly formed Afro American, Africana, and African American Studies programs designed their curriculum. Many Black Studies¹ departments adopted a scholar-activism approach to training students and made community engagement an integral part of the curriculum plan (Kershaw, 2003, p.28). The scholar-activist, by design, expects African American Studies scholarship to perform double duty, by meeting the same academic standards as longstanding disciplines and move discourse beyond the academy forward on issues effecting people of color.

The expectations of interdisciplinarity, especially for junior faculty coming from activist-forged departments, are further compounded by race, gender, and other socially constructed differences. Minority and interdisciplinary scholars focused on minority communities often struggle to reconcile their scholarly motivations, responsibility to outside communities, and expectations set forth by their college or university. Having institution personnel who work at the cross section of scholarly research, teaching, and administration can help ensure junior faculty are not forced to make reductive choices among their competing obligations. Scholar administrators can ensure that interdisciplinary departments and diversity initiatives achieve enough autonomy to withstand the changing priorities of the current administration.² Further, crosscutting employees can help colleges and universities see the value of interdisciplinary and minority faculty add outside of traditional tenure expectations.

Colleges and universities need *scholar administrators*. The concept of a scholar administrator has been quite reactionary to this point. Higher education professionals who have spent their careers at the intersection of teaching, researching, and administration are heralded as scholar administrators and celebrated for their ability to provide gap services the university had not realized it needed at the close of their careers (Barthwal, 1991; Blegen, 1960; Billard & Ferber, 1991). However, the demands of twenty-first century higher education are pointing towards a need to intentionally train PhDs to cross boundaries as a means of uniting institutions over the long-held faculty and staff divide to actually obtain sustainable and comprehensive employment in higher education.

When colleges and universities have incidents of hate or discrimination, interdisciplinary departments like African American Studies, Women Gender & Sexuality Studies, and Chicana/o Studies usually support the university through the crisis by creating additional lectures, seminars, and special courses. Most of this extra labor goes unacknowledged when university administration informs the public about what steps have been taken to address the incident and ensure that such occurrences will not continue. If nooses are found hanging from trees, the university will point to a recently formed council on diversity and inclusion.³ If a university is

¹ Black Studies is used here as an umbrella term for the various kinds of departments that study people of the African Diaspora.

² Black Studies and people of color initiatives often live or die based on the level of investment the current Dean, provost, and or the president has in diversity.

³ On May 1, 2017, several bananas were found hanging from nooses at American University with the words “Harambe Bait” and “AKA Free” written on the side. This was interpreted as a racially motivated crime in response to the election of the first African American woman student body president. American University president, Neil Kerwin stated that, “There will be a campus community meeting on Tuesday, May 2 to discuss the incident at 12

shamed for not taking strong disciplinary action against sexual assault, the university will convene a committee to address sexual assault on campus.⁴ Interdisciplinary departments intentionally offer additional support to the campus to ensure that the university or college has a tangible and very public response to improper occurrences on campus; most of which is left out of press releases or university-wide communications.⁵ Minority and interdisciplinary faculty are often expected to serve on steering committees to address underlying forces that created the crisis. The offices of such faculty have also become sanctuaries for major and non-major students to unburden themselves of the baggage these incidents induce. These functions are not automatically viewed as academic labor and do not neatly fit into tenure portfolios. In fact, the additional steps interdisciplinary departments take to address issues are not usually acknowledged by the university in any formal way. So, faculty of color, particularly those housed in interdisciplinary departments, are expected to produce scholarship that has double functionality and perform more service, so that the university can do the work of dealing with intolerable injustices, while delivering a similar quantity and quality of scholarship and students enrolled in classes as all the other disciplines on campus.

The consequences for failing to meet these impossible expectations are also higher than other disciplines, simply because interdisciplinary programs and departments are almost always the last to be funded and the first to be rolled back or eliminated during economic downturns (Rhodes, 2016; Rooks, 2006). Holding interdisciplinary programs to ambitious standards is not the issue and should, in fact, be the expectation. However, many interdisciplinary programs are often held to different and competing standards that force faculty to shrink from their original purpose; African American Studies departments choosing between scholarship and supporting student activism, for example. Until colleges and universities begin intentionally aggregating their expectations for scholarship and service to equitably reflect the purposes and expectations of different disciplines, interdisciplinary departments and the students, communities, and wide publics they serve will suffer. Scholar administrators act as interlocutors who can ensure that the unique expectations of interdisciplinary programs are not lost or forgotten.

