Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence
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Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence: Intentionality and Accountability

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Shirley Chisholm, the first black woman elected to US Congress, once said, “You don’t make progress by standing on the sidelines, whimpering and complaining. You make progress by implementing ideas.” In 2015, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) released a series of publications focused on the equity imperative in higher education. One of these publications, Step Up and Lead for Equity: What Higher Education Can Do to Reverse Our Deepening Divides, highlighted the continuing (and in some cases expanding) inequities in educational outcomes and served as a call to action.

To help build capacity at higher education institutions to address inequities in student outcomes, AAC&U launched a multi-year institutional change effort, Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence: Campus-Based Strategies for Student Success, funded by Strada Education Network and Great Lakes Higher Education Corporation & Affiliates. The thirteen campus teams represent various institutional types, and the project’s activities focus on addressing equity gaps through the following objectives:

- Increase access to and participation in high-impact practices (HIPs).
- Increase completion, retention, and graduation rates for low-income students, first-generation students, adult learners, and minority students.
- Increase achievement of learning outcomes for underserved students using direct assessment measures, including AAC&U’s VALUE rubrics.
- Increase student awareness and understanding of the value of guided learning pathways that incorporate HIPs for workforce preparation and engaged citizenship.

STRADA EDUCATION NETWORK

Strada Education Network™, formerly USA Funds®, is a new kind of nonprofit organization that takes a fresh approach to addressing—and solving—critical higher education and workforce challenges. We advance our guiding principle, Completion With a Purpose®, through a unique combination of strategic philanthropy, research and insights, and innovative solutions to improve the college-to-career connection. We work to bridge the huge disconnect that now exists between the skills and competencies that graduates take with them into the job market and the needs of employers, a skills gap that threatens the future of our nation’s economic growth and prosperity. Strada Education Network works to ensure all students have the tools and resources they need to successfully compete in today’s global workforce. Strada Education Network is building on the 56-year legacy of USA Funds—which helped more than 22 million students and parents pay for college.

GREAT LAKES:

Dedicated to making college education a reality since 1967.

Knowing that education has the power to change lives for the better, Great Lakes Higher Education Corporation & Affiliates was established as a nonprofit group focused on a single objective: helping students nationwide prepare for and succeed in post-secondary education and student loan repayment. As a leading student loan guarantor and servicer, Great Lakes has been selected by the U.S. Department of Education to provide assistance and repayment planning to more than 8 million borrowers—as well as assistance to colleges and lenders nationwide. The group’s earnings support one of the largest and most respected education philanthropy programs in the country. Since 2006, Great Lakes has committed nearly $225 million in grant funding to promote higher education access and completion for students of color, low-income students, and first-generation students. For additional information, visit home.mygreatlakes.org.
AAC&U, in partnership with the Center for Urban Education (CUE) at the University of Southern California, is helping universities identify baseline evidence about existing campus efforts to track, improve, and close equity gaps in the achievement of key learning and achievement outcomes for all students.

“While postsecondary institutions are becoming more diverse, the degree attainment gap for low-income individuals is widening. In 2013, individuals from high-income families were eight times more likely to earn a bachelor’s degree by age twenty-four than were those from low-income families. In 1970, the high-income individuals were more than six times more likely to earn a bachelor’s degree. In the intervening 43 years, bachelor degree attainment among those from wealthy families nearly doubled while it barely moved for those in the poorest families.”


“The vast majority of undergraduates felt safe and comfortable being themselves at their institution, and at least three-quarters felt valued and part of a campus community. However, certain populations—such as those with a gender identity other than man or woman as well as African American, Alaska Native or American Indian, and multiracial students—expressed less agreement with statements about safety and belonging.”

Alexander C. McCormick, Indiana University—Bloomington

Source: National Survey of Student Engagement, Engagement Insights: Survey Findings on the Quality of Undergraduate Education (2016)

The educators participating in this initiative are leading change on their campuses and building institutional capacity to ask and to address the difficult questions about equity and student success. In October 2015, campus teams participated in an Equity Academy, facilitated by AAC&U and CUE, in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Prior to the equity academy, the teams (1) collected data, based on the previously stated objectives, to examine equity gaps; (2) utilized AAC&U’s Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence: A Campus Guide for Self-Study and Planning; and (3) read a number of equity-focused publications, including America’s Unmet Promise: The Imperative for Equity in Higher Education (written by CUE and published by AAC&U).

At the Equity Academy, campus teams examined institutional data and addressed the following questions:

- How can we build capacity for educators to ask and respond to questions about equity that can lead to campus change?
- How can we move the dialogue about student learning and success from deficit-minded approaches to asset-based approaches?
- How do we motivate faculty and staff to address equity as intrinsic to higher education’s mission?
- What does it mean to be an equity-minded practitioner? What does it mean to have an equity-minded pedagogy?

Addressing equity and inclusive excellence requires clarity in language and goals, intentionality, and accountability. Those who engage in this endeavor must ask themselves: How are equity and excellence defined at our institution? How does our campus define and model inclusion? Who is currently excluded from achieving excellence?

Without a clear understanding of how the institution and educators define and value equity and inclusive excellence as priorities for student learning and success, a campus risks the possibility that the work will be done in isolation of strategic goals and visioning. Without clear equity goals to promote accountability to monitor progress, the aspiration of addressing equity and making excellence inclusive may not translate into sustainable improvements in campus practice.

Through the vision and practice of inclusive excellence, AAC&U calls for higher education to address diversity, inclusion, and equity as critical to the wellbeing of democratic culture. Making excellence inclusive is thus an active process through which colleges and universities achieve excellence in learning, teaching, student development, institutional functioning, and engagement in local and global communities. The action of making excellence inclusive requires that we uncover inequities in student success, identify effective educational practices, and embed such practices systematically for sustained institutional change.

The campus teams that are part of this institutional change effort are prioritizing definable and measurable equity goals as a key part of accountability and shared visioning. After 2015’s Equity Academy, each campus team developed campus action plans that include quantifiable equity goals and interventions to alleviate the gaps in student achievement and learning outcomes.

In this special issue of Peer Review, the campus teams share their evolving strategies for examining equity and how they are accelerating broad systemic-change efforts. We invite readers of this publication to join in the continuing conversation on what it will take to advance equity and make excellence inclusive.
Taking Equity-Minded Action to Close Equity Gaps

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Inequality is one of the most enduring features of our nation’s higher education system. Racial/ethnic and class-based disparities in college access, enrollment, and completion persist despite years of programmatic and policy efforts to counteract them. Though it is true that racially minoritized and low-income students are more likely to enroll in some form of postsecondary education than in years past, their likelihood of completing a bachelor’s degree once enrolled in college falls far below that of their white and economically privileged counterparts (Carnevale and Strohl 2013; Perna and Finney 2014). The differences in college enrollment and college completion among historically marginalized and white and affluent populations have widened (Witham et al. 2015), suggesting that postsecondary education remains “separate and unequal” (Carnevale and Strohl 2013). Clearly, American higher education has an equity problem.

AN INCREASED FOCUS ON EQUITY

The silver lining to this situation is that policymakers and institutional leaders increasingly recognize the urgent need to focus their efforts and resources on creating equity in higher education. Several states have acknowledged the need to make their higher education systems more equitable for African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, low-income students, and other historically marginalized populations. For example, California has spent nearly $400 million to fund student equity efforts at the state’s community colleges over the past three years. To receive the funding, each of California’s 113 community colleges was required to develop a detailed student equity plan in which they presented institutional data for key outcomes, identified which demographic groups were experiencing inequities, set goals for closing those equity gaps, and proposed specific activities to reach those goals.

Higher education organizations and private foundations also play an important role in creating equitable outcomes by undertaking initiatives aimed at informing equity-focused policy and practice. In 2015, for example, the Lumina Foundation and the Center for Urban Education (CUE) began a partnership to increase the number of states that incorporate closing equity gaps into their policy goals. AAC&U’s Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence project, funded by Strada and Great Lakes, provides a model of how higher education associations and private foundations might partner to guide the design and implementation of institutional equity efforts. As discussed in this issue of Peer Review, thirteen institutions with diverse missions and student bodies received funding to develop campus action plans to close equity gaps experienced by racial/ethnic minorities, low-income students, first-generation students, and adult learners.

These kinds of investments in equity efforts, whether by state governments or philanthropic organizations, reflect an increased focus on equity as a legitimate priority. Further, the growing presence of equity in policy discussions indicates that more leaders realize that national and state-level priorities to increase degree attainment and improve student success require the elimination of equity gaps experienced by African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, Pacific Islanders, and Southeast Asian students. Similarly, unless and until low-income and first-generation students experience equitable outcomes...
in degree attainment, the nation’s ambitious college completion goals cannot be realized.

For nearly twenty years, CUE has conducted socially conscious research and developed tools that help institutions of higher education produce equity in student outcomes. Estela Bensimon, CUE’s founder and director, developed the Equity Scorecard™ process to promote practitioner learning that brings about the major changes in institutional practices, routines, and culture needed to obtain equitable outcomes for historically marginalized and minoritized populations (Bensimon and Malcom 2012). CUE’s approach frames inequity as a problem of practice rather than a problem with students, emphasizing the responsibility of higher education institutions, faculty, staff, and leaders to eliminate disparities in educational outcomes and create equity for all students.

Through the study of their own institutions, practitioners can identify ways that existing policies and practices inadvertently create or further inequity. Faculty, staff, and institutional leaders engage in the inquiry process with a goal of “remediating” their own practices and mindsets to close equity gaps (Bensimon and Malcom 2012; Dowd and Bensimon 2015). Using CUE’s data and inquiry tools, our institutional partners have developed and implemented equity-minded practices and policies, and have become more effective at narrowing racialized equity gaps.

Though the specific changes implemented at CUE’s partner institutions have varied widely depending on each institution’s inequitable outcomes, local context, and priorities, their actions were guided by the principles of equity-mindedness. Described below, these five principles outline a different way of thinking about inequities and educational practice that has been demonstrated to be effective at closing racialized equity gaps.

