Building Institutional Capacity for Student Success
TABLE OF CONTENTS

3 | From the Editor

Building Institutional Capacity for Student Success
4 | Designing a High-Impact College for Returning Adult Students
    LAUREN ROY, College Unbound; LIYA ESCALERA, Bunker Hill Community College; STEPHANIE FERNANDEZ, University of Massachusetts Boston; EBRU KORBEK-
    ERDOGMUS, University of Massachusetts Boston; JENNIFER REID, Bridgewater State University; ADAM BUSH, College Unbound; and JOHN SALTMARSH, University of
    Massachusetts Boston

7 | Diversity and Inclusion in the Military: Theoretical Perspectives
    GARY A. PACKARD J.R., United States Air Force Academy

10 | Guided Pathways at Community Colleges: From Theory to Practice
    THOMAS R. BAILEY, Teachers College, Columbia University

13 | Reconsidering STEM Faculty Professional Development: Daring Approaches to Broadening Participation in STEM
    KELLY MACK, Association of American Colleges and Universities

Campus Practice
16 | Building Institutional Capacity for Undocumented Students’ Success
    DANIEL LÓPEZ JR. and LUÍA MORENO, Northeastern Illinois University

18 | Evolving Institutional Diversity by Incorporating Disability
    DAVID J. ARAGON and CARLA L. HOSKINS, University of Colorado Boulder

21 | No Excuses: A Systemic Approach to Student Poverty
    RUSSELL LOWERY-HART, CARA CROWLEY, and JORDAN HERRERA, Amarillo College

23 | Defining Institutional Success through Student Success
    AVIS PROCTOR and MARIELENA DESANCTIS, Broward College

Perspective
26 | Moving Veteran Students from the Margins to the Center
    MARSHA GUENZLER-STEVEN, University of Maryland

28 | Supporting Inclusive Teaching through a Graduate Learning Community
    JENNIFER RANDALL CROSBY and STEPHANIE FERNANDEZ, Stanford University, and DERISA GRANT, Bowdoin College

30 | From Mentee to Mentor
    CHERISHE CUMMA, New York City College of Technology/City University of New York

For More...
31 | From the Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement Action Network

About Diversity & Democracy
Diversity & Democracy supports higher education faculty and leaders as they design and implement programs that advance civic learning and democratic engagement, global learning, and engagement with diversity to prepare students for socially responsible action in today’s interdependent but unequal world. The publication features evidence, research, and exemplary practices to assist practitioners in creating learning opportunities that realize this vision. To access Diversity & Democracy online, visit www.aacu.org/diversitydemocracy.
Building Institutional Capacity for Student Success

In many respects, an institution of higher education acts as a municipality. A college or university requires complex physical infrastructure to support students, faculty, and staff in their day-to-day activities. Equally critical is the broader infrastructure for student learning: the network of possible modes of movement from a series of entry points to a range of endpoints. Like commuters in a metropolis, students aspire to travel from their own points of origin to their own destinations, moving along distinct paths toward their personal goals for work, life, and citizenship.

Too often, students find themselves stalled on these journeys. Their paths may be unexpectedly blocked, their travel slowed by unexpected maintenance, their progress delayed by gridlock. Standing in place is not an option, nor is moving ahead by forcibly lifting their bootstraps. The challenge, then, is for higher education as a whole—and for each college and university—to implement a range of programs and practices that fully support students’ success. These approaches may begin on familiar pathways, but they must help students advance along yet-unimagined avenues and allow them to experience their odysseys in novel ways.

Building such a system will entail effort at every level, from the individual to the institutional. It will also require keen attention to issues of equity, with a focus on both the educational experience and the student’s destination, in the workplace and in life. It will involve weighing the benefits and risks of a focus on efficiency, and will require committing fully to ensuring that all students experience the promise of a liberal education. Within municipalities, effective civic leaders consider the social consequences of new commuter options—who has access to the newest rail lines, who can afford to live in areas with the best transit access, and whose route is the safest and most personally rewarding. Similarly, effective educational leaders must ask tough questions about which students their efforts serve, and how effectively.

The challenge is for higher education as a whole—and for each college and university—to implement a range of programs and practices that fully support students’ success. Ensuring that all students achieve their greatest potential is crucial to the future of our diverse democracy.

In that vein, this issue of Diversity & Democracy suggests a range of approaches to building institutional capacity for student success. Collectively, contributing authors describe leadership and innovation at a variety of levels, from the individual to the cultural to the infrastructural. They point to the critical role of both academic and social supports, and they honor students’ abilities to guide their own journeys. They call on readers to seek new routes toward student success at their own institutions, to become leaders within their own contexts, and to build strong frameworks for student advancement.

This issue’s authors are among the many who have guided the path of this publication since I began editing it in early 2007. As I write my final editor’s note for Diversity & Democracy, I can’t help but reflect on the past decade and on the hundreds of authors—educators and students, faculty and administrators—who have applied their expertise to map this publication’s route. I have truly been honored to work with so many higher education leaders who see liberal education as essential preparation for life in a diverse democracy, and who strive to build colleges and universities that reflect that democracy in all its diversity. With our next issue, Diversity & Democracy’s new editor, Emily Schuster, will take the lead in guiding this publication’s path forward. I look forward to seeing where she leads us.

I hope that this issue of Diversity & Democracy can serve as a modest paver or pylon in readers’ efforts to build institutions with the complex infrastructure needed to guide all students equitably along their individual higher education journeys. As has long been argued in this publication’s pages, ensuring that all students achieve their greatest potential is crucial to the future of our diverse democracy.

—Kathryn Peltier Campbell
Editor, Diversity & Democracy
High-impact educational practices (such as learning communities, community-based learning, and capstone projects) are often found at the innovative margins of colleges and universities. Even when these practices are an institutional priority, they often do not reach the students whom they most benefit: low-income students, students of color, and first-generation students (Kuh 2008). Many of these students are adult learners who are returning to college after having started their degrees years earlier. In the United States, thirty-seven million adults ages twenty-five to sixty-four have attended a college without ever earning a degree or credential (Merisotis 2013). These students need access to educational programs that have been intentionally designed to support their success.

What would it mean to create a college that was deliberately designed for minoritized, underserved, and underrepresented students, and that offered a curriculum consisting only of high-impact practices? What would be possible if we combined these practices with key innovations—competency-based education, credit hours that are separate from seat time, prior learning assessments, high-touch student-faculty interactions supported by technology, and pedagogies that prepare students for careers and nurture their civic agency—to create integrative programs designed with returning adult students in mind?

**Designing a High-Impact College for Returning Adult Students**

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Higher education and I have a contentious relationship. I have associated higher education with both opportunity that I have embraced and elitism that I have resisted. When I was younger, I struggled with the idea that to be successful and valued, a person had to follow what I saw as the conveyor belt—the plan created long ago to categorize individuals and uphold power imbalances. To me, education felt political, and that feeling enhanced the tension I was experiencing.

When I first enrolled in college, I took several general education classes. I tried to be engaged in the material, but none of it felt particularly relevant to the work I was doing or wanted to do. During the day, I worked; in the evening, I learned. It felt as though higher education required me to check the rest of my life at the door. I memorized material, took exams, and wrote papers, and I ended my first year with As and Bs. But I didn’t continue in college, because my disconnected life left me feeling quite empty.

During my break from higher education, I discovered College Unbound. Crucially, nothing in College Unbound feels disjointed: all of my courses are connected through a project, generated entirely by me, that guides my learning. My project (essentially, my passion) is a lens through which to see course content and a way of meeting degree requirements. The degree itself is highly customizable to accommodate my schedule, my career, and my other commitments while supporting my well-being. At College Unbound, I can’t simply memorize content and pass tests. My courses require continuous reflection on how my studies connect to my work outside the classroom, giving me a real stake in each course. The program structure encourages personal growth through thoughtful participation and sharing among students and faculty. Sharing requires vulnerability, building trust among individuals while inspiring investment in one another’s successes.

Currently, I am a law enforcement advocate employed by Day One, a sexual assault/domestic violence agency. In collaboration with detectives in the local police department, I serve as a liaison for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, child molestation, and human
The result would be a new kind of college. This is what exists at College Unbound, Rhode Island’s newest postsecondary institution. Founded in 2009 and approved by the state in 2015, College Unbound has been recognized for its innovative approaches (Kamenetz 2010; 2015). The institution seeks to reframe higher education around a commitment to social justice in a diverse democracy: its mission is “to reinvent higher education for underrepresented returning adult learners, using a model that is individualized, interest-based, project-driven, workplace-enhanced, cohort-supportive, flexible, supportive, and affordable” (College Unbound 2017). Traditional models of higher education are failing many students, and College Unbound recognizes that making meaningful strides toward inclusive excellence requires significant—and unbound—change.

A Responsive Curriculum
College Unbound offers a single, but highly adaptable, degree program: a bachelor of arts in organizational leadership and change. Students develop strong intellectual and practical skills along with a sense of civic professionalism and social responsibility in a diverse democracy.

Students navigate College Unbound within cohorts—learning communities of ten to fifteen peers. The degree program is organized into semesters, each comprising six courses divided into two eight-week terms. Students enter College Unbound with different numbers of previously earned credits, but all take part in a shared first-semester experience consisting of Workplace and World Lab, Introduction to Organizational Leadership and Change, Writing for Change, Reframing Failure, and Contextualizing Work. Each student works with an advisor to create an individualized learning plan that aligns with the student’s goals and life experiences. Following the first term, students may complete their degrees while working full or part time, in accordance with their learning plans.

College Unbound treats the workplace as a learning asset, and Workplace and World Lab is a critical component of the curriculum. Students enroll in this course every term throughout their time in the program. The course prompts students to make connections between their curricular and workplace experiences through multi-semester projects that feed into their interests and goals while also benefiting the organizations in which they work or intern. The opportunity to integrate their coursework through a project they have designed empowers and challenges students, allowing them to identify and validate their strengths while developing their academic skills. (See Lauren Roy’s essay...)