Economic pressure compounds the unequal labor distribution among faculty, by simultaneously pricing many Americans out of higher education and dramatically reducing the number of available tenure track faculty positions for teaching at Liberal Arts institutions (Kelsky, 2015, p.7). The American Association of University Professors has reported that, “the share of full-time tenured faculty has declined by approximately 26 percent since 1975, while the share of tenure-track faculty has declined by nearly 50 percent” (2017, p.4). The economic and

noon in Kay Chapel. Members of the President's Council on Diversity and Inclusion (PCDI) will be in attendance.” (<http://www.american.edu/president/announcements/May-1-2017.cfm>)

⁴ In 2014 Dartmouth College was accused of mishandling sexual harassment and violence cases on campus. In response, the college created an initiative, “Moving Dartmouth Forward” which is “aimed at eliminating high-risk behavior and increasing inclusivity while strengthening Dartmouth’s longstanding commitment to leadership in teaching and learning.” (<http://forward.dartmouth.edu/>)

⁵ For example when black and brown students had racial slurs written on their dormitory doors at the University of Massachusetts Amherst in 2014, The W. E. B. Du Bois Department of Afro American Studies hosted a series of open dialogues in the Malcolm X Cultural Center (housed in the largest on-campus living community), designed and taught special seminars on race and difference through the Residential Academic Programs (RAP) Academy, and held a special training session on how to discuss difficult subjects in African American Studies course with graduate teaching assistants. None of these activities were listed in the university-wide communication from the Chancellor detailing how the university would respond to the incident.

employment crunch in higher education is also indicative of wider employment shifts in the United States. The twenty-first century has ushered in the use of smart technology that has radically reduced and restructured employment needs across occupations. Specific to higher education, this has led to the establishment of contingent positions like adjunct professors, visiting lecturers, and postdoctoral teaching fellows, in lieu of traditional tenure track opportunities. In 2016-2017, “faculty members on part-time appointments continued to make up the largest share of the academic labor force,” with an average annual total pay of \$20,508 according to the 2016-17 Annual Report on the Economic Status of the Profession. Financial squeezing from students unable to afford tuition⁶ and cuts to fiscal operating budgets is forcing colleges and universities to be more creative in their approach to hiring employees. For faculty of color, who are already overburdened with unrecognized service to the profession, this can mean amending the adage of twice as good to three times or more.⁷ Contrarily, if employment reconfigurations in higher education are done with deliberate emphasis and by people who recognize the value of cross-cutting service work performed by minority faculty and interdisciplinary departments, these transformative people and spaces can finally be moved from the periphery of our colleges and universities to the center. This shift has the potential to truly transform Liberal Arts education in the twenty-first century.

As many colleges and universities begin to rely more on contingent faculty to answer shifts in the higher education employment landscape, there must be critical oversight on the effectiveness of this strategy. Further, colleges and universities must be willing to revamp structures if they are proven ineffective. In 2014, the Institute for Research and Study of Accreditation and Quality Assurance reported:

Whereas full-time tenured and tenure-track faculty were once the norm, the professoriate is now comprised of mostly non-tenure-track faculty. In 1969, tenured and tenure-track positions made up approximately 78.3 percent of the faculty and non-tenure-track positions comprised about 21.7 percent. Forty years later, in 2009, these proportions had nearly flipped” (2014, p.4).