THE PRINCIPLES OF EQUITY-MINDEDNESS

When practitioners confront any kind of challenge on their campuses, they interpret that challenge using a schema, or cognitive framework, to make sense of the problem. That schema informs an individual’s understanding of the problem—its causes and effects—and guides their thinking about potential solutions and actions to be taken related to the problem (Gioia and Poole 1984). When it comes to the problem of educational inequities experienced by African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, and other minoritized populations, the schema often used to understand the problem treats inequities as an unfortunate, but unavoidable, phenomenon, whose fault lies with students, their families, and communities (Bensimon and Malcom 2012). As evidenced by the persistent nature of racial/ethnic educational inequities, this deficit-minded approach has served neither us nor our students well.

Equity-mindedness is a schema that provides an alternative framework for understanding the causes of equity gaps in outcomes and the action needed to close them. Equity-mindedness encompasses being (1) race conscious, (2) institutionally focused, (3) evidence based, (4) systemically aware, and (5) action oriented (Bensimon and Malcom 2012; Center for Urban Education, n.d.; Dowd and Bensimon 2015). Based on our research and work with over one hundred institutional partners, we suggest that reducing inequities experienced by African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans requires that practitioners become more equity-minded and embed equity-mindedness in practices and policies across the institution. Each of the principles of equity-mindedness is discussed in more detail below.


Race-consciousness in an affirmative sense involves noticing racial inequities in educational outcomes and experiences, naming those specific racial/ethnic groups that are experiencing equity gaps, and shying away from euphemisms often used to avoid open and honest discussions of the roles that race and racism play in the perpetuation of educational inequity. Equity-mindedness necessitates talking about race in meaningful ways. Certainly, talking about race may be uncomfortable for some and can be fraught with potential rhetorical landmines. Yet, these conversations are critically important. The problem of race-based inequities in educational outcomes cannot be solved if we do not even have the will to name the problem. Using euphemisms like “diverse students” or “underrepresented students” prevents practitioners from understanding that current practices and policies may have a disproportionately negative impact on African American, Latino/a, and Native American students.

Similarly, being equity-minded requires that higher education practitioners and leaders resist the temptation to use socioeconomic status as a proxy for race. Likely due to the political contention around issues of race, many faculty, staff, administrators, and policy makers center equity conversations on the inequities experienced by low-income students, remaining silent on the unique patterns of disadvantage experienced by African Americans, Latinas/os, and Native Americans. Though both race- and class-based inequities in outcomes exist, and some students experience them in combination, they are not the same thing. Numerous studies have demonstrated that when controlling for class, race-based disparities in educational and economic outcomes remain (e.g., Carnevale and Strohl 2013). In other words, low-income white students fare better in college entry, persistence, degree completion, and post-college employment and earnings than their low-income African American, Latina/o, and Native American peers. The same is true of middle-income and upper-income students. This is not to say that higher education institutions and policymakers should not prioritize reducing
class-based inequities. Instead, equity-mindedness requires acknowledging that race and class are different, and eliminating race-based inequities will require a different approach.


To possess systemic awareness is to understand the ways in which current inequities are related to structural inequalities and the historic and ongoing denial of educational and economic opportunity experienced by African Americans, Latinas/os, Native Americans, and other racially minoritized populations. Our nation’s schools are more racially segregated than before the Brown v. Board decision, with African American and Latino/a children more likely than white and Asian children to attend under-resourced, high-poverty schools (UCLA Civil Rights project). These intensely segregated, under-resourced schools offer students a truncated curriculum, leading to large racial disparities in access to college preparatory and AP coursework (The College Board 2014). Though class plays a part in this process, it is uniquely racialized. Patterns of school segregation are closely related to residential segregation resulting from the legacy of racism and a long history of housing policies that discriminate on the basis of race. Consider that, for example, Black families with household incomes of $100,000 or more “are more likely to live in poorer neighborhoods than even white households making less than $25,000” (Eligon and Gebeloff 2016). Discrimination in employment, lending, voting, and a host of other areas contribute to the racial inequities observed today. The underlying point is that systemic racial/ethnic inequities did not just happen—they were created over time through policy and entrenched racism. Acknowledging this enables equity-minded practitioners to situate present inequities within the sociohistorical context of the United States, and to understand that they are a dysfunction of structures, policies, and practices.

3. Equity-Minded Practitioners View Inequities as Problems of Practice and Feel a Personal and Institutional Responsibility to Address Them.

Equity-mindedness emphasizes institutional responsibility to create equity and directs practitioners to focus on what they can do to close equity gaps. Rather than attribute inequities in outcomes to student deficits, being equity-minded involves interpreting inequitable outcomes as a signal that practices are not working as intended. Instead of focusing on “fixing” students, equity-minded practitioners continually reassess their practices and consider how those practices can be remediated in order to achieve institutional equity goals (Bensimon and Malcom 2012). From this perspective, the elimination of inequities comes about through changes in institutional practices, policies, culture, and routines.

Since the founding of the center, CUE has studied practitioners’ conversations about race and equity to understand the explanations that are typically relied upon to explain inequities in student outcomes. We often hear faculty, staff, and administrators argue that inequitable outcomes emerge from deficits in student motivation, discipline, preparation, or study skills. By emphasizing practitioner and institutional responsibility for creating equity for students, CUE encourages practitioners to shift the way that they make sense of and talk about inequitable outcomes. For example, a faculty member who may have previously attributed race-based gaps in developmental math course completion to Black or Latino/a students’ unwillingness to use the tutoring center might now ask herself how welcoming the tutoring center is to minoritized students, whether the hours are conducive to these students’ needs, or question how the racial/ethnic makeup of the tutors compares to that of the student body.

Equity-mindedness does not suggest that student behaviors, motivation, and attitudes are unrelated to their success. However, focusing on students alone, to the exclusion of understanding the ways in which institutions and practitioners can change their practices, policies, structures, and culture to more effectively promote student learning and outcomes, is equally problematic.

4. Equity-Minded Practitioners Rely on Evidence to Guide their Practice.

Equity-minded faculty, staff, and administrators rely on evidence to understand the practice- and policy-related factors that contribute to inequities experienced by their students. Data can help practitioners to truly understand the nature of problematic inequities in outcomes. Similarly, quantitative and qualitative data ought to guide the development and implementation of solutions to close those equity gaps. When practitioners observe equity gaps through the examination of disaggregated institutional data, the first inclination is often to identify “best practices” being enacted by other institutions and to implement them on their campus. Through our work, we have found that campuses who concentrate on identifying “off the shelf solutions” for inequitable outcomes face challenges in closing equity gaps. This best practices approach often presumes the causes of inequities and prescribes solutions without a true understanding of the reasons that equity gaps exist.

Equity-minded practitioners use inquiry to gather evidence about the problem and to carefully examine existing practices to determine how they may be related to inequities. Additionally, equity-minded practitioners question their assumptions about students, recognize how stereotypes and implicit biases may harm racially minoritized students, and use disag-
ggregated quantitative data and qualitative inquiry findings to guide their practice. By developing the capacity of faculty, staff, and administrators to conduct inquiry, gather data, and make appropriate improvements based on that data, institutions invest in “best practitioners.”

5. Equity-Minded Practitioners Take Action to Eliminate Educational Inequities.

The final principle of equity-mindedness relates to being action-oriented. Equity-minded practitioners feel empowered to take action toward closing equity gaps in educational outcomes. In addition to (1) raising awareness of racial inequities in outcomes, (2) building understanding of the connection between inequitable outcomes and systemic inequalities, and (3) cultivating evidence-based knowledge about the nature of inequities on their campuses, the inquiry process “creates a sense of purposeful agency” among practitioners, motivating them to act (Felix et al. 2015).

Equity-minded practitioners recognize the need to engage their colleagues in institutional equity efforts and devise ways to use their power in intentional ways to promote this engagement (Bishop 2014). Many faculty, administrators, and staff at CUE’s institutional partners have advanced equity on their campuses by leveraging their vested authority. For example, a department chair used his authority over the faculty review process to engage his colleagues in the regular review of course success data disaggregated by race/ethnicity. At another institution with whom CUE has partnered, the provost used her authority over the faculty hiring process to embed equity-mindedness into academic searches for the entire institution.

CONCLUSION

As detailed in this issue of Peer Review, the institutions involved in the Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence project faced varying equity challenges. The campus action plans reflect a variety of approaches to addressing inequitable outcomes, including providing faculty and staff professional development opportunities, building institutional capacity for data collection and analysis, implementing high-impact practices, and revamping assessment practices. Though the participating institutions vary in their missions, student populations, and strategies for closing equity gaps, keeping the principles of equity-mindedness at the core of campus equity efforts will bolster their chances of success.

REFERENCES


Committing to Equity: A Catalyst for Institutional Transformation

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James Felton, Chief Diversity Officer, formerly of Anne Arundel Community College
Rick Fine, Dean of Planning, Research & Institutional Assessment, Anne Arundel Community College
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At Anne Arundel Community College (AACC), the ability to integrate the development of its Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence campus action plan with the college’s new strategic plan provided several opportunities that could not have been predicted. Because these two endeavors occurred simultaneously, a college-wide commitment to equity permeated every strategic plan goal and objective.

AACC’s campus action plan (1) led to an examination of the institutional policies, procedures, and resources necessary to provide all students with the opportunity to complete their educational goals; (2) provided a formalized mechanism to reinforce to the campus community the necessity of making data-driven decisions to improve student outcomes; and (3) announced that student outcomes would be disaggregated by race and ethnicity, making the focus on achievement gaps inescapable.

GIVING THE CAMPUS A BROADER FOCUS

The campus action plan was developed during a period of significant transition at AACC. In January 2016, AACC President Dawn Lindsay announced that over the next several years, the school’s focus would be on designing and implementing structured academic and career pathways for all students. This strategy was necessary to transform the campus culture and operations from its traditional focus on access to a broader focus on both access and completion.