...trafficking. I guide these individuals through the criminal justice system by providing crisis intervention, legal advocacy, court accompaniment, and appropriate referrals for community support. This work connects directly to my College Unbound project, Aporia Collective. I am working with three other women to create a zine (alternative magazine) for teenage girls who have experienced sexual and gender-based violence. Much of the zine consists of narratives and artworks submitted by women survivors and victims. The primary goal is to provide language for young people to discuss the structures of violence and their consequences for identity. Experiences of violence are personal, but they are also political; recontextualizing the conversation from the self to the larger structures can provide a language for survivors and victims to describe what happened to them while also seeing their experiences objectively. We hope to distribute the zine at children’s advocacy centers throughout Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

As part of my curriculum, I recently co-designed an independent study called Dance as a Practice of Freedom. The course included a physical dance class where I received private lessons from a professional dancer. It also involved a dance theory course where students explored the relationship between identity and dance history, as well as the meaning of specific bodies in motion. Through this course, I realized how dance heals and repairs the connection between body and mind, giving individuals ownership of and presence within their own bodies—a crucial outcome for survivors of sexual violence. I now plan to integrate dance into my future professional practice. After graduating from College Unbound, I plan to earn a master of fine arts degree in dance, something I had never viewed as a possibility. My goal is to become a dance therapist who teaches trauma-informed dance lessons to survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.

College Unbound allows the most marginalized individuals to have a shot at earning an education. Within my cohort, students often say that we are literally living our projects and our courses. The return is real. Three-quarters of us have changed careers and found new jobs more aligned with our goals and our passions. I feel as though I have been able to uncover who I really am—but I had to learn how to see myself differently before that could happen. At College Unbound, students are made to feel that we are valuable and that our richly complex lives can be part of what we study in the curriculum. I can’t imagine a higher impact. ☎️
on pages 4–5 for a student’s perspective on the College Unbound experience.)

Pedagogy as Participatory Epistemology
College Unbound embraces the idea that high-impact learning happens in many spaces, and that faculty are not the only holders and creators of knowledge. Students are true partners in their learning: they engage in coassessment of their work, and their stories and histories actively shape the curriculum. For students, this model results in a learning environment where they can all be successful and where inclusive excellence is expected and realized. For faculty, the model offers an entry point to an exciting, collaborative endeavor that highlights the impact of student-centered teaching.

In spring 2016, several of this article’s authors—Liya, Stephanie, Ebru, Jennifer (all doctoral students in the higher education program at the University of Massachusetts Boston) and John (a faculty member in the program)—cotaught a College Unbound course, Contextualizing Work. As described on the syllabus, the course “requires students to step out of their current role in their workplace, or in the development of their project, and apply research strategies using their immediate environment.” The course’s primary goal is to put qualitative research methods into practice by engaging students in integrated reflection on and exploration of the intersections among their identities, their projects, their places of work, and their social justice commitments.

From the beginning of the course, the faculty team engaged in a cyclical process of continuous reflection on our teaching and our students’ experiences. In collaboration with other College Unbound faculty, we met with students each Monday, debriefed as a faculty group each Wednesday, held virtual office hours each Thursday, collaborated over long conference calls each Sunday, and interacted with students using their online portfolios throughout the week. In short, by teaching students to “contextualize their work,” we were also contextualizing our own work—putting into practice an intentional, social justice-oriented teaching agenda in an environment that was at once more rigorous, flexible, focused, creative, and fulfilling than we had encountered in our previous teaching experiences.

Key Learning Outcomes
The College Unbound model focuses on generating ten learning outcomes, which we call “the Big Ten”: (1) advocacy for self and others, (2) accountability, (3) collaboration, (4) communication, (5) creativity, (6) critical thinking, (7) intercultural engagement, (8) problem solving, (9) reflection, and (10) resiliency. As students achieve these outcomes, they become empowered leaders who are able to deal with diversity, complexity, and change. Because their lives are integrated into their coursework, students continuously develop lifelong learning competencies, both inside and outside of the classroom.

As civic actors in a democracy, students need an education that is not merely economically instrumental, but that also supports their civic agency. Such an education requires integrated experiences that allow students to flourish in their coursework and in their lives. College Unbound offers this type of education to returning adult students, with the goal of instilling greater justice and equity in the world.

For more information about College Unbound, visit www.collegeunbound.org.

REFERENCES
For the first half of my adult life, I was immersed in the homogenous cultures of small-town America and Air Force flying squadrons. If asked about diversity, I would have said I was color-blind. However, through many experiences over a thirty-five-year military and academic career, I have learned to celebrate the rich diversity of human experience. Attending graduate school, commanding an Air Force flying squadron, leading an academic department, and participating in advocacy related to a variety of social justice issues have changed my perspective.

No issue helped me rethink my ideas about diversity more than my involvement with the repeal of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell (DADT). I ventured quietly into DADT work when my department at the United States Air Force Academy invited Aaron Belkin, director of the Michael D. Palm Center, a leading institute focusing on the study of sexual minorities in the military, to present his research several years before the repeal. Over time, Aaron and I became colleagues and friends. As our friendship developed, so did my involvement in examining DADT. In 2010, I was on the writing team for the Department of Defense’s study on the repeal of DADT, which concluded that the military could repeal the policy without risk to military effectiveness and readiness (United States Department of Defense 2010). I continue to speak regularly about the process that led to repeal and to be a voice for inclusive approaches to transgender service, gender equality, and religious respect.

The 2012–17 Department of Defense Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan refers to diversity as a “strategic imperative” (2012, 3). This report affirms that the military must foster a diverse and inclusive workplace and culture if we are to recruit the best talent and develop the most effective force possible. In this article, I will share a few of the theoretical perspectives I have found particularly useful in my diversity and inclusion (D&I) journey. I hope they will help you as well.

**Relationships and Social Context**

Through my graduate studies in counseling and leadership, I have gained an understanding of the vital importance of relationships and social context. This theoretical background has been a critical influence on my D&I work. My philosophy is strongly influenced by Carl Rogers’s person-centered theory, which posits that “significant positive personality change does not occur except in a relationship” (1957, 96). When I was a department head, I posted on my door a modified version of this quote: “Significant positive organizational change does not occur except in relationship.” During my doctoral studies, I expanded my understanding of the role of relationships, accounting for social as well as interpersonal contexts. My mentor, Robert Cairns, had studied with Albert Bandura, founder of social learning theory; like Bandura, Cairns emphasized the important role that the immediate social environment plays in personal development (Cairns 1998). In Cairns’s and Bandura’s views, in order to understand behavior, one must understand the reciprocal relationship between the individual and the society.

Successful D&I work, like successful counseling and leadership, depends on one’s ability to create healthy, productive relationships while accounting for social context.
be successful, too!” For years, instructors in the leadership course tried to “fix” students and their bad attitudes about leadership education. Not surprisingly, that approach didn’t work.

Recently, we shifted our focus to building a better learning environment. Cadets at the academy live in squadrons of about one hundred students (approximately twenty-five from each class year) who live and work together as a coherent unit or learning community. Rather than teach in a traditional classroom disconnected from the social world of the squadron, we moved the class to the squadron. This resulted in better teacher-student relationships and allowed students to practice the theories they were studying within their own social context. Class projects became squadron projects. Study sessions became squadron activities. Early results indicated improved attitudes, greater cohesion, and more application of material (Packard et al. 2015). Based on these promising findings, we are expanding the model to all incoming freshman in fall 2017.

Viewing education from the learner’s perspective allows us to focus on encouraging growth rather than on forcing change, and to spend time building relationships rather than lecturing.

Tempered radicalism played out in my life most visibly during my work gently advocating for DADT repeal. As a long-serving senior Air Force officer, I am passionate about my service and my identity as a military professional. Prerepeal, I was also concerned about the harm DADT was causing to those who simply wanted to serve without having to lie about themselves or their partners. As an officer, I am under oath to uphold the law, even when I disagree with it. However, my loyalty does not require me to stand by passively while people are harmed. In fact, I believe that my oath requires me to do the opposite: to work for change, but to do so in a way that does not cause more harm than good. This tension between loyalty to the organization and passion for social justice is at the heart of tempered radicalism.

As a tempered radical, I constantly reflect on the tension between loyalty and change. With practice, I have learned that a collegial conversation is almost always more powerful than a passionate outburst. I have found that I am more effective when I listen to understand than when I lecture to convince. That said, I have learned that my approaches and responses must sometimes be bold. I will speak up strongly when I believe it is necessary and when I am doing so for the greater good rather than to advance my personal agenda. But when I do engage strongly, I must put my ego aside so I am able to continue seeing things from the perspectives of others, making relationships easier to nurture. Striking this balance is never easy, but it is necessary if I want to focus on long-term successes rather than short-term gains. Choosing conversation over outburst and taking the long view have been instrumental to my D&I work and my sanity. Like yoga or Pilates, tempered radicalism takes discipline, patience, and concentration. But the results are worth the effort.

Slow Change and Tempered Radicals

The work of change can be painfully slow. My understanding of slow culture change significantly improved when I discovered Debra Myerson’s theory of tempered radicalism (Myerson and Scully 1995; Myerson 2001; Myerson 2008). Tempered radicals believe “that direct, angry confrontation will get them nowhere, but they don’t sit by and allow frustration to fester. Rather, they work quietly to challenge prevailing wisdom and gently provoke their organizational cultures to adapt” (Myerson 2001, 2). The tempered radical is passionately connected to the organization and also convinced that significant change needs to occur in order to improve it.

Tip #1: If you are struggling with your D&I work, analyze where you are spending your time. Put more time into relationship building in the communities and places you are trying to influence. Address social context to be more effective.
Tip #2: When you are frustrated with slow change, temper your radicalism. Stay focused on the long view and develop a support system with other tempered radicals. D&I needs radicals as catalysts for change, but it also needs an army of tempered radicals to see change through to completion.

Effective Leadership
Tempered radicalism requires a generous measure of patience and a healthy dose of persistence. It also requires humble and creative leadership. Understanding what needs to change is much easier than figuring out how to make lasting change a reality. A leader cannot simply temper radicals to see change through to completion.

My approach to facilitating sustainable change has been influenced by the work of Jim Collins, best known for Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap . . . and Others Don't (2001). In another of his books, Great by Choice (2011), Collins describes some of the attributes of successful, change-oriented leaders, whom he calls “10x leaders” because they lead companies that outperform the competition at least tenfold. I have found that the attributes of these leaders nicely complement a focus on social context and an emphasis on slow change.

Collins identifies three core leadership behaviors of 10x leaders. First is “fanatical discipline”: the ability to pursue goals with unbending focus. These leaders don’t give up easily, and they stay true to their purpose. Rather than get caught up in negativity, they hunker down and optimistically focus on the goal. Second, these leaders are more rebellious than their counterparts, but they get away with their audacity because of their “empirical creativity.” They are willing to step outside the box and challenge the status quo, but they do so from a solid foundation of valid data. They take the time to do their homework, presenting fully developed, creative ideas supported by strong evidence. My favorite of the leadership behaviors Collins names is the last: “productive paranoia.” Leaders exhibiting this behavior worry about their effectiveness, but they channel their concern into meaningful action. They don’t complain; they create solutions. They take the right way rather than the easy way.