On average, part-time lecturers—the largest group of contingent faculty members—earn \$16,700 from teaching alone per year compared to an average of \$67,000 per year for the lowest rank of tenure track faculty (Griffey, 2016). In addition to a grave reduction in pay, contingent faculty hiring is often an informal process devoid of job security. These contingent faculty positions often leave the employee on the brink of poverty, in a constant state of flux, and makes the cost of earning the requisite Master’s and/or PhD for collegiate teaching a bad investment. These positions cannot be long-term solutions for colleges and universities, because job instability and being embarrassingly underpaid will cause our colleges and universities to lose the brightest and best new advanced degree holders to tech start-ups, non-profit organizations, federal agencies, and large business corporations. As for the university, temporary and underpaid teaching positions serve to further isolate already siloed departments, programs, schools, and colleges (Umber, 2014).

⁶ According to Mitchell, Palacios, and Leachman, the average annual published tuition has risen 28 percent from 2007 to 2014 (“States are Still Funding,” 10).

⁷ The adage explains that people of color must be twice as good as their peers to get half as far.

Due to the increase of non-tenure track academic positions, the employment crunch has increased the competitiveness of the tenure track job market and severely truncated the kinds of scholars that universities and colleges are looking to hire (Mitchell, Palacios, & Leachman, 2014). Colleges and universities are more unwilling than ever to take a chance on brilliant scholars who are looking to push disciplinary boundaries. Instead, many institutions are simply looking for the cheapest way to instruct students, which often neglects to foment the process of discovery that is at the heart of Liberal Arts education. Rejections of full-time faculty are losses of scholarly creativity and reductions in areas of academic expertise, especially for interdisciplinary subjects, which are felt campus-wide every time an institution is admonished publicly for failing to meet the specific needs of its various minority groups. Colleges and universities seeking to revise employment structures to increase efficiency in Liberal Arts education must promote creative and comprehensive problem-solving among their faculty and staff to ensure that all student needs are met. It is through creativity in employment configuration that higher educational professionals will strike a balance between meeting financial constraints and providing the best education for the world's future leaders.

Increasingly, faculty members engaged in interdisciplinary or ethnic area studies scholarship are being jointly appointed to two or more departments to encourage multidisciplinary approaches to complex questions. Joint appointments are also very practical responses to the money crisis (Patton, 2015). New faculty members often have service obligations to multiple departments, programs and/or centers that are affiliated with their home department(s), in addition to their teaching and research duties. For junior faculty of color, the service load is often further exacerbated by supporting minority students and minority-serving programs. Many of the service roles new faculty are asked to fill were once defined as staff roles. This conflation of faculty and staff roles is potentially dangerous in its willful ignorance of overloading junior faculty and making coveted tenure more elusive. However, the broadening of faculty responsibilities has the potential to make desperately needed cross cutting connections around campus. These multidisciplinary roles allow for campus communities to unify across the great faculty, staff divide that has kept many of our colleges and universities from reaching their fullest potential. The concept of integrating faculty and staff duties is positive, but only if colleges and universities are careful not to overburden employees.

Diversity and inclusion programs for students often face similar points of contention on college and university campuses. My path in academia was forged by programmatic spaces that specifically bridged economic, social, and experience gaps for students of color.⁸ Some spaces were intended to be safe spaces to ensure that students of color could convene without retribution, others were designed to help us stay connected to our various communities outside of the university, while others attempted to alleviate stressors that traditionally prohibit academic success for minority students. Student groups like Ngambika, a step⁹ and community service organization for freshman women of color at Emory University, and multi-ethnic achievement

⁸ Programs for supporting African American students' unique challenges and needs was directly connected to student protests for the creation of Black Studies departments in the late 1960s (Bradley, 2009, p.115).

⁹ Stepping is rhythmic form of movement and music derived from synchronized hand claps and foot stomps that is popular among Black Greek Letter Organizations and African American college students.

programs like the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship (MMUF),¹⁰ are often created in vacuums. Often, these initiatives are housed in ethnic area studies departments, multicultural centers, or diversity offices and are designed to partially remove negative variables that disproportionately impact students of color, to alleviate the added pressure on students of color, and encourage academic success. The Woodrow Wilson Foundation has reported that, “doctoral education’s diversity record is poor” generally. One of the foundation’s recommendation for improvement is to bolster communication among programs for academic diversification. In addition to strengthening cross dialogue among programs like MMUF, McNair Scholars, and Gates Millennium Scholars, I contend that these programs need to be better integrated into the core of hosting college and university. Keeping such programs at the margins or as an offshoot of one department has the potential to devalue the work of these initiatives. Such programs often struggle with becoming fully integrated into the college or university because diversity is not necessarily always mandatory or the expectation for excellence throughout campus.