At the same time, the AAC&U project team was working on its campus action plan. Their action plan aligned very well with the AACC strategic plan as it provided tools, resources, and coaching that focused the campus on how to be equity-minded as the difficult work of institutional transformation began in earnest. The project team’s action plan aligned very well with the AACC strategic plan as it provided tools, resources, and coaching that focused the campus on how to be equity-minded as the difficult work of institutional transformation began in earnest. The two plans matched so well that the president’s cabinet discussed an integration schedule that aligned the AAC&U action plan’s timeline with the college’s strategic planning process. This integration meant that the campus action plan emerged as an important framework that helped shape the college’s new strategic plan, Engagement Matters: Pathways to Completion (FY 2017–2020).
Other significant accomplishments to emerge from the implementation of the campus action plan were the creation of an Equity Resource Team (ERT) and the establishment of equity-focused data dashboards. The ERT, which includes faculty and instructional staff that began work in summer 2016, provides a unique opportunity to focus on equity by narrowing achievement gaps in course success, retention, and completion. In fall 2016, the pilot group focused on creating best practices for culturally responsive teaching in courses with high enrollments (Biology 101, Business & Its Environment III, Chemistry III, Introduction to Psychology III, and Developmental Mathematics). Preliminary meetings began with the sharing of data that revealed equity gaps in particular disciplines. Throughout that semester, faculty utilized culturally responsive teaching practices and cross-cultural communication pedagogies, learned about high-impact practices, and worked with various experts and educational partners within the college and local community to increase student completion and success. The ERT discipline sub-teams were also given time to consider how to integrate best practices into their courses to increase retention and completion. These best practices were piloted by ERT faculty in spring 2017 classes. In fall 2017, the strategies will begin to be scaled into all sections of the above disciplines.

The work of the ERT resulted in four broad strategies that all disciplines can apply to enhance college-wide professional development opportunities to increase student retention:

1. Provide the opportunity for faculty to participate in a yearlong professional development program for a cohort of faculty that incorporates weekly online activities emphasizing equity, student success, and academic excellence.

2. Focus on teaching excellence by implementing required group assignments in classrooms (both face-to-face and online) that emphasize student engagement.

3. Increase access to textbooks via strategies such as using open educational resources or placing copies on reserve in the library or academic departments.

4. Ensure that each course's content represents a diverse set of identities. In coming years, additional disciplines will implement similar practices, with the intent that culturally responsive teaching strategies are firmly embedded college-wide. The ERT initiative includes the following unique goals:

   ▪ Establish a sample of faculty and student participants to address the goals of the AAC&U action plan and the AACC strategic plan.
   ▪ Support faculty and instructional staff from similar courses or academic programs by providing them access to equity and achievement gap data pertinent to their teaching responsibilities.
   ▪ Employ a participatory action-research methodology to help campus constituents understand why equity and achievement gaps exist along with trying to affect change through collaboration and reflection.
   ▪ Create a set of evidence-based strategies that are assessable and measurable.
   ▪ Provide faculty with a stipend for their work.
   ▪ Establish faculty expertise as paramount in addressing equity gaps at the course level.
   ▪ Afford opportunities for ongoing professional development and mentoring of colleagues.

**INCORPORATING AN EQUITY LENS**

Development of the campus action plan focused the college on the necessity of improving course and program assessment by incorporating an equity lens. Thus, the strategic plan has fourteen institutional key performance indicators (KPIs), which will have a standardized set of variables to be disaggregated, including by race/ethnicity, so that equity disparities are routinely monitored. Because it is critical to have interim assessment points that note ongoing progress toward each KPI, the college has determined predictive measures that will provide quarterly status updates for the KPIs and allow for timely feedback so that adjustments to initiatives can be made to improve outcomes.

In fall 2016, a revised and enhanced comprehensive program review process was introduced to assess course, program, and institutional outcomes. The new comprehensive program review was intentionally aligned with institutional KPIs and course success initiatives to ensure continuous improvement and a focus on equity. Specifically, by including artifacts from courses, this process allows for the identification of where improvements need to be made in learning for all students, and this data will be matched with course pass rates that have been disaggregated by race. The correlation of these data will be used to examine the intersection of learning and completion, while also ensuring that equity is achieved for both. Another product of the campus action plan—the establishment of easily accessible, equity-focused data dashboards—has been critical to changing AACC’s culture. The intent is that the focus on achievement gaps is inescapable for the college community, and the result will be a transformed institution that is characterized by an inclusive and student-ready culture. ■
A Data-Informed Approach to Advancing Equity

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California State University–Northridge (CSUN) is located in the heart of Los Angeles’s San Fernando Valley, and its student population reflects the diversity of the region it serves. In only ten years, our population of Latina/o undergraduates increased from 30 percent in fall 2006 to 49 percent in fall 2016. During the same period, students receiving Federal Pell Grants became the majority of our undergraduates—growing from 36 percent of the population to more than half (53 percent).

CSUN prides itself on its long tradition of access and is committed to improving equity in success rates among our students. The six-year graduation rate for the cohort of first-time freshmen entering in 2009 was 50 percent, with variation among racial, ethnic, and income groups. We are dedicated to raising the overall graduation rate, as well as closing the gaps in graduation rates between students from better-served and underserved backgrounds.

Our campus joined the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U)’s Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence: Campus-Based Strategies for Student Success project with a number of objectives that aligned with the university mission, the Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence project goals, and the California State University System’s graduation initiative.

We are dedicated to raising the overall graduation rate, as well as closing the gaps in graduation rates between students from better-served and underserved backgrounds.

DEVELOPING OUR CAMPUS ACTION PLAN

Our campus action plan was developed by a select committee that included eight members from administrative and faculty roles within academic affairs and student affairs.

Armed with a draft statement developed at the October 2015 AAC&U Equity Academy, project members met monthly over the next six months to discuss what kinds of changes the campus most needed and which of those would have the greatest impact on equity and inclusiveness. The committee worked to identify relevant data, integrate its efforts with the work of the university’s Student Retention and Graduation Committee, broaden the scope of campus involvement, and share information with the campus community once the plan was finalized in May 2016.

IMPLEMENTING OUR CAMPUS ACTION PLAN

Our campus action plan is characterized by a data-informed...
and collaborative approach. We began implementing the objectives and targeted intervention strategies, in part with the help of a newly established institutional structure—the Office of Student Success Innovations (OSSI). A product of the collaboration between the academic affairs and student affairs offices, OSSI opened its doors on June 1, 2016. Its mission is to close the opportunity gap among our students by engaging and empowering faculty, staff, and students to work collaboratively to develop innovations that expand educational equity and student success. The OSSI director, a twelve-month faculty member, joined the Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence project team in fall 2016.

Beginning in summer 2016, we set out to share information with and engage the campus community in several ways, including (1) the provost’s annual Planning and Professional Development Series, (2) a new monthly town hall series on the current higher education environment, and (3) a new monthly email campaign to the campus from the Office of Institutional Research (IR). At the same time, we took steps to meet the four Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence project goals. For example, to help our students learn about their possible pathways to degree, our Office of Academic First-Year Experiences is working with a group of stakeholders from across campus to launch a campaign to help students become aware of an online tool that will help them plan their degree route, as well as the resources available through academic affairs and student affairs.

To improve equity in rates of course completion, we used institutional data to identify a high priority course list for each college, consisting of the lower-division courses offered by each college that have large enrollments, high rates of non-passing grades, and large gaps in course GPAs between traditionally underserved and better-served students. Programming for faculty was developed in collaboration with OSSI, the Offices of Institutional Research and Faculty Development, the chief diversity officer, and the Faculty Technology Center. Workshop series, retreats, institutes, and faculty learning communities began in fall 2016, and many will run through spring 2018.

These programs involve bringing faculty together in interdisciplinary communities and providing them with course- and section-level data on gaps in rates of non-passing grades between students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Next, faculty are invited to consider principles of equity-mindedness. Then faculty are provided with evidence-based strategies to close gaps and increase student success that can be used in their classes, such as learning-centered syllabus design, transparent assignments and grading, growth mindset, high-impact practices, and metacognitive interventions. Finally, faculty are supported as they consider engaging in the scholarship of teaching and learning to assess and disseminate the results of their efforts.

In addition, IR and OSSI developed a program aimed at supporting faculty and staff in making data-informed decisions. The 2016–17 Data Champions program funded thirty-seven faculty and staff members from across campus to get in-depth training on institutional data tools, to use institutional data to investigate a student success-related question, and to “champion” the data by sharing the results and tools with faculty in their colleges. The program has been incredibly effective at empowering faculty to identify student success issues themselves and come up with their own solutions to address them.

High-Impact Practices
Our objective is to expand undergraduate research experiences and to better assess the impact on student success. In fall 2016, the provost established an under-graduate research working group aimed at exploring options for expanding the institutional capacity for undergraduate research. In addition, a faculty member is using institutional data to document and assess the impact of grant-funded training programs on student success. The Office of Institutional Research will use these results, along with CSUN data, to better understand the impact of engagement in undergraduate research on student outcomes for various groups.

Student Achievement of Learning Outcomes
The campus established a writing proficiency exam as a graduation requirement. The university assessment coordinator realized that this test (usually taken by students in the junior year after the completion of general education courses) could be used to evaluate student proficiency in critical thinking, quantitative reasoning, and information competence in addition to written communication, which the test already evaluated. As such, he revised the prompt to test students on the three additional competencies, which will give us an important benchmark to analyze the core of our curriculum and its ability to incorporate the LEAP principles.

ASSESSING OUR CAMPUS ACTION PLAN
We do not expect to change campus culture overnight, but we hope that by engaging campus stakeholders in all areas and levels, we will see many small changes that should result in transformation at the institutional level. In particular, we will assess our progress by examining opportunity gaps in the high-priority courses we have identified, as well as in one-year continuation and graduation rates. Once we have made more headway in assessing gaps in student achievement of learning outcomes, we will also examine progress in narrowing those divides.
Project LAUNCH Begins with “L” for Learning

Sheree L. Meyer, Interim Dean, College of Arts and Letters; Professor of English, California State University–Sacramento

When the California State University–Sacramento (Sacramento State) team selected Project LAUNCH (Learning to Advance Underserved Communities in Higher Ed) as the name for its project with the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), little did we know how appropriate the name would become. Sacramento State’s project, as well as the national AAC&U project, Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence: Campus-Based Strategies for Student Success, involve some of the same challenges as a NASA space launch. A launch occurs at the start of a journey that will require constant vigilance and may include course corrections. However, long before the launch itself occurs—be it a space or project launch—such a journey is preceded by careful planning.