Collins’s framework has allowed me to function more effectively as a leader. Like Myerson, Collins emphasizes the long view with a focus on sustainable, positive change. Perhaps the most important lesson I have learned from Collins is the importance of being a humble leader. Humility is not a term often used to describe an Air Force pilot or a radical. But I have found that humility, persistence, and a focus on social context can be powerful partners in D&I work.

Tip #3: Effective D&I leaders are disciplined, productive, data driven, and above all humble. They take creative approaches, but they also are sure to stand on the solid ground of empirically validated evidence.

Concluding Thoughts
Relationships, patience, and effective leadership: these ideas have guided my D&I work in the military and in higher education. In this article, time and space have prevented me from revisiting every one of the authors, theorists, and activists who have influenced my work. But the three ideas I have highlighted above are the ones I find myself returning to time and again when I am stuck and need a boost of energy. I hope they suggest new ways for you to think about your work. And I hope you will share the ideas that shape your thinking with others so we can all continue to improve our efforts to make the world more inclusive.

Author’s note: The author would like to thank Steve Jones for his thoughtful feedback on this article. The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the US Air Force, the US Department of Defense, or the US government.

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Imagine that you are a student at your institution. If you sit down and explore your college’s website, are you able to pick a program and create a plan of study that will carry you through to graduation? If you are at a community college—where many students hope to transfer—are you able to plan a course sequence that would allow you to transfer into your desired major and finish your degree at a four-year college without taking excess credits?

If you are having trouble carrying out this exercise, as many faculty and administrators do, just imagine the barriers confronted by community college students. Students lack much of the knowledge about higher education possessed by college staff, and even counselors who understand their colleges well cannot possibly help students develop complete academic plans in the fifteen or twenty minutes that they typically spend with each student. So, what can be done to remedy this situation?

Redesigning College

At the Community College Research Center (CCRC), we say that the typical community college is structured like a cafeteria. Although community colleges provide many services, programs, and activities, it is often up to each student to navigate the complexities of the college experience. Students get lost and confused amid hundreds of options, which is one reason that graduation rates at community colleges are low. Even students who finish college often graduate with many more credits than they need. These problems are particularly serious for students of color and low-income students, who tend to arrive at college with the least knowledge and social and financial resources, and are thus particularly harmed by the confusing environment and its inefficiencies (Bailey, Jaggars, and Jenkins 2015).

Over the past two decades, better data have led to a better understanding of how students are faring in college. With this information, educators and policymakers have been pushing for reform under the banner of the completion agenda. Colleges and systems have implemented initiatives on college readiness, developmental education, advising, the use of data, and a host of other improvements. But research by CCRC and others has led to a key insight: individual reforms that involve relatively few students or that touch only a piece of the student experience are not enough to measurably improve graduation rates or other key indicators of institutional success (Bailey, Jaggars, and Jenkins 2015).

The effects of even significant reforms within one segment of a student’s college career—for example, developmental education—fade over time if nothing changes in the rest of the college.

In our recent book, Redesigning America’s Community Colleges: A Clearer Path to Student Success (2015), Shanna Smith Jaggars, Davis Jenkins, and I argue that what is needed is a comprehensive reform model that transforms the entire college to focus on student success. We propose a guided pathways model that involves redesigning each part of the student experience, from the stage where students choose programs and start remedial or college-level work to the time of graduation, when they move on to further education or careers.

Areas of Practice

As of 2017, guided pathways reforms are being designed by more than 250 colleges, including at least ten in each of the following states: Arkansas, California, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, Ohio, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and Washington. Thirty colleges are participating in the Pathways Project coordinated by the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC). The project aims to implement guided pathways at scale over several years. CCRC has worked with AACC to break down guided pathways into four main practice areas:
1. **Mapping pathways to student end goals.** In the guided pathways model, colleges create clear maps for every program they offer. They make these maps easily accessible on their websites so students will understand what courses are necessary to complete a program or qualify for transfer, how long completion will take, and what opportunities for employment or further education they will have at the end of the program.

2. **Helping students choose and enter a program pathway.** Currently, many students choose programs and courses largely on their own. In the guided pathways model, colleges help new students explore programs, consider possible careers, and develop complete academic plans. Undecided students narrow their options by choosing from clusters of majors—such as business, social sciences, or health—that align with their interests. Developmental education reforms enable students to enroll more quickly in college-level courses, including courses in their field that will keep them engaged in college.

3. **Keeping students on a path.** Both students and advisors can see students’ plans mapped out through graduation and keep track of students’ progress. If students get off track or have trouble in a course, alert systems bring these issues to advisors’ attention so they can steer students toward academic or other supports. Colleges also try to remove institutional barriers such as inconvenient schedules or cancelled classes.

4. **Ensuring that students are learning.** Programs are designed around a coherent set of learning outcomes, rather than as a collection of courses. Program learning outcomes align with requirements for success in further education and employment in a related field. Colleges track student learning outcomes and work to improve teaching.

Guided pathways reforms involve every part of the college, requiring the redesign of major departments and of functions such as developmental education and advising. For this reason, they take several years to implement in full, and they require coordination among administrators, faculty, advisors, financial aid personnel, schedulers, technology specialists, and many others. Because these reforms involve changing the way things have always been done, they often are met with skepticism and resistance. Some faculty and staff, for example, may be concerned that their courses will be canceled or that students on more structured plans will lose the opportunity to explore as they find their majors. But these educators may be pleasantly surprised: greater retention can increase the need for higher-level courses, something that many faculty favor.

To ensure buy-in, reform efforts should involve faculty and advisors from the very beginning. Reform leaders should also underscore for faculty and staff that guided pathways reforms do not necessarily limit choice, but rather provide a systematic process through which students can make more informed choices.

**Guided Pathways Examples**

The colleges in the AACC Pathways Project, which have committed to implementing redesigned programs by fall 2018, were chosen because they had built organizational cultures open to change. In CCRC’s report on the first year of guided pathways implementation (Jenkins, Lahr, and Fink 2017), we found that participating colleges, despite significant challenges, are finding innovative ways of adapting guided pathways principles to their schools and to the circumstances of their students.

In Texas, San Jacinto College has organized its 144 degree and certificate programs into eight meta-majors, including arts and humanities; business; construction, industry, and manufacturing; and public safety. For each of the college’s career/technical programs, a program mapping team consisting of staff and faculty from each meta-major has documented jobs in the college’s service area, verified demand for certificates and degrees, and recorded wage information. Career/technical programs that did not lead to family-supporting wages have been eliminated.

Teams working on transfer-oriented programs have created maps leading to the five most common transfer destinations, with the aim of moving students away from general studies degrees that often leave them with credits that don’t transfer.

Cleveland State Community College in Tennessee has organized “career communities” in business; advanced technologies; fine arts and humanities;
education; social sciences; science, technology, engineering, and math; and health care. The college is using these career communities to reorganize orientation as a one-day event during which each student will attend a presentation on the programs of study, career options, and types of degrees (transfer and career/technical) available in the career community the student has selected. All students will enroll in required first-year seminars corresponding to their career communities; in these seminars, they will create individualized educational plans leading to graduation. The college is also redesigning its website to help students explore programs and careers.

Redesigning advising is one of the most challenging parts of colleges’ guided pathways work. Prior to its advising redesign, Jackson College in Michigan had four advisors—one attached to each of its four main program areas—for more than five thousand students. Due to long lines and wait times, most students registered for courses without seeing an advisor. Over the past two years, the college has hired several new “student success navigators” (for a total of eighteen) and is aiming to reach a 200:1 advising ratio. Every student receives a call from a navigator before orientation; during these calls, navigators help students begin setting goals and developing program plans. Students are required to see their navigators in person at least three times during their first term, and navigators advise students throughout their time in college.

Improving Student Success
The reforms described above are just a few examples of the significant work that colleges are undertaking to improve student success. CCRC plans to follow these colleges’ progress as they complete the planning and implementation phases of their work and begin to see an impact on their students. These vanguard colleges will offer lessons for the hundreds of colleges asking how guided pathways can be done well.

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Even though colleges and universities in the United States produce nearly two million graduates each year (Ryan and Bauman 2016), American higher education is not without significant challenges related to the success of its most valuable stakeholders—undergraduate students. Arguably, most pressing among these is the hemorrhagic loss of talented undergraduate students from the STEM disciplines. Indeed, every fifteen minutes, a student majoring in STEM either changes his or her major to a non-STEM discipline or withdraws from college altogether (NSF 2017). This phenomenon disproportionately, although not exclusively, affects African American, Latino, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Native American (collectively, AALANA) students, who now comprise the fastest-growing undergraduate populations in US colleges and universities (NSF 2017).

For decades, academic researchers and policy analysts alike have foretold the danger that this loss of talent poses for US global preeminence in STEM fields. Yet our centenarian institutional structures—and often we STEM higher education reformers ourselves—doggedly persist in systemically and systematically marginalizing the very students on whom we must depend to advance the scientific discovery and innovation that will yield improved health outcomes, sustained economic growth, and a secure cyberinfrastructure. Advancing discovery and innovation demands that US institutions of higher education, and the professional organizations that support them, hear and heed the clarion call for greater diversity in STEM. We cannot continue to depend on mere workaround strategies that fail to address the root causes for cultivating, as opposed to weeding out, talent. They tend to overlook the importance of cultural responsiveness in teaching and learning, underemphasize the value of self-efficacy, or wholly disregard the inescapable influence of our unique personality traits and characteristics—as if all faculty are alike. In sum, the professional development of STEM faculty has been unduly universalized in many ways, to the point that its results are now simply additive rather than synergistic.

Therefore, instead of continuing to rely on hit-or-miss approaches to STEM faculty development, we must now customize our efforts so that they are based on a deeper, more holistic understanding of our true selves and of the influences—historical, sociopolitical, and cultural—that inform our individual commitments to STEM higher education reform. While these influences are as distinct as the individual narratives and institutional contexts from which they originate, they collectively represent the source from which change within STEM higher education must emanate. To adapt the words of Mahatma Gandhi ([1913] 1999, 241):

If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the [academy] would also change. As a man [or woman] changes his [or her] own nature, so does the [academy] change towards him [or her].... We need not wait to see what others do.
We are compelled to revitalize STEM faculty professional development in ways that demystify the complexities of our humanity and unmask the incongruence between it and the sometimes-volatile work environments in which we educate and train our students.