Diversification programs that help minority students, faculty, and staff navigate the politics of race, gender, and class are some of the biggest incubator spaces on campuses across the country. Interdisciplinary departments and diversity programming are often vibrant and inclusive spaces that are also insular from the tumultuous climate of the wider university. These programs risk teaching participants how to operate in the kinds universities we would like to see—that are diverse and inclusive—rather than the ones that currently exist. Diversity and inclusion programming beneficiaries are often sent into collegiate settings that lack the foundation to support them. Though the incubator method has been established as the industry standard, this model is one born of resistance rather integration. Resistance is tiresome work that is not sustainable.

An independent study conducted by researchers at the Cornell Higher Education Research Institute, indicates that MMUF has not made a measurably significant difference in minorities obtaining the PhD. However, the study also states that participating in MMUF has improved the quality of experience for minority students in doctoral programs. This is further evidenced by the MMUF 25th Anniversary report claiming that MMUF participants finish their doctoral programs up to three years faster than the national average. For programs like MMUF to live up to their mission of increasing diversity in the professoriate, our colleges and universities must first see the value in diversification and agree to intentionally work toward ensuring that there is room on department faculty rolls when minority candidates complete the PhD. According to Brad Rose Consulting, “gaining and sustaining support from, and recognition by, host institutions” is one of the major challenges MMUF faces (13). MMUF, and programs like it, need to be streamlined with the stewarding of the college or university, so that supporting minority students through academic training is not another burden only managed by overworked minority faculty and under-resourced interdisciplinary departments. Streamlining will require the help of faculty and high-ranking administrative staff. This kind of work is ripe for scholar administrators.

The goal should be to make our campuses so diverse and inclusive that special support programs are no longer ancillary but an integral thread in the university’s fabric. To achieve such equity,

¹⁰ The Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship specifically addresses underrepresentation in the academy by helping minorities acquire doctoral degrees in the Humanities and Social Sciences.
<http://www.mmuf.org/about/mission>

we must shift how minority students, faculty, and staff are received by the wider university rather than training them to resist the pressures of being different in a collegiate setting. Admittedly, this an incredible, utopian even, undertaking. Having designated appointees who understand the import and have the will to fight for the reconfiguration of inequitable policies on campus in positions to make real changes to antiquated processes for the college or university is one step in the right direction.

Research shows that colleges and universities have begun to hire more administrative staff (Hurlburt & McGarrah, 2016; McElroy, 2017). This shift has been characterized as adopting corporate business models for operating Liberal Arts institutions. When a growing administration is coupled with an over-reliance on contingent faculty, the university model becomes lopsided and dysfunctional. According to the American Institutes for Research study on Contingent Faculty, private four-year colleges and universities realized the largest decline in instructional spending of all tuition types. The report also determined that constraining faculty compensation modestly impacted overall employee spending (Hurlburt & McGarrah, 2016). Many colleges and universities are simply shifting their dollars from highly trained faculty to high-level administrators. This war for resources between faculty and staff leaves the students underserved and with hefty tuition bills. Rather than choosing between faculty and staff—both of which are essential to operating our colleges and universities—we must consider how these two roles can overlap or merge. Making efficient personnel decisions will allow our schools to have the best administrators, brightest scholars, and a reduced operating budget.

The time has come for higher education to begin training our graduate students to be scholar administrators. The role of scholar-administrators demands (and opportunity calls for) people who can fill non-traditional roles aimed at integrating the various sectors of a college or university. We are living in a global society that values connectedness and efficiency. It is the duty of our colleges and universities to help the people of the world learn how to talk across difference. It is not enough to be diverse in representation—that is not the heavy lifting of diversity. Rather, finding a common language that allows each of us to bear witness to the humanity in others is the real challenge, especially for colleges and universities.

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