Project LAUNCH is closely aligned with campus and California State University (CSU) system-wide initiatives. CSU has set ambitious goals for increasing four-year graduation rates by 2025 while at the same time reducing the achievement gaps for Pell-eligible and underrepresented minorities to zero. At Sacramento State, President Robert S. Nelsen has also articulated “imperatives,” including student success and diversity and equity, and has committed resources to achieving these goals.

FACULTY LEARNING IN COMMUNITIES

Faculty and curricular development are the key to faculty engagement in student success initiatives aimed at reducing the equity gap and attaining learning outcomes. To that end, Sacramento State has effectively adopted the faculty learning community (FLC) or professional learning community (PLC) model. Just as learning communities are a high-impact practice for student success, an FLC provides optimal conditions for faculty learning. While Sacramento State’s Center for Teaching and Learning’s 2016 summer institute introduced a large number of faculty to the concepts, strategies, and implications of equity, Project LAUNCH’s PLC, “2016 Equity and Student Success: Inclusive Teaching for Diverse Learners,” offered a structured, year-long syllabus for ongoing and in-depth dialogue that enacted movement from theory to praxis. Educating faculty and staff about factors that limit inclusiveness such as unconscious or implicit bias, microaggressions, stereotype threat, and other obstacles to genuine intercultural communication, as well as the ways in which an institution—through its policies, practices, and curricula—might contribute to inequities, is a first step in an iterative change process.

A launch occurs at the start of a journey that will require constant vigilance and may include course corrections. However, long before the launch itself occurs—be it a space or project launch—such a journey is preceded by careful planning.
Institute participants included faculty from education, sociology, philosophy, recreation and leisure studies, government, and the library. While many faculty began the PLC focused on a particular course, they are developing plans of practice applicable to most of their courses. One common approach that emerged is the establishment of rules of interaction to increase inclusive participation and productive engagement in classroom activities. Other faculty members identified gaps in curriculum; one, for example, is adapting “Introduction to Inclusive Recreation and Recreation Therapy” to serve general education learning outcomes. Pre- and post-institute surveys also assist us in assessing attitudinal and cultural shifts on issues related to equity.

FACULTY LEARNING THROUGH ASSESSMENT
Assuring both access and success for our highly diverse student population requires yet another kind of learning for faculty: ongoing quantitative and qualitative curricular, pedagogical, and programmatic assessment. Indeed, if we are to move beyond the “launch” phase and towards a sustainable and strategic transformation of the institution, we need to set up continuous feedback loops to help us improve. In response to our Project LAUNCH action plan, as well as our Developing Hispanic Serving Institution federal grant action plan, constituents across campus will also need to learn and practice effective analysis and deployment of disaggregated data regarding racial, ethnic, and economic factors.

Two gateway courses, Criminal Justice 1 and Psychology 2, were funded through Project LAUNCH to provide targeted interventions. These courses were chosen from the areas identified in the project plan because we had already established a comparison group with sections of the same courses in our first-year program learning communities, and we had full commitment from the departments to implement and assess the interventions. While coordination of university and department-level programs can be challenging, the faculty and peer tutors in both courses expressed a high level of engagement in the intervention and its assessment. Project LAUNCH participant Marlyn J. Jones, a professor in the Division of Criminal Justice, illustrates this point:

Last semester, the professors teaching the classes we identified for participation in Project LAUNCH reiterated the importance of tutoring support to students identified from early assessments as being at risk of failing the course. Project LAUNCH, with its intended soft touch, serves the purpose of directly helping students. Simultaneously it facilitates data collection to assist in more systematic assessment to develop treatment of the problem identified through the data.

ARE OUR STUDENTS LEARNING?
Are high-impact practices leading to the achievement of our baccalaureate learning goals? To answer that question, Project LAUNCH supports the development of learning outcomes assessment for first-year seminars and Writing Partners @ Sac State, a program of the Community Engagement Center. Project LAUNCH developed a first-year experience rubric, adapted from the AAC&U VALUE rubrics, to capture expectations for first-time students that include four foundational learning goals: lifelong learning, integrative thinking, intercultural competence, and information literacy.

The initial review prompted the creation of a signature assignment aligned with the goals. Writing Partners @ Sac State pairs first-year students with fifth-grade students in local schools and culminates with a guided visit to Sacramento State. In addition to emphasizing rhetorical writing goals, the end-of-program reflection asks students, “What do you now understand about your participation in this activity as having an impact on young people in their community?” Both programs are currently analyzing data from their first sampling of assignments.

WHAT’S NEXT?
The goals of Project LAUNCH cannot be attained in isolation from our institutional goals or independent of other equity and student success efforts. The future of our campus action plan will depend on collaboration across divisions and into departments. To better serve the educational needs of our underserved students and to close achievement gaps, we need to educate ourselves. Real change begins with ourselves and our practices.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
Project LAUNCH reflects the efforts and support of a large team of faculty, staff, and administrators, including members of the AAC&U Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence project team: Janet Hesch, Reza Peigahi, Joel Schwartz, Tina Jordan, Bridget Parsh, Todd Migliaccio, and Dana Kivel. I am both professionally and personally grateful to them and to AAC&U leadership for their commitment to students and to the values that we share.
Fostering Inclusive Excellence for All Carthage College Students

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Carthage College is a private, not-for-profit, primarily undergraduate, liberal arts and sciences institution with total enrollment of approximately 3,000 students. Having recently completed a ten-year strategic plan in May 2015, Carthage was excited to partner with the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) in the Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence: Campus-Based Strategies for Student Success project. The AAC&U project aligned well with several specific college strategic goals, such as increasing student retention and graduation rates; expanding access to several high-impact practices, including undergraduate research, service learning, and internships; supporting diverse student populations; and refining institutional data practices. Organizing the development and implementation of our equity project to complement other initiatives associated with furthering the college’s strategic goals was key to Carthage’s success. Our commitment to supporting students in their process of self-discovery and preparation for the future also aligned well with the project’s goal of encouraging “completion with a purpose” and engaged citizenship, yielding additional synergy.

SHIFTING THE FOCUS FROM DIVERSITY TO EQUITY AND INCLUSION
In efforts to promote intercultural awareness and to make the Carthage community more reflective of society, the college’s recent strategic plans have set goals for increasing the diversity of the student body. Over the past five years, the percentage of students of color on campus has grown from 10 to 17 percent. With the increase in compositional diversity on campus, the focus of the college’s work is shifting from building diversity to promoting inclusion and equitable outcomes. As part of our project, we identified equity gaps in four-year and six-year graduation rates and set a goal of reducing the disparity between the completion rate for black and Hispanic students as compared with white students.

Our commitment to supporting students in their process of self-discovery and preparation for the future also aligned well with the project’s goal of encouraging “completion with a purpose” and engaged citizenship, yielding additional synergy.
While many of our strategies introduced or strengthened practices to promote success for all students, others focused more narrowly on improving the experiences of students experiencing equity gaps. To set the stage for our work, author and scholar Terrell Strayhorn was invited to speak about fostering students’ sense of belonging at a 2016 meeting for all faculty and staff. First-year advisors and faculty teaching the required first-year seminar were invited to a follow-up workshop with Strayhorn to help them re-envision their roles as “cultural navigators” of the college experience.

Subsequent efforts to infuse equity-mindedness into campus planning and practices have involved both campus leadership and the community. The president’s cabinet participated in a full-day session that utilized the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) to promote individual and group self-analysis of intercultural competence. A director of equity and inclusion was appointed to coordinate campus efforts. An equity and inclusion committee, made up of faculty, staff, and students, was established. The committee formed four sub-groups that focus on access and equity; diversity in the curriculum; campus climate; and student/faculty learning and development. The committee works collaboratively with other campus committees to make recommendations to promote equity and inclusive practices. Specific recommendations are being developed to improve faculty and staff hiring practices, revise general education requirements, and re-focus elements of the new student orientation program.

FACULTY AND STAFF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

To ensure broad participation in and long-term sustainability of our equity efforts, Carthage has initiated numerous opportunities for professional growth and development. Our approach to faculty and staff development has been driven by three guiding principles: (1) faculty and staff share membership in our larger community of practice that serves our students, (2) learning more about practices that facilitate or impede equity is a critical first step for everyone, and (3) ongoing support is necessary to sustain changes in practice.

We opened our fall 2016 Teaching and Learning Conference with a workshop on building communities of practice. This sparked the launching of a learning community of faculty and staff focused on equitable and inclusive classroom practices. Members of this community are pursuing projects to improve their own practices and develop new knowledge to share with the larger community. The work of the learning community complements, and at times informs, workshops on specific teaching practices (e.g., transparency) or course design principles (e.g., clearly stated learning outcomes) known to facilitate success for a greater number of students. The committee emphasizes infusing new practices into current ones to promote both the feasibility and sustainability of faculty and staff development.

To promote greater depth in faculty/staff personal development, the equity and inclusion committee has implemented an equity and inclusion certificate program providing Carthage administrators, faculty, and staff with opportunities to enhance the knowledge, disposition, and skills essential for equity and inclusion work through the completion of a year-long program involving thirty to fifty hours of training and ongoing self-reflection.

CURRICULAR INNOVATIONS

As part of our project, Carthage has sought to assess and expand access to and participation in high-impact practices (HIPs) by students experiencing equity gaps. Although our equity goal focused on increasing completion rates, we recognized that early experiences that promote engagement could have the most profound effect on student outcomes. To that end, we have taken advantage of the college’s 4–1–4 academic calendar that requires first-year students to enroll in a January-term class. New HIP-rich courses are being developed to increase exposure to HIPs in the first year. Academic advisors will highlight these course offerings to students during individual advising sessions to promote enrollment by students experiencing equity gaps who might disproportionately benefit from these experiences. Faculty teaching these courses will be asked to build on Strayhorn’s cultural navigation framework, focusing some of their work during the term on helping students develop their own pathways to academic success. Additionally, four experiential learning task forces are developing plans to significantly increase student participation in undergraduate research, service learning, study abroad, and internships.