STEM threatens to erode our national and global futures—we need more than great questions. In Leading with Soul, Bolman and Deal (2011) remind us that it is not the questions, but knowing where our questions come from that makes the difference.

For some, questions about undergraduate STEM education reform arise from a moral obligation; for others, they represent an institutional mandate. For Project Kaleidoscope of AAC&U, our questions are now driven by an unequivocal commitment to employing our own vulnerabilities, sensitivities, and sensibilities about ourselves, our histories, and our worldviews—as a collective source and force—to create a world-class model of STEM higher education reform that honors our own legacy as STEM academicians and guarantees our future as global citizens.

The source of our questions, rather than the questions themselves, compels us to revitalize STEM faculty professional development in ways that demystify the complexities of our humanity and unmask the incongruence between it and the sometimes-volatile work environments in which we must educate and train our students.

The Source of Change
Rather than suggest a generalized framework for professional development models and tools, I list below three key principles that shape a structure of reform that is responsive to the contemporary conditions of twenty-first-century STEM faculty life, and is, most of all, sustainable, both within the academy and in our private lives. Each principle is representative of an explicit strategy that reflects our commitment and effort toward reforming undergraduate STEM education at its very core—with our hearts, minds, and souls.

PRINCIPLE #1: Undergraduate STEM reform begins with the reform of us.
Don’t try to fix the students. Fix ourselves first.—Marva Collins

Recognizing that pedagogical reform is a necessary, but insufficient, approach to total reform of undergraduate STEM education, AAC&U’s Teaching to Increase Diversity and Equity in STEM (TIDES) initiative pairs pedagogical reform with a three-year-long professional development program for STEM faculty (Mack and Winter 2015). This initiative represents a strong pivot toward making equity and justice essential to immediate and widespread change in undergraduate teaching, and begins with a deep exploration of self. TIDES faculty engage in unpacking the root causes of their own underlying personal biases and the systemic injustices that negatively affect AALANA students at their institutions. They also participate in thorough review of critical theories (e.g., critical race theory, critical gender theory), hands-on diversity training, and mindfulness practice.

Collectively, TIDES has contributed to the retention and persistence of over two hundred thousand STEM undergraduates to date, more than 50 percent of whom are from AALANA and other historically marginalized groups. More importantly, though, for the TIDES community of STEM faculty, mastery of TIDES program components has irreversibly changed undergraduate STEM teaching practices, deeply enhanced leadership and decision-making capacities, and permanently altered personal worldviews.

PRINCIPLE #2: We are all responsible for leading undergraduate STEM reform.
Growing other leaders from the ranks isn’t just the duty of the leader, it’s an obligation.—Warren Bennis

Since its founding in 1989, PKAL has been one of the leading organizations in the United States focused on transforming undergraduate STEM education through the professional development of STEM faculty. Its STEM Leadership Institute—designed to provide early- and mid-career STEM faculty with the knowledge, practice, and skill required to effectively negotiate the politics of institutional change (Elrod and Kezar 2014)—is undergirded by a uniquely designed curriculum that emphasizes...
experiential learning. However, recent racially motivated uprisings on many of our nation’s campuses now threaten to undermine the progress we have made, and could make in years to come, toward diversifying the STEM disciplines.

To ensure that our progress remains steady, PKAL has designed and launched My Tenure Trek™ (MTT), a diversity simulation grounded in experiential learning theory, which guides participants through a simulated tenure process that is simultaneously representative of the culture of STEM and the lived experiences of diverse faculty. Offered exclusively through the PKAL STEM Leadership Institute, the simulation requires participants to assume the identity of someone markedly different from themselves. Unlike most diversity training programs, MTT™ purposefully provokes the onset of physiological and emotional reactions to situations commonly encountered on the journey toward tenure, in order to awaken and sensitize participants to the influences of power and privilege, the impacts of microaggressions and implicit biases, and the dangers of ignoring any or all of these.

PRINCIPLE #3: We must recognize greatness everywhere greatness exists.

The true task of leadership is not to put greatness into [anything], but to elicit it, for the greatness is already there.—John Buchan

To date, few research studies have explored the impact of leadership on broadening participation in STEM. Of those that do exist, almost none focus on Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), institutions that have led the nation for over five decades in broadening the participation of African Americans in STEM.

The Center for the Advancement of STEM Leadership (CASL)—founded by the University of the Virgin Islands, Fielding Graduate University, North Carolina A&T State University, and AAC&U with generous funding from the National Science Foundation’s HBCU Undergraduate Program—aims to redress this omission.

Our work must continue to reflect a greater awareness, a deeper appreciation for our humanity, and a stronger commitment to acknowledging, honoring, and sharing with others the privilege that we enjoy as STEM faculty.

CASL strategically utilizes the cultural authority of HBCUs themselves to shape the perspective through which this distinctive institutional context is rigorously examined, explained, and integrated into mainstream discourse on STEM higher education reform. Through a yearlong professional development program for STEM faculty, CASL exposes undergraduate STEM reform leaders to theories of leadership and organizational change as well as historical and contemporary truths about the leadership legacies associated with HBCU STEM successes. Most importantly, CASL guides these leaders in the practice of self-examination as a tool for engaging in the kind of purpose-driven, liberatory leadership that broadens the participation of African Americans in STEM.

Conclusion
Successful STEM higher education reform will clearly require far more than can be expressed in three principles. What will remain important, though, is that our work continue to reflect a greater awareness, a deeper appreciation for our humanity, and a stronger commitment to acknowledging, honoring, and sharing with others the privilege that we enjoy as STEM faculty.

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Our work must continue to reflect a greater awareness, a deeper appreciation for our humanity, and a stronger commitment to acknowledging, honoring, and sharing with others the privilege that we enjoy as STEM faculty.
Undocumented and DACAmented students are as diverse as their experiences.1 While a majority of these students identify as Latinx/a/o or Hispanic and many are from South or Central America, undocumented students of all ethnicities come from across the world— from Africa, Asia, Europe, Canada, the Caribbean, and Oceania (Pérez 2012). These students are no different from students with legal residency. Many have lived in the United States for most of their lives, attended elementary school and high school here, speak English fluently, and want to pursue a college education in order to make meaningful contributions to this country. But often, they were brought to the United States by their parents at a young age and lack a way to become legal residents or citizens. Despite tremendous financial and personal obstacles, undocumented and DACAmented students are academically talented, self-motivated, focused, and resilient.

As institutions of higher education continue to enroll undocumented and DACAmented students, higher education professionals struggle to understand how to better serve a student population that faces many challenges and barriers. It is no longer sufficient to support these students solely through informal, voluntary practices. Instead, colleges and universities must build institutional capacity for undocumented and DACAmented student success by creating and implementing comprehensive policies and practices that align with institutional mission and vision.

**Institutionalizing Support at NEIU**

With 30 percent of full-time students now identifying as Latinx/a/o, Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU) is the first public four-year university in Illinois to be federally designated as a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) and the most ethnically diverse institution in the Midwest. As such, NEIU has a set of values that guide the work of the institution in the service of its students and the rest of the community. Among these values are access to opportunity and appreciation for the rich diversity of students, faculty, and staff. One key value in particular guided NEIU to institutionalize support for undocumented students: our focus on community.

For Northeastern, a focus on community means that the institution “has a special obligation to provide an environment that is supportive, nurturing, and participatory.” As articulated in the university’s values statement, “such an environment is characterized by civility, fostering humanity and engagement, and creates a sense of community through inclusion, mutual respect, and empowerment” (NEIU 2017). Furthermore, NEIU has a long history of serving undocumented students. Prior to the 2003 passage of Illinois House Bill 60, a state law that considers qualifying undocumented students as Illinois residents for the purposes of receiving in-state tuition rates at public colleges and universities, NEIU was working with Chicago-area high schools and community organizations to provide access to higher education and award private scholarships to undocumented students. Although the university did not identify specific services for these students, many faculty and staff informally assisted undocumented students by referring them to campus and community resources.

In 2011, a group of undocumented students at NEIU created the Undocumented, Resilient, and Organized (URO) student club. Their activism around the need to provide systematic and intentional support for undocumented students prompted NEIU to take a closer look at institutional practices and student needs. In 2012, a small one-year Innovation Grant awarded by NEIU’s then-president allowed for the creation of the Undocumented Student Project (USP), a committee composed of faculty, staff, and administrators from across divisions and academic programs. This committee created a resource guide for faculty and staff working with undocumented students on campus.

Realizing that a one-year grant and one resource guide were only the beginning, the president awarded the grant for a second year in 2013. The USP committee began observing the obstacles undocumented students were experiencing and started proposing and implementing solutions.

This cross-divisional community effort allowed the university to begin institutionalizing support for undocumented and DACAmented students. While creating institutional support was not an easy task, the NEIU community was committed to supporting these students, and buy-in existed across the

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1. “DACAmented” students have documented their status through the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, created in 2012.
Expanding an Array of Services

USP committee members began institutionalizing support for undocumented and DACAmented students by educating each other about state and federal policies around immigration issues, as well as institutional policies directly affecting students. In the area of admissions, we realized that undocumented students were confused by the admissions application and hesitant to fill out the affidavit form that would grant them in-state tuition, which looked intimidating. Improvements to the admissions application and the addition of our NEIU logo to the affidavit form addressed some of these issues.

To further ease the application process, we created a website for current and prospective undocumented students. All talent and merit scholarships, and most foundation scholarships, were made available to qualifying students regardless of their citizenship status. In addition, we created an undocumented student ally training program for NEIU’s faculty and staff, modeled after Safe Zone workshops on LGBTQ awareness and allyship. To date, close to two hundred faculty and staff have become undocumented student allies by participating in the training.

NEIU’s deep sense of community extends beyond the campus. Over the years, we have established meaningful partnerships with community-based organizations, attorneys, state officials, and other Illinois colleges and universities to ensure that we can refer our students to reputable and caring people and organizations who can provide the services and advice we cannot. These partnerships have allowed for many collaborative opportunities, including DACA workshops, know-your-rights trainings, citizenship workshops, and healthcare accessibility presentations.

In 2014, the Undocumented Student Project was formally institutionalized within the Division of Student Affairs; it then became the Undocumented Student Resources office within the University’s multicultural center, and the university hired a director to lead the work. Today, the office strives to continue addressing the concerns and needs of our undocumented and DACAmented students, as well as the faculty and staff who work with them daily. Office staff provide students with one-on-one life advising, connect them with university and external resources, provide purposeful programming, train faculty and staff across the institution, connect with community-based organizations and immigration experts, establish connections with high schools and community colleges, and share best practices with other higher education institutions nationwide. Recently, the university has partnered with TheDream.US, a college access and success program, to provide private scholarships for DACAmented students.