CONCLUSION

Carthage College’s intentional focus on identifying and reducing equity gaps in student outcomes has profoundly reshaped our efforts to support students experiencing equity gaps on campus, and it is showing promising signs of early success in improving underrepresented student retention. Three general lessons are worth noting for others who undertake similar efforts. First, our work was most effective where it naturally aligned with our institutional identity, vision, and existing strategic goals. Second, we have found that strategies to broadly engage the campus in collaborative efforts have been most effective. Third, we have benefitted tremendously from the opportunity to engage with our peers from other institutions in this effort, at times seeing new possibilities, and at times gaining new perspective. Opportunities for this type of cross-campus dialogue abound.
Advancing Equity for Student Success

Gwen Mitchell, Director, Center for Faculty and Professional Development, Clark Atlanta University
Michelle Rhodes, Transfer Specialist, Transfer Student Services, Clark Atlanta University

As a member of the Association of American Colleges and Universities’ (AAC&U’s) project, Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence: Campus-Based Strategies for Student Success, Clark Atlanta University (CAU) has expanded our commitment to equity, access, and success for the student population we serve. CAU’s strongly held principles guide the way we provide opportunities, resources, and services to create pathways for program completion. The equity project is directly related to the university’s quality enhancement plan (QEP) to enhance student learning, and CAU’s strategic plan identifies the importance of faculty and student engagement in high-impact practices and lifelong teaching and learning opportunities.

Clark Atlanta University is “Mobilizing for the Future” under the leadership of our new president, Ronald A. Johnson. CAU serves as a research university that transforms the lives of students by preparing them to be problem solvers through innovative learning programs; supportive interactions with faculty, staff, and students; exemplary scholarship; and purposeful service. The university demonstrates this commitment in its academic programs, business practices, steadfast efforts to develop and support a diverse student population, and implementation of programs to ensure opportunity and success. One of the strategic drivers for the university, increasing students’ academic and career success, directly parallels our commitment to equity and inclusive excellence. Our students succeeding and graduating with a purpose is a priority of Clark Atlanta University.

The Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence project engages students and faculty at all levels of the university from executive leadership, deans, faculty, administrators, staff, and undergraduate and graduate students. This historic moment characterizes a community transforming to be equity-minded. As such, Clark Atlanta University is advancing equity by (1) adopting a new general education curriculum, (2) creating intentional faculty training and development, (3) redesigning the first-year seminar model (framework in progress), (4) participating in the United Negro College Fund’s Career Pathways Initiative, and (5) providing student transition services. These strategies are highlighted in this article.

One of the strategic drivers for the university, increasing students’ academic and career success, directly parallels our commitment to equity and inclusive excellence. Our students succeeding and graduating with a purpose is a priority of Clark Atlanta University.

NEW GENERAL EDUCATION CORE CURRICULUM
Led by a team of department faculty chairs, CAU implemented a new general education program in fall 2016. The learning outcomes of the redesigned core curriculum provide access to and participation in several high-impact practices (HIPs). The learning outcomes of the redesigned general education core embrace the Association of American Colleges and Universities’ VALUE rubrics (civic engagement, creative and critical thinking, ethical reasoning, information literacy, inquiry and analysis, integrative learning, intercultural knowledge, oral and written communication, reading, problem solving, and quantitative literacy).
The learning outcomes are for students to become (1) skilled in integrative and collaborative learning; (2) competent in critical and creative thinking; (3) competent in multicultural and global interactions; (4) competent in financial, quantitative, technological, and scientific literacy; (5) proficient in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and nonverbal communication; (6) appreciative of the humanities / fine arts; and (7) mindful of personal and professional ethics, human values, and holistic wellness.

The general education core curriculum is introduced during the first-year seminar experience along with educational practices such as undergraduate research, career preparation and development, common intellectual experiences, and learning community experiences.

**INTENTIONAL FACULTY TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT**

Faculty training is critical to the success of the project. The primary training goal is to implement professional development workshops to support the seven learning outcomes of the new general education requirements, four levels of inquiry that underpin CAU’s Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), and five cornerstones of the United Negro College Fund’s Career Pathways Initiative. Selected faculty members from the four schools at CAU (Arts and Sciences, Business Administration, Education, and Social Work) are receiving training on integrating high-impact practices into the curricula and measuring the impact on student learning outcomes. A team of fifteen to twenty faculty members are participating in a series of workshops to develop signature assignments and rubrics related to the general education student learning outcomes, QEP, Career Pathways Initiative, and HIPs. During the workshops, faculty design signature assignments and rubrics for integrating HIPs and one of the initiatives mentioned above into their pedagogy. Upon completion of the workshops, faculty members are expected to implement the assignments and share their new knowledge with colleagues during departmental faculty meetings and other training opportunities (a “train-the-trainer” model) to reach at least 80 percent of the faculty.

**CAREER PATHWAYS INITIATIVE**

CAU’s participation in the Career Pathways Initiative serves as an accelerator for the university’s ongoing efforts to better prepare our students for permanent employment and graduate and professional school. CAU’s five Career Pathways Initiative cornerstones include:

- career planning and professional development
- improving teaching and student learning outcomes to prepare our students for full-time employment and graduate or professional school
- faculty-mentored undergraduate performance and research across all disciplines
- faculty development to better inform our faculty to complement the offerings of our Career and Professional Development office and confer the skills employers want or need and
- improving student support services, including in the Career Placement Department

**STUDENT TRANSITION SERVICES**

To further advance equity on an ongoing basis, the university is developing a transition center that will focus on meeting the gap in services for transfer students and increasing satisfaction as they transition to the university. The center will partner with other units at the university as campus partners to provide transition services for students to close the equity gap and increase persistence and progression. The transition center will identify resources for students’ guided pathways at any given transitional point at CAU (e.g., entering the first year or senior year) along with mentorship, training, and leadership opportunities. The students’ experience will be enhanced through participation in transition learning groups.

Assessments will play key roles in determining how the university advanced equity and improved students’ learning experiences through participation in the project. Several campus actions and instruments for measuring the use of HIPs and student success will be used:

- learning management system statistics and analytics
- eportfolio development
- student response systems
- real-time data collection activities (student polls, interviews, focus groups, surveys, and other analytic tools)

CAU will take the following actions to track data for continuous improvements and gains in bridging the equity gap:

- complete an inventory of campus action items
- continue campus initiatives for project goals
- successfully track faculty participation
- successfully track student participation/success in initiatives
- initiate assessment activities
- evaluate completed assessments to determine success
- successfully engage faculty and appropriate administrators to scale up practices

With the achievement of these goals, Clark Atlanta University will continue to move in an upward trajectory. The collaborative effort and engagement involved in the Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence project will develop and implement viable, robust guided pathways for success that close the equity gaps for CAU students to become engaged scholars that complete with a purpose.
Promising Pathways:  
A Gateway to Equity-Mindedness

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Angela Frazier, Assistant Dean, Rosary College of Arts and Sciences, Dominican University  
Gema Ortega, Director of Transitions Program and Lecturer, English Department, Dominican University  
Kathleen O’Connor, Assistant Professor, Psychology, Dominican University  
Norah Collins, Associate Dean of Students, Dominican University  
Paul Simpson, Executive Director, Academic Enrichment Center, Dominican University  
Tina Taylor-Ritzler, Associate Professor, Psychology, Dominican University

Dominican University is a premier Catholic institution that serves students from the Midwest and around the world. Founded in 1901 as St. Clara College, Dominican University prepares students to pursue truth, give compassionate service, and participate in the creation of a just and humane world. Sponsored by the Sinsinawa Dominican Sisters, the university embraces its identity as a gateway institution of higher learning that offers a rigorous liberal arts education to women and underserved students, including first-generation, Hispanic, African American, immigrant, and international students.

In July 2015, an organizing team drafted a letter on why Dominican University should become a partner in the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U)’s Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence: Campus-Based Strategies for Student Success project. The letter’s argument was that Dominican has the passion, the commitment, and the need to innovate toward more equitable models of student success. This article explains what Dominican has done since being selected as a project participant and how we plan to continue our work beyond the three-year project.

A PROJECT TO IMPROVE THE FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE

Our five-person equity team identified closing equity gaps for African American and first generation college students as a pressing concern. To understand the problem, we developed a framework for our own equity analysis. We created a data set for the 2008 and 2013 student cohorts and benchmarked those two cohorts across thirty variables. Next, we conducted a transcript analysis of the African American students in both cohorts. Our team shared our analysis and ideas for a project with key stakeholders and constituents. With the support of six instructors, we developed a first-year curricular intervention to improve year-to-year African American and first generation student retention. The equity team/stakeholder action plan became known as Promising Pathways.

First Semester of Promising Pathways: Piloting “First Year Together”

In First Year Together, a group of freshman students, known as the Promising Pathways Intervention (PPI) students, and their faculty advisors worked together for the full academic year to ensure a strong start and a good plan for four years at Dominican. This strategy included enrolling selected students in an intensive freshman seminar where they attended group advising sessions and psychosocial in-class presentations and activities. As part of First Year Together, the equity team and several faculty advisors developed a guided pathways tool to help students complete their individual plans for making college a transformational experience and for preparing for life after Dominican. A faculty development
summer academy for equity-minded data analysis and direct assessment of student learning will end the pilot phase of the project.

Second Semester of Promising Pathways: Promoting Student Success
This past semester, an expanded equity team convened to consider next steps for First Year Together. The team's efforts focused on connecting students to success opportunities while facilitating a smooth transition to their majors. To achieve these objectives, the equity team held a seminar to share information and outcomes data about PPI with advisors within the majors.

For the PPI cohort, the equity team is promoting the programs and activities that are available to all students to foster student success. For PPI students, however, participation in these programs will be monitored through an online student portal called Engage DU, and prizes for participation will be awarded at a PPI culminating activity. Data monitoring of cohort retention rates, graduation rates, and PPI outcomes will continue. To prepare for next fall, the equity team is working with the Borra Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence (BCTLE) to design summer faculty meetings to engage new faculty in PPI and to plan for a summer faculty workshop in 2018. The meetings will engage interested first-year seminar faculty with Promising Pathways while the 2018 workshop will use a modified AAC&U VALUE rubric to assess the common assignment used in the First Year Together seminar.

The summer workshop will focus on closing equity gaps through the direct assessment of student learning. This approach supports the BCTLE's emphasis on intercultural competence, inclusive teaching, and integrative learning as strategies to improve learning outcomes for all students.

**DATA MATTERS**
Initially, the equity team conducted a benchmark analysis of first-year retention rates by race for the 2008 and 2013 cohorts. The team noted significantly lower retention rates in the 2008 cohort and volatility in retention for African American and Hispanic students compared to white students in the 2013 cohort (see table 1).

A transcript analysis of both cohorts revealed key reasons why African American graduation rates were lower than those of other ethnic groups. For example, the graduation rate for the 2008 cohort was 62.7 percent overall but only 32.4 percent for African Americans. The data showed that few African American students graduated in four years. Some reasons for the longer time to degree were:

- African American students had an imbalance in credits attempted versus credits earned. These students also accumulated credits that did not count toward a degree. Additionally, African American students experienced course failures, withdrawals, and lost credits due to transfers.
- To maintain financial aid eligibility, some students earned more than the credits required to graduate but did not meet all their program requirements. Our analysis also helped the team realize the importance of a reliable, centralized tracking system to monitor whether all students have access to high-impact practices and transformative learning opportunities.

**Student Characteristics for the PPI Group**
For data analysis purposes, the students who participated in the intervention became the “PPI group.” The randomly selected comparison group became the Promising Pathways Comparison or “PPC group.”

- The PPI group included 103 students selected on a modified random basis. The PPI group was 21 percent of the freshman class (495 students).
- African American enrollment in the PPI group was 17.5 percent compared to 8.7 percent in the PPC group. African American enrollment was 8.8 percent of the total freshman class.
- First-generation students made up 62.1 percent of the PPI group compared to 56.5 percent of the PPC group.
- The average composite ACT score for the PPI group was 20 compared to the composite score of 22 for the PPC group.

**SCALING UP THE PROJECT**
Plans to scale up the project for next year are being developed. So far, four objectives for the next academic year include: (1) identifying a project coordinator, (2) recruiting a second group of first-year seminar instructors and advisors, and (3) creating an electronic version of the guided pathways tool and a system to facilitate student academic planning and monitor participation in high-impact practices.

Overall, Promising Pathways has allowed for the development of an equity leadership team, a data analysis framework, and a faculty development program, as well as tools for incorporating holistic advising and guided pathways development into the freshman seminar. We look forward to continuing our work to close equity gaps at Dominican University.

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**TABLE 1. FIRST-YEAR RETENTION RATES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COHort Year</th>
<th>African American</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Asian*</th>
<th>Total Fall to fall student retention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>81.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>80.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Undergraduate Asian enrollment is 3.2% of total undergraduate enrollment.
Campus-Based Strategies for African American Student Success

Jaffus Hardrick, Vice Provost, Student Access and Success, Florida International University
Sonja Montas-Hunter, Assistant Vice-Provost, Student Access and Success, Florida International University

Florida International University (FIU), with an enrollment of fifty-five thousand students, is one of the nation’s largest urban public research universities. Participation in the Association of American Colleges and Universities’ (AAC&U’s) Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence project was motivated by the university’s commitment to remaining an “accessible” institution for the South Florida community. Hispanics represented 61 percent and African American students represented 14 percent of our enrollment for the 2014–15 academic year. Long-term goals and objectives for the AAC&U project are to succeed with (1) developing a framework for the Office of Student Access and Success (SAS); (2) engaging in intentional data collection; (3) educating the FIU community on high-impact practices; (4) promoting student engagement, specifically among African American students; and (5) engaging faculty in strategies to promote equity in curricular planning. The success of the initiative relied on collaboration between key stakeholders at the university, including the Office of Analysis and Information Management, the Center for Advancement in Teaching, student affairs (e.g., Black Student Union), and academic affairs.

The Theory of Socialization states that there must be “reciprocal interaction between personal, behavioral, and environmental determinants” for an individual to successfully adapt behaviors of their environment.

Designed to ensure success by providing various support services that promote academic socialization from undergraduate through graduate education. The framework for the SAS mission is guided by Albert Bandura’s (1977) Theory of Socialization and Theory of Self Efficacy. The Theory of Socialization states that there must be “reciprocal interaction between personal, behavioral, and environmental determinants” for an individual to successfully adapt behaviors of their environment. The theory of self-efficacy centers around individuals believing in their ability to succeed in specific situations or accomplish tasks (Bandura 1994). These theories, coupled with the commitment of AAC&U and Strada Education Network to using high-impact practices to increase degree completion with a purpose, led us to integrate the development of students’ interpersonal, intrapersonal, and cognitive skills into the curriculum.

FRAMEWORK FOR STUDENT ACCESS AND SUCCESS
Created in 2014, SAS is responsible for creating access and services for underrepresented minority students. SAS hosts several initiatives funded by Federal TRIO Programs—including undergraduate college access initiatives and several graduate fellowships that are designed to ensure success by providing various support services that promote academic socialization from undergraduate through graduate education. The framework for the SAS mission is guided by Albert Bandura’s (1977) Theory of Socialization and Theory of Self Efficacy. The Theory of Socialization states that there must be “reciprocal interaction between personal, behavioral, and environmental determinants” for an individual to successfully adapt behaviors of their environment.

DATA COLLECTION
Data collection occurred in three ways: institutional data, surveys, and focus groups. Multiple data collection strategies allowed us to triangulate the results. Initial analysis of the data revealed the following:
• Black students who are experiencing their first time in college (FTIC) tend to have lower high school GPAs than Hispanic or White students. The average high school GPA for Black students is less than 3.0.
• Fifty percent of FIU’s Black FTIC students live on campus, which is a much higher percentage than other ethnicities.
• The top three courses that Black FTICs (first-year students who started in fall 2013) are more likely to fail than non-Black FTICs are Principles in Microeconomics; General Biology II; and Pre-Calculus, Algebra, and Trigonometry.

The survey was sent to 2,726 Black students who were enrolled from fall 2012 to fall 2015. The data indicated that an astounding 49.96 percent of the students who responded have never used the services provided by the offices that are central to high-impact practices (University Learning Center, Center for Excellence in Writing, Study Abroad, Center for Leadership). Respondents indicated that they either did not know where to seek help or they knew about the offices but did not engage with them. The focus groups gave us qualitative insight to the awareness of HIPs among African American students and indicated that many students don’t prioritize engagement with HIPs in their undergraduate experience.

The data provided us with actionable items to follow-up with, such as better collaboration with FIU’s STEM Transformation Institute to address the challenges in undergraduate STEM, strengthening our pre-collegiate services, and making better use of assistance from Residential Life.

AWARENESS CAMPAIGN AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT
Successful outcomes for the project were contingent on a strong awareness campaign that emphasized the vision and mission of SAS and the importance of high-impact practices. Our first step was a complete redesign of the SAS website to define our brand within the context of student success and aligns with the Strada goal of degree “completion with a purpose.” The website’s goal is to communicate the value of high-impact practices and achievement of learning outcomes so that students are better prepared for the workforce or graduate education. We were responsive to students’ lack of knowledge about or engagement with HIPs and to a recent Strada report that indicated a difference of perception between universities and employers on the achievement of competencies necessary to be successful in the workplace.

For our second step, social media was leveraged to communicate a “tip of the month” and monthly student profile to stimulate dialogue in the university community about degree completion with a purpose. The intent was to share positive academic behaviors, thus echoing Bandura’s principles of Social Learning.

Finally, our most successful component of the awareness campaign is the LIVE LEARN GROW personal and professional development series. The intent of this effort is to provide students with the opportunity to engage with university and industry professionals and to share tools for academic success.

FACULTY/STAFF ENGAGEMENT
Faculty and staff engagement is critical to the success of these efforts. We dedicated two team members for this purpose. Activities included an analysis in spring 2016 semester of gateway course outcomes, which included demographic breakdowns of students for faculty teams to consider equity in their efforts to redesign courses over the summer. Equity-mindedness training workshops were also provided to faculty, teaching assistants, and first-year experience instructors.

A key workshop, “From Diversity to EQUITY: Removing Obstacles to Student Success,” included principles from the Center for Urban Education and AAC&U. A faculty book club was also created to discuss strategies for implementing an equitable curriculum.

SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES
As with any complex initiative, there are successes and barriers to success. At FIU, this project has allowed for more collaboration among university stakeholders who engage in the assessment, promotion, and compliance of student success goals. Additionally, it provided stakeholders the opportunity to analyze how to better communicate the value of HIPs and learning outcomes within the framework of equity and student success.

The university provides many opportunities for engagement in HIPs, but lack of student participation remains a challenge. While students have a responsibility to take ownership of their own success, it is our responsibility to make sure that we acculturate students to be proactive in their self-efficacy. In conclusion, the initiative is an effective model for universities willing to examine pedagogical and student affairs practices through an equity-minded lens and an examination of how educators engage students in intentional learning so that they obtain “well-being beyond graduation” (Gallup 2015).

REFERENCES
Building an Equity-Minded Pathway for Transfer Students

Aurélio Manuel Valente, Vice President for Student Affairs, Governors State University
Alicia L. Battle, Assistant Professor of Community Health, Governors State University
Robert E. Clay, Director of Intercultural Student Affairs, Governors State University

Governors State University (GSU) has served as an academic home to traditionally underserved students since its founding in 1969. Established as an upper-division institution that served only juniors and seniors at the undergraduate level, in 2014 GSU underwent an institutional transformation into a comprehensive residential four-year institution. However, 95 percent of our new students continue to be transfer students who are thirty-one years old on average, are likely to be single heads of households, and are most likely enrolled part-time (taking approximately nine credit hours per semester).

Our current strategic plan reiterates GSU’s commitment to ensuring an accessible and high-quality education to underrepresented and historically underserved students. Our vision statement expresses that GSU will be an intellectually stimulating public square, serve as an economic catalyst for our region that primarily includes Chicago and its south suburbs, and lead as a model of academic excellence, innovation, diversity, and responsible citizenship.