Conclusion

Across the country, undocumented and DACAmented students are experiencing higher degrees of stress and fear due to President Trump’s announcement that DACA will be rescinded in March 2018. They are afraid that they or their parents may be deported, and they know that after their work permits expire, they will need to find alternative sources of income while still helping at home and maintaining the academic standing necessary to qualify for limited scholarship opportunities. As educators, we cannot add to this stress and fear or expect students to achieve perfection in order to prove that they are deserving. It is not sufficient to provide access or to claim that we embrace diversity. We must work together to remove the barriers preventing our students from reaching their full potential so they can be better equipped to contribute to American society and the world.

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In 2007, the University of Colorado Boulder (CU Boulder), a large public research university, relocated Disability Services within its newly minted Office of Diversity, Equity, and Community Engagement. This reorganization has led to a heightened understanding of diversity and inclusion across the university community, enhancements in student services, and an evolving holistic vision for serving students with disabilities. Shifts in CU Boulder’s institutional culture have occurred in step with larger changes unfolding in the disability services field, including trends toward serving students with invisible disabilities—such as learning disabilities, Attention Deficit Disorder and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADD/ADHD), and psychological issues—alongside those with visible or physical disabilities (Madaus 2011). The field’s movement from a medical model that prioritizes treating students’ physical or mental impairments to a social model that emphasizes reducing institutional and environmental barriers has also bolstered these cultural shifts. At CU Boulder, careful, continuous attention to cultural change over an extended period is improving the learning environment for the entire student body.

Background
Like many institutions of higher education, for many decades, CU Boulder located Disability Services within its Division of Student Affairs. Disability Services grew from a small operation providing personalized services to students in the 1980s and 1990s to a medium-sized department serving a growing population in the early 2000s. But by the mid-2000s, the department found itself in a quandary. The number of students requesting accommodations was rising precipitously (see fig. 1), exceeding the department’s capacity to keep pace.

As it struggled to meet rising demand, Disability Services adopted a compliance approach strictly limiting services to the delivery of classroom accommodations (e.g., testing accommodations, note-taking services, and sign language interpreting). Mirroring trends in the field more broadly, this approach aligned with the subculture of the Division of Student Affairs, which then housed other clinically oriented departments such as counseling and psychiatric services, a victim assistance office, and an office addressing issues related to student conduct.

In 2007, an opportunity to reposition Disability Services arose when the university decided to elevate an existing office of diversity and appoint a vice chancellor to represent diversity and inclusion efforts on the chancellor’s cabinet. Three student support services departments—Disability Services, an office for precollegiate outreach, and a multicultural student services department—moved into the new Office of Diversity, Equity, and Community Engagement (ODECE), which was located in the Division of Academic Affairs under the administrative leadership of the provost. While the university’s most recent accreditation report was the primary driver of this change, a separate external review conducted nearly simultaneously had also advised rebalancing the departments.

Disability as Diversity
At the time of restructuring, university leaders embraced the idea of elevating diversity and inclusion as priorities within the institution. They also realized that incorporating Disability Services into a revamped institutional diversity division could catalyze the development...
of a more complex understanding of diversity and inclusion across the university community. One important goal was to influence perceptions within the university, moving from a limited deficit-based framework toward a new asset-based understanding of students as differently abled learners whose intellectual capabilities are taken as a given and fostered. At its core, disability is about variation among learners, which manifests across all social identity groups (McKee 2017). Disability can affect anyone at any stage of life, becoming a defining aspect of one’s identity whatever social groups one otherwise claims. As Myers, Lindburg, and Nied have written, “Disability is a human condition. As such, it logically is a part of diversity” (2013, 107).

University leaders hoped that incorporating disability into institutional diversity efforts would allow CU Boulder to serve its students better while also deepening the community’s perceptions of diversity and inclusion as a whole. But achieving a shift in culture takes time. In the early years, the campus community, including those staff most directly affected, did not fully understand or support the structural changes. Nonetheless, the act of moving Disability Services and other departments into ODECE made a statement, framing diversity as including multiple factors, including disability, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, and sexual orientation. In addition, moving these departments from student affairs to academic affairs suggested new opportunities to prioritize student learning and intellectual development.

In time, the departments that had been relocated in ODECE would begin to see the strategic advantage to their placement in the Division of Academic Affairs. Aligning their work with the university’s core mission of teaching and learning empowered them to focus on the key aspects of program delivery that they had in common: the academic and student development components of their work. In recent years, the door has opened wide for innovation and collaboration within and outside of the new division.

Enhanced Services
Multiple factors had contributed, and continue to contribute, to the accelerated growth in student demand for accommodations. As social awareness of disabilities has grown, so too has the number of students requesting support for learning disabilities, ADD/ADHD, psychological issues, and other invisible disabilities. Today, more than 75 percent of students served by the division have invisible disabilities (see fig. 2). Additionally, in 2010, Disability Services moved from the third floor of an outdated residence hall to the main level of a newly constructed, state-of-the-art, accessible student services building. This move to a more prominent location had symbolic as well as practical significance for students’ engagement with Disability Services.

From 2012 to 2014, the vice chancellor of ODECE provided leadership that solidified Disability Services’ resource model and stability in significant ways. In 2012, the department received funding in the budget to cover escalating costs that had caused recurring deficits in the past. Additionally, in 2014, when a dedicated longtime leader retired, a new director and two new assistant directors received promotions. Subsequently, numerous part-time staff positions throughout the department were expanded to full-time status.

Just as the new leadership team was forming, the US Department of Justice initiated an investigation into the accessibility of CU Boulder’s digital environment. Disability Services and the Office of Information Technology formed a working group to address the issues at hand. This group developed processes that have now begun to transform digital accessibility practices for all students, staff, faculty, and community members.

With new leadership, Disability Services reorganized its staff structure, expanding the job duties of the director and assistant directors and formalizing teams focused on operations and services, access, and programming. New
programming for students signaled a shift from a focus on compliance toward a new philosophy. Early academic and community-building activities included expanded institutional and K–12 outreach, scholarship awards, recognition events, study skills mentoring, a national student chapter dedicated to ADHD and learning disabilities, and a diverse learners’ awareness week.

**Vision and Inclusive Excellence**

A campus-wide Making Excellence Inclusive strategic planning process initiated by the chancellor and provost in 2014 has reinforced the efforts of Disability Services to contribute proactively to the university’s learning environment. Guided by the overarching goal of enhancing quality in the educational experience for all students, faculty, and staff, this process has focused on the idea that the presence of diverse perspectives results in richer learning for all involved. Mounting evidence regarding the benefits associated with “neurodiverse talent” in professional settings points to “productivity gains, quality improvement, boosts in innovative capabilities, and broad increases in engagement” (Austin and Pisano 2017).

In the learning environment, Disability Services has begun exploring the broad benefits of universal design, or “the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for specialized design” (RL Mace Universal Design Institute 2017). One outcome of the Department of Justice investigation on digital accessibility, which concluded in 2015, was the implementation of services through the Office of Information Technology to provide assistance in implementing universal design principles. Faculty are beginning to recognize that when their teaching materials are fully accessible, all students have a better learning experience.

In 2016, after careful consideration, Disability Services made a conscious and deliberate decision to move away from the medical model toward the social model of disability. A recent departmental white paper underscores the new vision for our work (Griffin, Meister, and Mora 2017):

> Disability Services envisions a fully accessible, integrated, and universally designed campus community at CU Boulder. The social model emphasizes students as the authority about their experience and how they engage with their academic pursuits. . . . The department will continue to advocate for universal access in CU’s learning environment while doing its part to promote inclusive excellence in the campus community.

As the department moves toward a holistic approach (see fig. 3), it envisions working in close collaboration with university leaders to further resolve barriers to students’ learning. The staff plans to partner with faculty to address the needs of individual students and to establish a fully functional testing center to meet the continuously increasing demand for accommodations.

**Summary**

The reframing of disability as an element of institutional diversity at the University of Colorado Boulder has signified an important step toward creating inclusive learning environments. At CU Boulder, the components of effective organizational change leading toward a cultural shift have consisted of a classic mix: leadership influence in the face of external forces (Burke and Litwin 1992). Continuous and proactive attention from campus and department leaders have converged with greater societal awareness and acceptance of disabilities, including invisible disabilities. Just as Madaus (2011) foresaw, new learning technologies combined with increasingly diverse student enrollments are opening doors for disability services professionals to play a broader role in ensuring inclusive practices that benefit all members of the academic community.

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Amearillo College (AC), a community college in the Texas Panhandle, has revolutionized its approach to student success by adopting a “no excuses” framework for addressing student poverty. The college’s No Excuses Poverty Initiative serves as the connector between campus programs, services, and projects designed to increase student persistence and boost graduation and transfer rates. By systemically addressing poverty barriers, AC is ensuring that all students have equitable access to college.

AC was the first higher education institution to implement the No Excuses University philosophical framework developed by Damen Lopez’s TurnAround Schools organization (see http://noexcusesu.com/about/). The framework has prompted AC leadership, faculty, and staff to take responsibility for the whole student by setting high expectations and assisting students in reaching these expectations. When our students are not successful, we explore the reasons for their lack of success; but we ultimately bear the responsibility for having the right people, processes, or policies in place to support our students.

The No Excuses Poverty Initiative opened the door for us to recognize that our preconceived notions did not match reality. In the past, we held a narrow view of our students, believing that their college experiences were similar to our own. We did not see poverty as an issue demanding action. Yet we came to see that fulfilling the college’s mission—which focuses on changing lives, educating students, meeting industry needs, and serving the community—requires us to fully understand our students and the barriers they face.

Following the Data
In 2011, AC held a data summit for all faculty and staff. Our data did not paint a pretty picture of student success: our retention rates were lower than we had imagined, and our completion rates were barely in the double digits. As we sat together processing the data, we knew we needed to act. Our community needed us to improve.

We thought these distressing numbers meant that we needed to provide more academic support services and interventions. We made assumptions about student needs, fully expecting that limited tutoring hours, misaligned instructional practices, and scheduling challenges were the greatest barriers to student success. But when we began surveying and interviewing our students, we learned that their needs were profoundly different from what we had understood. While important, academic supports were not among the top ten barriers to completion that students identified. Instead, the greatest barriers to student success were all life related rather than classroom specific—and the most powerful and debilitating barrier was poverty, which affects 71 percent of AC students.