Our vision statement expresses that GSU will be an intellectually stimulating public square, serve as an economic catalyst for our region that primarily includes Chicago and its south suburbs, and lead as a model of academic excellence, innovation, diversity, and responsible citizenship. These words guide GSU’s efforts and speak to our core values through tumultuous and uncertain times. For instance, in the face of stagnant economic growth and a decline in the middle class in our service region, many other institutions have rolled back programs and services.

However, GSU continues to invest in student success. As an example, GSU has been recognized for its innovative and highly structured cohort-based lower-division program where freshmen are taught by full-time faculty (Flaherty 2016).

Consistent with our commitment to serving the underserved, GSU has worked to provide a growing number of underrepresented first-year, first-time, and first-generation college students with all the benefits of a university education—experiences that students from more privileged backgrounds take for granted.

PROJECT OVERVIEW
As part of the reimagining of programs and services for our transfer students and for our rising juniors, GSU recently...
launched the Center for the Junior Year. The center serves as a vibrant intellectual hub designed to transition students into signature work in their majors. In addition to the center, junior seminars were also established for each academic program to help students interrogate their major, not merely explore it. Junior seminars, envisioned as a cornerstone experience for juniors, are designed to be writing intensive and are offered in the first semester of a transfer student’s enrollment.

Both the junior seminar and the Center for the Junior Year are crucial to realizing our campus goals for our partnership with the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) in their Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence project. GSU’s overall equity project is to ensure that African American students, specifically African American transfer students, are successfully retained and persist on to graduation. By disaggregating our campus data, the campus planning team developed the following action plan goals:

- Implement equity-minded practices with the goal of closing student success gaps of African American transfer students
- Develop and offer quality high-impact practices in the junior year of study
- Create and assess signature assignments that focus on the junior seminar’s social responsibility learning outcome
- Increase internship opportunities and workforce preparation for rising juniors converging from general education coursework, our dual degree program, and transfer students from community colleges

Given our designation as a completion college (Johnson and Bell 2014) and emphasis on social justice, the campus planning team focused our project on the dual emphasis of faculty development for teaching diverse populations and providing academic support to students in their junior year of college.

LESSONS LEARNED

While peer institutions can adopt the methods we used to scale up our work, the lessons learned by the campus planning team are equally valuable:

1. Principles of equity-minded practices challenged traditional notions of “fairness.” Shifting to equitable outcomes caused a great deal of tension that required deeper conversations in the faculty development workshops beyond those that were initially planned. The campus planning team redesigned our Inclusive Excellence workshops and restructured mini-grant funding to integrate equity-minded practices into all our goals.

2. Lead change, don’t simply manage change. Advancing innovation on a campus amidst major transformation, and in uncertain financial times, proved to be challenging. In this environment, the planning team has worked to increase faculty buy-in. Nonetheless, the planning team is confident that momentum can be sustained by leveraging partnerships with other groups doing related work throughout campus.

3. Department and college leadership is vital. While there was support from the president and provost, the college and departmental leadership was not initially involved in this project. In hindsight, the project would have benefitted from the intentional inclusion of these critical campus leaders earlier in the project. Involvement from these campus leaders would have created more direct access to the faculty who can enact educational change in the junior and senior years of instruction. Accordingly, in our second year, we developed equity score cards for each junior seminar course and presented them to an audience of all college deans and department chairs. This presentation, entitled “Advancing Inclusive Excellence,” was very well received and immediately successful in garnering increased faculty participation. The response also resulted in an invitation from faculty leadership to have the campus planning team replicate this presentation to the faculty senate.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the campus planning team has worked to incorporate the lessons we learned into our project by (1) refining and refocusing goals for the excellence in equity project, (2) scaling our work beyond the classroom, and (3) integrating the excellence in equity project with other connected initiatives. Since social justice and student success are both key institutional values, the campus planning team is connecting equity efforts more intentionally with our student success initiative (funded by a Title III federal grant) and our Male Success Initiative (funded by the Kresge Foundation). Both initiatives have additional funding beyond 2018, when the Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence project formally ends.

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Facing Ourselves, Engaging Our Students: Equity-Minded Practices at Work

Richard J. Prystowsky, Provost and Senior Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs, Lansing Community College
Anne M. Heutsche, Professor of History, Lansing Community College

For the past few years, Lansing Community College (LCC) has been engaged in a comprehensive, transformative initiative called “Operation 100%,” whose goal is 100 percent completion for students in certificate, degree, and transfer pathways. Realizing that we cannot reach this goal if we do not close equity gaps in student success, we enthusiastically embarked on our Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence project with the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U). Our touchstone metric is that no student be left out or left behind as we close equity gaps and deliver quality educational experiences.

THE LCC EQUITY PROJECT
Our project goal is to close the equity gap by 5 percent for African American males and females, as well as for Latinas and Latinos. Long term, we plan to use lessons learned as we continue our journey toward the goal we share with the Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence project—100 percent completion through 100 percent inclusion. To create a sustainable structural and conceptual framework, we are using a project logic model for our planning and assessment purposes, and we are ensuring direct faculty and staff input and engagement. Further, we have strategically aligned and integrated the equity project with other college initiatives—for example, our work strengthening gateway courses with high DFWI rates—and with the college’s overall mission. In addition, in line with equity-minded practices, our project steering committee engages adjunct faculty in key aspects of the work. Though such deliberate intentionality takes time and resources, it has resulted in much goodwill and participator engagement.

Our equity project contains several components—for instance, a focus on the intersectionality of poverty and race, the redesigning of developmental education to address the disparate impacts on underserved students, and the inclusion of equity-related student learning outcomes in general education courses and guided program pathways. For the purposes of this article, we will highlight two challenging, but also necessary and promising, practices that we have adopted: ongoing implicit bias awareness training and the development of Faculty Institutes, which focus on student engagement.

Recognizing that no one can escape being affected by discriminatory or otherwise prejudicial cultural attitudes and practices, we are concerned that we might unintentionally undermine our efforts to close equity gaps if we do not honestly address our own implicit biases.
practices, we are concerned that we might unintentionally undermine our efforts to close equity gaps if we do not honestly address our own implicit biases. To this end, we hired a consultant from Project Implicit to hold “train the trainer” sessions. Our chief diversity officer is continuing this training with faculty, and our provost is continuing it with staff. Assisting the chief diversity officer are three lead faculty, one of whom, a biology faculty member already involved with our efforts to improve success rates for our gateways courses, helped us to understand a particular complexity of closing equity gaps: that many underserved students never enroll in our college-level biology classes. This revelation has led not only to implicit bias awareness training for science faculty, but also to preliminary work to develop a pipeline of underserved K–12 students who could enroll in our biology classes. To this end, LCC and high school science teachers are working on developing pedagogical approaches to engage students in STEM pathways.

For all faculty engaged in implicit bias awareness training, the ultimate goal is to develop relevant activities (such as the revision of syllabi language and content and the development of content material for K–12 teachers) that they can use to counter the influence of implicit bias in the classroom. Focusing on understanding how their knowledge of and pedagogical approaches to dealing with their own implicit biases connect directly to ameliorating problems of inequity in their classrooms, faculty ask themselves the following question: “How do we help all students engage, contribute, and feel a sense of inclusion and belonging?” Although engendering and sustaining faculty engagement in this work has been challenging at times, we have attenuated this problem by involving faculty who have already been engaged in similar work.

Staff leaders are assisting the Provost with his implicit bias awareness training for front-line staff. Participation is strong and consistent, and the preliminary results are promising. Using strategies learned in the training, staff are rethinking intake and customer service processes, are paying close attention to their implicit biases regarding age and disabilities, and have requested training to help them be more aware of students’ mental health difficulties. The key grounding question for staff is, “How do we create practical steps to keep implicit biases in check during everyday encounters with students?” In addition, this work sends the message that every employee at the college is valued as both an educator and a leader. Indeed, we are finding that many employees at the college are eager to help all students succeed; they just need to be invited to be agents in this important work.

**FACULTY INSTITUTES**

Given the importance of meaningful faculty and student engagement to closing equity gaps, we created Faculty Institutes based on the work of Paul Hernandez, LCC’s chief diversity officer and the author of *The Pedagogy of Real Talk* (2016). We began with a summer Faculty Institute cohort of thirteen full-time and adjunct faculty members from accounting and history, two high-enrollment gateway course areas in which underserved students were disparately affected with high DFWI rates. Faculty Institute participants created two activities to implement in their classrooms: “Real Talks,” which are conversations by faculty intended to engage students in a meaningful, relevant, and authentic manner, and “Alternative Lessons,” which make course content relevant and engaging. This work has produced promising results already, and faculty who participated in the Faculty Institutes have remained energetically committed to continuing the process.

We are moving in a deliberate manner by creating faculty cohorts and helping them develop additional skill sets based on lessons we learned during the first year of the Faculty Institutes. Eventually scaling up this effort, we will identify faculty who have the potential to become trainers so that we can institutionalize our equity-related student success work.

As we engage in this important work, we remind ourselves to be patient, since we know that we are addressing decades of inequities among the college’s underserved students. Guided by Martin Luther King Jr.’s wise reminder that the “arc of the moral universe is long, but [that] it bends towards justice,” we are working to create a campus environment that honors, celebrates, and gives rise to multiple voices. We are weaving sustainable and equity-minded attitudes, behaviors, and actions into the fabric of our institution so that, eventually, we will no longer need an “equity project.” Our everyday efforts will already be models of equity-minded practices.

**REFERENCE**

Data-Driven Action Plans for Student Success and Inclusive Excellence

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Morgan State University is a public urban research university in Maryland, with a current enrollment of 7,689 students, known for its excellence in teaching, research, public service, and community engagement. Classified as a Historically Black College and University, Morgan prepares diverse and competitive graduates for success in a global and interdependent society. In October 2015, Morgan was one of thirteen institutions of higher education selected by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) to participate in a three-year project, Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence: Campus-Based Strategies for Student Success. The project’s aim is to advance equity and improve the quality of college learning for all students.