With these data in hand, we sought to understand the limitations that poverty creates. In fall 2011, we required all faculty to attend a professional development training hosted by Donna Beegle, an expert on addressing poverty barriers in education. Beegle prompted us to consider the systemic obstacles that institutions may create when working with individuals living in poverty. For example, educators may use inaccessible language to explain higher education to students, may fail to attend to students’ relational needs, and may treat student behaviors as though they stem from lack of motivation rather than from food and housing insecurity. To remove these obstacles, we must be willing to recognize and understand the confines that poverty places upon entire families, neighborhoods, and communities.

The ARC
AC soon realized that responding to student needs with good will and care would not be enough. We had to take action. We thus established the Advocacy and Resource Center (ARC) as a home for our social services case management program, which provides students with coaching, counseling, social service intervention, access to a food pantry and a clothing closet (both stocked entirely by donation), and student peer advocacy (see https://www.actx.edu/arc/). The ARC connects students with resources on campus and in the community, including transportation, childcare, housing, food, and utility assistance.

Staffed with only two full-time social workers and one part-time assistant, the ARC relies on an extensive network of community partnerships and relationships to maximize resources for the 10 percent of AC’s student body that the center serves. To help these students meet basic life needs, the ARC's staff works with over fifty local nonprofits that provide access to government-supported and privately funded services. Without these external partnerships, the
college would be unable to eradicate the poverty barriers our students experience.

Working in coordination with West Texas A&M University, the ARC has become a field placement site for social work students seeking their bachelor’s or master’s degrees. Each semester, social work interns assist ARC staff, providing intensive case management to AC students. This expansion of staff comes at no financial cost to AC, since the social work interns are required to complete field practicums for their degrees.

Students have testified to the important role that the ARC plays in their success. As one student stated, “The ARC helped me pay for my school tuition, textbooks, and childcare. The food pantry helped to feed my children. But more than anything, this department was the place I would go to for emotional support and cry about how overwhelming my life was. Every step of the way, the ARC reassured [me], told me that I was worth being successful, and that I could do it. They gave me encouragement and hope.”

**A Suite of Services**

The ARC’s work connects with several other efforts to support student success, including some that use technology. For example, AC’s early alert system allows faculty who have identified students needing academic and social services interventions to send electronic alerts to key student support staff. AC also uses predictive modeling software to create a risk indicator for each incoming student. By understanding an individual student’s life challenges prior to the start of classes, AC staff can connect the student to on-campus resources before barriers become insurmountable and the student is unable to complete a class or term.

Additionally, the No Excuses Poverty Initiative embraces a mentoring component, which pairs recent high school graduates experiencing poverty with AC faculty and staff. The mentoring program is designed to help students navigate college processes by immediately connecting them to support services, community resources, and academic interventions.

AC’s Career and Employment Services Center partners with our local workforce agency, Workforce Solutions, to place a full-time career specialist on campus. This individual helps students gain access to immediate and future job search and employment services, labor market information, career planning and training, and financial aid, including subsidized or free childcare. The partnership is free to AC, which provides only office space for the career specialist.

Finally, in fall 2016, AC opened two new centers to address two identified student success barriers. The AC Counseling Center offers individual and group counseling to students with the support of two licensed professional counselor interns, who are supervised by an AC psychology faculty member. The AC Legal Aid Clinic provides pro bono legal services to students by partnering with local bar-certified lawyers.

**Reflecting a Deep Commitment**

Six years after launching the No Excuses Poverty Initiative, AC’s values and actions reflect our deep commitment to ensuring that our students achieve their educational goals. Our data show that if students access college and community resources, they will be successful. Since the initiative’s launch, A-to-C pass rates in developmental education courses and gateway courses have increased 20 percent and 9 percent, respectively, and fall-to-fall retention rates have increased 13 percent. We have also seen a 7 percent increase in three-year graduation rates, a 2 percent increase in transfer rates, and a 6 percent increase in three-year completion (combined transfer and graduation) rates. While we never expected to become advocates for removing poverty barriers, this work is the most rewarding element of our professional lives. Because of AC’s No Excuses Poverty Initiative and its systemic approach, we will no longer allow poverty to be the biggest barrier our students face—no excuses.
Defining Institutional Success through Student Success

AVIS PROCTOR, North Campus President and Vice President of Academic Affairs at Broward College
MARIELENA DeSANCIS, A. Hugh Adams Central Campus President and Vice President of Student Services at Broward College

Located in Broward County, Florida, Broward College serves more than 63,000 students annually, offering certificate programs, two-year degrees preparing students for transfer or careers, and baccalaureate degrees. Honored as a Finalist with Distinction in the 2017 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence, the institution has developed a reputation for its achievements related to student learning, certificate and degree completion, graduate employment and earnings, and underrepresented minority and low-income student success. For the fourth year in a row, we have ranked first in the Florida state college system for graduate earnings and industry certifications, and we currently exceed state and national course-pass and degree-completion rates.

How did we accomplish these achievements? By implementing administrative goals that are tied to our students’ success. These goals are simple, yet effective, focusing on completion, enrollment, and retention. We cannot claim that our strategies are the only ones that work; there is no “one-size-fits-all” model that will yield the same results across all of higher education. Nevertheless, we share our efforts here in the hopes that others may find something worth adapting to their own institutional contexts.

Defining Success
Defining our success as an institution requires us to carefully assess our students’ short-term objectives relative to their long-term goals and to provide the right curricula, academic supports, and services to help them achieve these goals (see McPherson and Schapiro 2008). At Broward College, this means supporting a diverse student population striving for a wide range of outcomes. Like many institutions, Broward College serves a mix of traditional and nontraditional learners from various academic backgrounds. Our traditional learners typically matriculate directly from high school with the goal of completing an associate’s degree and transferring to a university to complete a bachelor’s degree. Our nontraditional students are mostly adult learners who come to Broward College seeking continuing education or workforce development with the objective of qualifying for immediate employment or promotion.

Broward College measures its achievements by establishing goals and expectations tied to our students’ aspirations. We compare our outcomes to state and national standards, as noted above; but we are never satisfied by merely meeting the acceptable mark. Instead, we aim to have a positive impact in our community and the wider society by producing graduates who exceed average expectations, both in their academic achievements and in what they are able to accomplish after leaving Broward College.

A Holistic Approach
At Broward College, we focus on the entire student experience, assisting each individual on the journey from prospective student to graduate. We have developed a system to help students navigate their courses and make smart academic choices. We engage them at every point along the academic journey, equipping them with the information they need to make career decisions early so they are driven to succeed in their chosen fields.

The college offers several outreach activities to new students, including our summer bridge program, our new student orientation program, and our JumpStart enrollment initiative, which provides assistance with registration and enrollment. Our first-year experience program offers organized events to engage new students as they transition to college. These offerings are part of a strategic approach to helping new students adjust to the postsecondary education experience by providing important information and managing expectations.

To support current students, we have established a series of program progress benchmarks monitored through academic advising. Each student is assigned an academic advisor at the outset of the college journey; in addition to meeting regularly with students, advisors rely on an Early Alert system that notifies them, based on faculty feedback, of students’ academic and nonacademic challenges. Our advising team ensures that every student is on the path to graduate or to transfer to an upper-division baccalaureate program or a four-year institution. To help students plan for transfer, we have developed transfer maps using data from our university partners. Faculty and program managers keep this information up-to-date so students do not experience delays or leave Broward College with excess credits. We also regularly review courses to ensure that our curricula meet industry standards for employability, and we partner with industry leaders to...
establish learning outcomes that are tied to workforce needs.

Financial and social supports are critical to ensuring that students meet their completion goals. During the 2015–16 academic year, Broward College had 51,208 students who were eligible for Pell Grant funding, and the majority of our students have unmet financial needs. Yet federal grants and loans are often not enough for students to complete their studies. Through the Broward College Foundation and the support of industry partners, we have been able to offer an increasing number of scholarships each year. We have kept tuition affordable by implementing Florida’s 10K Degree Challenge, which called on higher education institutions to create $10,000 bachelor’s degree programs. We have also expanded our online programming, offering blended courses to accommodate busy schedules and online open resources to keep textbook costs low.

We supplement our academic and financial support programs with extracurricular activities and resources. These include our Academic Success Centers, where students can meet with advising teams, gain access to specialized tutoring services, and participate in mentorship programs. We strongly believe that every higher education institution should strive to produce graduates who have had opportunities for personal development and civic engagement, and who have grown from students into responsible and active citizens. Therefore, in addition to traditional extracurricular activities such as student government, sports, cultural presentations, and study abroad, we offer a wealth of opportunities involving community outreach or other events organized by the college or its community partners. In sum, because the college experience is far more than what happens in the classroom, we take a holistic approach to supporting student success.

Career Preparation

Broward College wants to ensure that students succeed as students—but we also want to facilitate their success after graduation. Therefore, to help students understand career possibilities related to our programs, we have transformed our career centers, providing dedicated coaches who forecast future demand and potential earnings in each field. The centers also offer valuable opportunities for students to gain work experience through internships and on-the-job training, as well as interview-preparation and job-placement resources.

To further assist students in making informed decisions about their chosen fields of study, we developed a tool called Career Ladders. Created using labor market tools, feedback from local employers, and faculty expertise, each “ladder” gives a snapshot of the different career possibilities connected with a particular academic program. The ladders emphasize program paths and help students understand how they can reach their career goals.

A number of corporate alliances support our graduates. These relationships provide companies a pipeline of highly skilled workers while offering students a practical understanding of life beyond the classroom. We have arrangements with organizations in some of the fastest-growing industries in South Florida, including health care, automotive, marine, aircraft, and information technologies.

Employers continue to call for improved workplace-essential skills in areas such as problem solving, professionalism, communication, and teamwork. We are partnering with the general education and career technical education assessment teams to develop microcredentials or badges recognizing students’ mastery in these areas. We plan to partner with faculty to embed practice of these competencies throughout students’ academic experiences.

Finally, we continue to work with our employer community to subsidize students’ educations through paid internships, expanded apprenticeships, and employer-sponsored tuition. Together, we can help create a sustainable and economically stable community by connecting our students to their futures, no matter their ambitions or majors.

It is increasingly clear that the college must focus not only on current workforce needs, but also on the unknown needs of the future. Ensuring that students are able to problem solve, think critically, and communicate effectively are priorities alongside teaching the
content and concepts of traditional curricula.

**Supports for Faculty and Staff**

Building institutional capacity for student success requires dedicated leadership across the college, from all members of the executive team, faculty, and staff. At Broward College, every department embodies our mission, allowing us to unify our efforts to achieve our goals. Our administration has invested in professional development and training to ensure that faculty and staff can employ new innovations and teaching strategies.

The college boasts a department dedicated to continuous training in the service of promoting excellence in teaching. This unit offers year-round opportunities for faculty and staff to learn about new tools and technologies and best practices in student support, and it facilitates collaboration across programs and disciplines to create synergy inside and outside of the classroom. For example, in 2013 and 2014, the department organized two sessions for faculty on the development of “productive persistence,” the combination of skills and tenacity students need to succeed in their academic pursuits (Uri Treisman, quoted in Silva and White 2013, 5). After participating in training, faculty work with the department to assess student learning as faculty use their new teaching strategies. These opportunities prepare faculty not only to teach effectively, but also to communicate with students and the public about what the college offers. Staff also have access to continuous training opportunities, including professional development days where participants attend multiple seminars on best practices, the latest trends in technology, or topics outside of their fields.

To monitor the effectiveness of our efforts, we have put in place measures of accountability. Through weekly Goals, Objectives, and Accountability Look-over (GOAL) calls, representatives from departments across the college report on ongoing initiatives and share ideas. We have also taken a strategic approach to communication with faculty and staff, instituting monthly learning council meetings and publishing newsletters on different topics of interest. We solicit feedback from students through focus groups and surveys, and we collect and analyze anecdotal evidence. A number of cross-program and interdepartmental advisory boards, such as our innovation board and our curriculum committee, provide input on, assess, and evaluate programs and policies. These comprise representatives from departments across the college and, in some cases, industry partners.

**A Commitment to Continuous Development**

We believe that the initiatives described above have helped close gaps between different student populations while improving our graduation and transfer rate outcomes. Between 2005 and 2009, our overall transfer or completion rates for first-time undergraduates rose from 33 percent to 52 percent for full-time students and from 18 percent to 25 percent for part-time students. But even though we have made great strides in supporting student success, Broward College’s leadership is committed to improving existing measures with new, complementary ideas that fit the dynamics of our institution.

Not every measure we have tried has worked, and we are constantly reviewing our initiatives and implementing new practices to reach our goals. Our newest initiative involves guided pathways. In 2015, we were selected as one of thirty institutions to participate in the nationwide Pathways Project, led by the American Association of Community Colleges. (Editor’s note: See pages 10–12 for more information about this initiative.) The project has prompted us to create eight broad areas of study: Business; Education; Health Sciences; Public Safety; Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics; Arts, Humanities, Communication, and Design; Social Behavioral Sciences and Human Services; and Industry, Manufacturing, Construction and Transportation. We are restructuring our overall approach to provide clear direction to students as they pursue particular fields of study or career objectives in these areas. Our efforts, both trials and successes, have contributed to a set of best practices for career pathways (see Wyner et al. 2016).

Our holistic approach has fostered the grit and determination of our students, resulting in better academic outcomes. Yet we are still learning and improving. The cultural, economic, and social contexts of Broward County, and of South Florida as a whole, are changing and growing, demanding flexibility of us and our students. And our measures for improving student success will never be exhaustive. We know that we must be committed to sustaining and surpassing our existing efforts for the benefit of students, faculty, staff, and our community.

**REFERENCES**


Moving Veteran Students from the Margins to the Center

MARSHA GUENZLER-STEVENS, Director of the Adele H. Stamp Student Union–Center for Campus Life at the University of Maryland

It began with a single student, a young man who enrolled at the University of Maryland (UMD) after deployment in Iraq and a long convalescence at Walter Reed Medical Center. His transition to college was flawed, in part because we as an institution were failing our veterans. He was operating at the margins of the university until he found his way to the vice president for student affairs.

Early on, we were reminded of UMD Professor Emeritus Nancy Schlossberg’s transition theory (Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman 1995) and theories of marginality and mattering (Schlossberg 1989). We hung our ideas for the veterans program inside this frame.

Theory to Practice
Schlossberg posits a range of factors that can leave people feeling as if they don’t fit in, including some related to the experience of transitioning from one role or culture to another. Our veteran students talked about their transitions from the military (a culture defined by rules, the hardships of war, and the power of shared mission) to the university (a culture defined by youth and open possibility, where many felt isolated and disadvantaged by rusty academic skills). One young man described being unmoored by the clash of cultures when he returned from his deployment in Afghanistan and moved into a first-year residence hall. He was not alone. With experiences like his in mind, we planned for institutional transformation using Schlossberg’s theory of marginality and mattering (with key terms in bold below) as a guide.

First, we asked, how would we pay attention to veterans? We began by transforming the admissions process, connecting with veterans at the point of inquiry and considering their military service and leadership in admissions decisions. Current veteran students began calling admitted students and inviting them to orientation programs and, eventually, to adventure orientation weekends and family programs. We added additional staff and launched academic transition programs, including an online Math Boot Camp to help veterans prepare for math placement exams. We created a Got Your Six (got your back, in military speak) program to train faculty and staff to honor veterans’ unique leadership and life experiences. We held focus groups and listened to veterans’ feedback. The Counseling Center staff consulted the Center for Deployment Psychology in Bethesda, Maryland, to learn new treatment protocols for veterans and those with military-related post-traumatic stress disorder, and we recognized the unique experiences of women veterans, veterans of color, and LGBTQ veterans. As we embraced the veteran student population, administrators and faculty across campus began referring to students as “my veterans.”

We told stories to convey to veterans and members of the campus community that veterans were important and that they mattered. These stories led us to set a holistic mission for Veteran Student Life, focusing on the mind, body, and spirit. When we garnered our first federal grant supporting veterans, our congressional representative called to say that “we did it!” That congressman and Maryland’s secretary of veterans affairs regularly visited campus and used our stories to inform federal and state legislation. We connected with other higher
education institutions in the state, both private and public, enhancing a collective desire to serve veteran students. We also connected veteran students with one another, creating a TerpVets student organization. While many veteran students wanted to be free of their military past and enjoy “just being a student,” others longed for the camaraderie they had previously enjoyed. In the end, we determined that we needed a dedicated safe space from which to provide services and support. One trustee provided a sizeable gift to partially support the construction of such a space, which colleagues in Facilities Management—many of them Vietnam-era veterans—helped to design and construct. Alumni and parents of current students committed resources to equip and furnish the facility.

We developed rituals to honor our veterans and make them feel appreciated, including Veterans Day celebrations and Veterans Week programming that involved coordination with the Career Center, the LGBT Equity Center, the Counseling Center, and colleagues in the student union. Ten years ago, I asked the athletic department to provide two hundred football tickets, to put veterans on the field during a conference game, and to share veterans’ stories in video clips on the scoreboard. That practice has become an annual homecoming for our veteran students and alumni, and the football game and reception now boast an attendance of over seven hundred military-affiliated individuals. The event includes an hour-long ceremony recognizing scholarship recipients and their benefactors; with the support of alumni, families, and friends, the scholarship program has grown from one to forty-four scholarships.

We wanted to ensure that our veterans experience ego extension—the sense that others are proud of their successes and sympathize with their failures. As we added staff to Veteran Student Life, we sought allies in each academic college and in other areas of student services, including the Learning Assistance Service, Disability Support Services, and the Counseling Center. The Smith School of Business added full-time staff to support veterans, and the Education of Deans provided the resources for UMD to become a Yellow Ribbon Campus. Working with colleagues at the University of Michigan, we launched Peer Advisors for Veteran Education (PAVE), training veteran students to advise and guide their peers. We changed our institutional policies related to transfer credit, deployment, and military service for members of the National Guard and Reserves. We tailored resources to first-generation college students and, with a disproportionate number of women veterans compared to national averages, we crafted interventions specifically for women. One benefactor provided funding for a tutoring program focused on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. When we sat down with StoryCorps to record our veterans’ stories, we heard of setbacks and obstacles—but more often, we heard of resiliency, support, and community.

Schlossberg inspired us to craft community among veterans and connect that community with others on campus. We wanted veteran students to know that people are depending on them. The bent toward service that inspired many to enlist motivated us to partner with Team River Runner (a recreational program for wounded veterans) and UMD’s Department of Recreation and Wellness to create outreach and programming for veterans with disabilities. Veteran students became teaching assistants and student organization presidents; they served on university committees and as commencement speakers. They were touted in university videos and invited to testify on Capitol Hill. Associations and publications

Achieving this goal would require more than a single office or admissions strategy; it would mean transforming the whole university community.

A Full Circle

The theories of Nancy Schlossberg helped light our path—but the journey led us back to Nancy. When Nancy and the members of her family foundation, the Kamin Foundation, heard of our work, they asked how they could help. When we told them about the emergency expenses that often overwhelmed veterans and their families, from medical fees to housing costs, Nancy and her family started the UMD Veterans Crisis Fund. With each disbursement, this institution—with Nancy Schlossberg’s help—is reminding our veteran students that they matter.

References


Learning communities can have strong positive impacts on participants’ teaching effectiveness, views of teaching as an intellectual pursuit, and interdisciplinary connections (Cox 2001). For graduate students, learning communities can provide effective mechanisms for professional development as well as a respite from disciplinary isolation (Huntzinger, McPherron, and Rajagopal 2011).

Recognizing these potential benefits, Stanford University’s Office of the Vice Provost for Teaching and Learning (VPTL) launched a learning community in 2015–16 to increase graduate students’ knowledge of and confidence in engaging with issues related to identity in the classroom. Ten students participated in the first cohort of the Identity in the Classroom Learning Community, and the pilot program’s success led to a second cohort of twenty-six in 2016–17.

The learning community was intentionally interdisciplinary, involving graduate students (in their first through sixth years) and postdocs from the humanities, the social sciences, and the STEM fields. For participants—many of whom were already teaching assistants or interested in teaching—the learning community was a rare professional development opportunity to explore teaching in a research-focused institution.

Addressing Questions of Inclusion
The VPTL office created the learning community at a time when issues of diversity and inclusion were becoming more visible on campus. Many undergraduates were joining protests such as Black Lives Matter, demanding greater faculty diversity, and calling for ongoing instructor training on identity and cultural humility. Learning community participants wanted to explore whether and how to address these issues in the classroom; they also wanted to acquire specific strategies for navigating difficult conversations and creating inclusive spaces.

After discussing the dangers of using a checklist or a standardized manual for something as complex as inclusive teaching, participants in the first cohort decided to focus on considerations, or central ideas and values on which to base pedagogical practices. This approach did not prevent participants from identifying best practices, but allowed for flexibility in their application. The cohort discovered that while overall considerations for creating inclusive classrooms may remain constant, the particular features of such classrooms can vary depending on context. For example, an instructor considering the effects of student socioeconomic status might be mindful of the cost of course materials, but might address cost concerns differently depending on specific institutional policies and available resources.

Each cohort met eight times, with each meeting focused on a different topic, including stereotype threat, gender diversity, trigger warnings, and growth mindset. Each group made decisions about topics, readings, and activities together, selecting one or more shared readings and a designated group facilitator for each topic. As facilitators, group members employed various teaching strategies, such as think-pair-share and gallery walks, thus modeling for one another multiple student engagement techniques. Invited guests from campus, such as a lecturer who conducted gender diversity trainings, a staff member who taught a class on allyship, and a counseling center staff member with expertise in anxiety, brought additional perspectives.

Beneficial Outcomes
An important goal of the community was to develop participants’ understanding of the ways in which student and instructor identities might affect teaching and learning. A questionnaire administered before and after learning-community participation indicated significant gains in participants’...
knowledge, preparation, and comfort addressing issues related to student identity in their teaching, as well as improved confidence in creating an inclusive classroom atmosphere.

In addition to developing the skills of individual participants, the VPTL office sought to share the knowledge created by the cohorts with the broader teaching community. Thus, the first cohort produced a series of resources that are now part of the office’s online toolkit. Participants in the second cohort produced a wider variety of resources, including two-page handouts, slide presentations for use in teaching assistant trainings, and blog posts, all with the goal of linking relevant research to practice.

Overall, we found that ongoing interdisciplinary conversations like those that occurred through the Identity in the Classroom Learning Community are vital for creating a reflective, responsive, and learner-focused culture of teaching. They also have broad benefits to individual instructors and the teaching community at large. As one participant stated:

Participating in the learning community was one of the most meaningful and impactful professional development experiences of my graduate career. The learning community helped me to see inclusion as a series of ongoing and overlapping practices that I must intentionally employ and continually reevaluate. Now, as I design syllabi or plan assessments, I ask myself, “What type of learning space do I want to create? Who is included in this lesson? Who is excluded?” These central questions, which were a running theme throughout much of the learning community, have served as a pedagogical North Star of sorts, so that no matter the specific strategies, readings, or formats I employ in a given class session, I am able to continually return to the practices that support the learning of all students.

For complete syllabi and sample resources, contact Jennifer Randall Crosby at jrcrosby@stanford.edu. Jennifer Randall Crosby is former director of faculty and lecturer programs in the Office of the Vice Provost for Teaching and Learning at Stanford University. Derisa Grant participated in the university’s Identity in the Classroom Learning Community during the 2015–16 academic year.

REFERENCES


Mentee to Mentor

CHERISHE CUMMA, Student at New York City College of Technology/City University of New York

During my sophomore year of college, I developed a bond with my English literature professor, Anwar Uhuru. He became my informal mentor and a powerful influence in my life, encouraging me to pursue any opportunity that might help me succeed. One day, I received an email from Professor Uhuru telling me to apply to the Futures Initiative’s (FI’s) Peer Mentoring Program at the City University of New York (CUNY) Graduate Center, with a direct link to the program application for June 2016 included. I immediately applied. I knew that Professor Uhuru would not suggest an opportunity if it weren’t imperative that I pursue it.

A few weeks later, FI Leadership Fellow Director Lauren Melendez contacted me to congratulate me on my acceptance into the program. I was ecstatic. After receiving the first email from Lauren and reading her kind and encouraging words, I felt that I had made the correct choice by applying. But it wasn’t until I attended the first day of orientation in July that I realized how good my decision had been. At orientation, I met the twenty-nine other peer mentors from thirteen CUNY colleges. The FI team made us feel welcome and provided a sense of tranquility in an intimidating environment. They greeted us with swag bags that included T-shirts, pens, magnets, and other trinkets; they also provided bountiful mental and physical nourishment that kept us energized and engrossed.

Throughout the two-day orientation, the FI team presented the mentors with various challenges designed to build confidence and gave us opportunities to speak truthfully about our feelings and thoughts. Through activities such as think-pair-share, interactive games like “Who Wants to Be a Peer Mentor?,” and group work involving role playing, we learned about the qualities of an ideal peer mentor and practiced our mentoring skills. These activities were designed to prepare us to become official FI Peer Mentors at our respective colleges, where we would help provide resources, advice, and support to fellow students throughout the academic year and beyond.

After orientation, we gathered for monthly meet-ups to discuss our progress as peer mentors and bond with mentors from other CUNY campuses. During these meet-ups, we learned about other mentors’ successes and tribulations. As time progressed, I began to use the resources provided at the meet-ups to assist students on my campus. In doing so, I noticed improvements in my leadership skills as well as an urge to spread resources to all students via the FI blog, which I began contributing to regularly.

In addition to offering a strong foundation for mentoring, the program has provided academic opportunities that have propelled me to new levels. Through it, I gained training and practice in copyediting and became an undergraduate editor of Structuring Equality: A Handbook for Student-Centered Learning (Ashton 2017). I also gained acceptance to the CUNY Pipeline Program, which provides educational and financial support to CUNY undergraduates from underrepresented groups who are interested in earning a PhD at the CUNY Graduate Center or another university. These opportunities are stepping stones to the career I hope to have in journalism. The Peer Mentoring Program provided me with a strong foundation not only to embark on this journey but also to work toward achieving my future career goals.

Through the FI Peer Mentoring Program, I have made academic gains—and I have gained another family. The FI team and my fellow peer mentors have offered kindness and support throughout my various endeavors. Any time I have required assistance with a difficult situation, they have provided insight. Like a family, the group pushes its members to see their true potential. Becoming a member of the FI Peer Mentoring Program is one of the best decisions I have made. In just one year, I have grown, overcome obstacles, and become a better person.

REFERENCE

Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement Calendar

The following calendar features events on civic learning sponsored by members of the Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement (CLDE) Action Network and others focused on education for democracy. For more information, please visit AAC&U’s CLDE Calendar online at http://www.aacu.org/clde/calendar/.

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<tr>
<th>MONTH</th>
<th>DATES</th>
<th>CLDE EVENT</th>
<th>LOCATION</th>
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<tr>
<td>NOVEMBER</td>
<td>2-4</td>
<td>AAC&amp;U Network for Academic Renewal: Transforming STEM Higher Education</td>
<td>San Francisco, California</td>
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<td>MARCH</td>
<td>22-24</td>
<td>AAC&amp;U Network for Academic Renewal Conference: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusive Democracy: The Inconvenient Truths</td>
<td>San Diego, California</td>
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<td>25-28</td>
<td>Campus Compact: True Stories of Engagement: Higher Education for Democracy</td>
<td>Indianapolis, Indiana</td>
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<td>MAY</td>
<td>15-17</td>
<td>Campus Compact’s 5th Global Service-Learning Summit: Dignity and Justice in Global Service Learning</td>
<td>South Bend, Indiana</td>
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<td>18-19</td>
<td>Red Rocks Community College National Community College Conference on Service Learning</td>
<td>Lakewood, Colorado</td>
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AAC&U and the Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement (CLDE) Action Network

As part of its commitment to preparing all students for civic, ethical, and social responsibility in US and global contexts, AAC&U has formed the Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement (CLDE) Action Network. The CLDE Action Network builds on the momentum generated by the 2012 White House release of the report A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy’s Future. Coordinated by Caryn McTighe Musil, AAC&U senior scholar and director of civic learning and democracy initiatives, the network includes twelve leading civic learning organizations that are committed to making civic inquiry and engagement expected rather than elective for all college students. Diversity & Democracy regularly features research and exemplary practices developed and advanced by these partner organizations and their members:

American Association of State Colleges and Universities
Anchor Institutions Task Force
Association of American Colleges and Universities
The Bonner Foundation
Bringing Theory to Practice
Campus Compact
Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement
The Democracy Commitment
Imagining America
Interfaith Youth Core
Kettering Foundation
NASPA–Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education
## Upcoming AAC&U Meetings

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<tr>
<th>MEETING</th>
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<tr>
<td>AAC&amp;U Annual Meeting</td>
<td>Washington, DC</td>
<td>JANUARY 24–27, 2018</td>
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<td>Can Higher Education Recapture the</td>
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<td>Elusive American Dream?</td>
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<td>Network for Academic Renewal</td>
<td>Philadelphia, Pennsylvania</td>
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<td>Conference</td>
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<td>General Education and Assessment:</td>
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<td>Foundations for Democracy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Network for Academic Renewal</td>
<td>San Diego, California</td>
<td>MARCH 22–24, 2018</td>
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<td>Conference</td>
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<td>Diversity, Equity, and Inclusive</td>
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<td>Democracy: The Inconvenient Truths</td>
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### About Diversity & Democracy

Diversity & Democracy supports higher education faculty and leaders as they design and implement programs that advance civic learning and democratic engagement, global learning, and engagement with diversity to prepare students for socially responsible action in today’s interdependent but unequal world. According to AAC&U’s Statement on Liberal Learning, “By its nature ... liberal learning is global and pluralistic. It embraces the diversity of ideas and experiences that characterize the social, natural, and intellectual world. To acknowledge such diversity in all its forms is both an intellectual commitment and a social responsibility, for nothing less will equip us to understand our world and to pursue fruitful lives.” Diversity & Democracy features evidence, research, and exemplary practices to assist practitioners in creating learning opportunities that realize this vision. To access Diversity & Democracy online, visit [www.aacu.org/diversitydemocracy/](http://www.aacu.org/diversitydemocracy/).

### About AAC&U

AAC&U is the leading national association concerned with the quality, vitality, and public standing of undergraduate liberal education. Its members are committed to extending the advantages of a liberal education to all students, regardless of academic specialization or intended career. Founded in 1915, AAC&U now comprises nearly 1,400 member institutions—including accredited public and private colleges, community colleges, research universities, and comprehensive universities of every type and size. AAC&U functions as a catalyst and facilitator, forging links among presidents, administrators, and faculty members who are engaged in institutional and curricular planning. Information about AAC&U membership, programs, and publications can be found at [www.aacu.org](http://www.aacu.org).

### AAC&U Membership 2017

- MASTERS: 30%
- BACCALAUREATE: 24%
- ASSOCIATES: 12%
- RES & DOC: 16%
- OTHER*: 18%

*Specialized schools, state systems and agencies, and international affiliates