This article highlights key aspects of Morgan’s data-driven action plan for student success and inclusive excellence that can be replicated by other institutions. In accordance with guidelines from AAC&U, Morgan’s project goals are to: (1) increase student access to and participation in high-impact practices (HIPs); (2) increase completion, retention, and graduation rates for low-income, first-generation, adult, and/or minority students; (3) increase achievement of learning outcomes for underserved students using direct assessment measures, including AAC&U’s VALUE rubrics; and (4) increase student awareness and understanding of the value of guided learning pathways that incorporate HIPs and prepare students for the workforce and engaged citizenship.

Morgan’s data-driven framework included: (1) the use of disaggregated data on enrollment, retention, graduation, and course success rates by race, gender, and type of students to identify and close gaps in equity; (2) increased participation in professional development opportunities on student success and inclusive excellence by graduate students, staff, faculty, and administrators; (3) construction and administration of a HIPs survey for all members of the faculty; and (4) redesigned general education courses to increase access to and participation in HIPs and equity-minded strategies. The data leadership team, action plans with measurable goals, assessment system, and professional development were key elements of Morgan’s framework for improving student success and inclusive excellence. The leadership team also initiated dialogues to achieve understanding of the project, obtained input from all interested constituents, publicized successful activities,
shared challenges, and sought feedback from key stakeholders.

**ACTION PLANS**

Morgan’s data-driven action plans for student success and inclusive excellence contain goals, measurable objectives, assessment methods, communication aims, and equity-minded strategies for achieving each goal of the project. An action plan was developed for each of the four goals listed in the second paragraph of the introductory section. Prior to the development of action plans, the team collected and reviewed data on student demographics; course data on the general education program (e.g., completion and attrition rates, course grades, student evaluations); institutional data (e.g., retention rates, graduation rates, the National Survey of Student Engagement); and annual reports related to diversity and inclusive excellence.

The team disaggregated student data by race and ethnicity and reviewed it for unequal student outcomes. When observed, the team: (1) identified the name of the focal group experiencing the gap (e.g., retention rates of African American female students); (2) described the reasons for the gap; (3) set a measurable goal to close the gap; (4) identified the additional number of students needed to close the gap; and (5) identified the year when the goal will be met. Additional data on high-impact practices (HIPs) and VALUE rubric use were collected through surveys and syllabi analyses. To ensure more access to HIPs and equity-minded strategies, a total of twelve general education courses were redesigned with the Supplemental Instruction (SI) model—taking a traditional course and using technology and community-based activities to engage students in the educative process—in summer 2016. Through SI, technology, and workshops on HIPs, the learning environment was redesigned to increase students’ ability to think critically, synthesize ideas, and formulate questions about course content and materials. Students of all academic and learning abilities and levels have benefitted from the SI model of instruction.

**ASSESSMENT SYSTEM**

Project goals, assessment measures, data management and dissemination strategies, and team processes are all aspects of the assessment system. In December 2016, the project team established measurable objectives, performance targets, and direct/indirect measures for tracking changes for each goal from the first year through the end of the project. The project team used monthly meetings and reports to analyze, improve, and disseminate data on different aspects of the assessment system. In addition, Blackboard, Starfish, Degree Works, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), and Excel spreadsheets are examples of technology used to support data collection and analyses. These data were used to inform decisions and continue to improve the project.

**LESSONS LEARNED AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

The project’s leadership team identified several success factors: the role of leadership, campus-wide partnerships, the alignment of institutional goals, and professional development. Support of project initiatives by the provost, deans, chairs, and the leadership team from AAC&U made it possible to acquire buy-in from members of the faculty, students, and administrators. Support of administrators also made it easy to align the project’s goals with those of the university. Several offices on campus—assessment, institutional research, enrollment management, student success and retention, and career development—all collaborated and shared information on how elements of their strategic plans aligned with initiatives of this project. Based on survey results in which over 60 percent of the faculty reported that they needed more knowledge of HIPs and VALUE rubrics, the project team held two professional development workshops on HIPs to support faculty knowledge of best practices. The team developed a sustainability plan and in November 2016 acquired a grant on career development and learning pathways to continuously support the action plans on student success and inclusive excellence, as well as faculty professional development, at the end of this project.
Achieving Student Success for African American Males

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- **Regina W. Davis**, Assistant Provost for Student Success and Academic Support, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University
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North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University (NCA&T)—a public Historically Black University in Greensboro, North Carolina—was guided by Preeminence 2020 (its strategic plan) and the University of North Carolina’s Fostering Undergraduate Student Success Policy as it refocused its plan for improving undergraduate student success and achievement. A prominent component of this refocusing was the redesign and implementation of a more holistic academic advising model beginning fall 2016. Academic advising is a core function of the university and requires an intentional culture of promoting lifelong learning and empowering students to make sound academic, professional, and personal decisions. In addition, being a university that is designated as a Historically Black College or University, equity issues may be markedly different from Predominantly White Institutions. However, the student population that faces similar issues on both types of campuses is African American males. Low retention and completion rates for this population are among the most critical issues in higher education, and this issue is reflected on our campus. While the success of all students is paramount, the 129 African American males in our male retention program, Project MARCH (Male Aggies Resolved to Change History) became a focus as we aimed to reframe their experiences on campus. This article describes the implementation of the new advising model and high-impact practices as they relate to our African American male population.

Academic advising is a core function of the university and requires an intentional culture of promoting lifelong learning and empowering students to make sound academic, professional, and personal decisions.

**ACADEMIC ADVISING CONTINUUM**

The mission of NCA&T’s refocused academic advising structure is to create a shared holistic advising continuum aimed at equipping students with success skills and learning support to be academically, professionally, and personally successful. Another integral focus of the restructuring is to utilize academic advising to close retention gaps and improve graduation rates for African American male students. Under this structure, students have two academic advisors, a faculty advisor in their academic department
and an academic coach in the Center for Academic Excellence, a campus unit with four core functions: academic advising, academic monitoring, academic support, and student success.

The Student Success Advising Continuum provides each student with high-touch, high-impact academic guidance during their first-year experience at NCA&T. The continuum highlights the students’ decreasing reliance on the academic coach after their first year and increasing contact with their departmental faculty advisors. This ongoing communication ensures that students receive consistent and effective advising. Moreover, the connection between the faculty advisor and the student is an important one because the faculty advisor’s expertise within the discipline of the students’ major enables advisors to assist with many advising and support activities that will prepare students for success beyond the undergraduate experience. It also represents the transition from initial reliance on professional advisors to increased contact with faculty advisors.

**PROJECT MARCH MALE RETENTION PROGRAM**

Project MARCH is a living learning community (LLC) housed in the Center for Academic Excellence. The LLC is focused on enhancing the academic progress of first-year minority male students and first-generation students at NCA&T. Project MARCH is also designed to help these students overcome obstacles that could keep them from progressing to their sophomore year, thus increasing their retention, persistence, and graduation rates.

**Academic Advising for MARCH Participants**

The new academic advising model allows African American males to develop a personal and consistent relationship with members of the campus community. Project MARCH students share a common intellectual experience through their weekly first-year seminar course, which is taught by their academic coaches. The students also meet with their faculty regarding progress toward degree and career goals. This dual advising model provides a holistic approach to providing students with the knowledge and tools for academic and career planning as well as the use of campus resources. Furthermore, formal and informal academic and social interactions between the students and academic coaches foster trustworthy relationships.

To build rapport, Project MARCH academic coaches visit the LLC dormitory weekly to check-in and interact with the students. Moreover, students participate in meaningful engagement-focused student development and learning via two bimonthly programs: (1) “Let’s Talk About It” informal chat sessions, with topics such as handling emotional aspects of college life, reacting to academic and other stressors, and balancing college and personal life, and (2) the “Third Tuesday Engagement” formal workshops, with topics such as conflict resolution, goal setting, critical thinking, and learning styles. Finally, starting this fall, Project MARCH academic coaches and students will travel to the Dominican Republic for their first global learning experience.

During their second semester, Project MARCH students will engage in a shared-learning experience in a writing-intensive English course, and they will follow this with an African American studies course during their third semester. We believe that embedding these strategies and high-impact experiences within our preeminent advising model will raise student awareness of learning pathways, close retention gaps, and improve career outcomes for our African American male students.

**ASSESSING PREEMINENT ADVISING**

To support the Student Success Advising Continuum at NCA&T and its impact on African American male students, ongoing assessment is necessary to ensure that we are meeting our objectives and identifying areas for improvement. At the beginning of the academic year, freshmen take the ETS Success Navigator, an assessment designed to help colleges reach incoming students experiencing equity gaps and improve retention rates. The assessment provides student-intake information that will assist with predictive analytics for managing the freshman advising caseload. In subsequent meetings with advisees aimed at addressing the results, faculty advisors and academic coaches obtain information regarding the students’ academic goals, interests, strengths, and challenges, which ultimately helps students identify learning pathways that will yield the best results.

**CONCLUSION**

Academic advising is an integral component of student success. A shared advising model can be an effective way to achieve student success for all students, including marginalized groups. Preliminary findings show that the shared academic advising model has had a marked impact on student success.

The number of students placed on academic warning and academic probation has decreased 36.4 percent from the 2015–16 academic year to the 2016–17 academic year. Additionally, students participating in Project MARCH had positive results, with a 4 percent decrease in the number of participants placed on academic warning and academic probation. This high-touch, high-impact model of academic advising has garnered encouraging results. While we will continue to shape and enhance this shared advising model, we feel confident that we will increase African American male retention and graduation rates.
The Pomona College Quantitative Pathways Project

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Pomona College is committed to creating an educational environment that reflects equity and inclusive excellence. In recent years, an important part of that effort has been devoted to creating a more diverse student body, resulting in dramatic growth in the percentages of traditionally underrepresented, first-generation, and low-income students. The percentage of students from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups grew from 19 percent of the incoming class in 2007 to 24 percent in 2016; the 2016 entering class included 45 percent students of color overall (including all domestic underrepresented minorities and multiracial students). During this same time, the proportion of first-generation students increased from 11 percent to nearly 18 percent of the incoming class.

Far from being satisfied with this positive trend, we realized that the larger challenge was not just recruiting exceptional individuals to campus but creating a culture in which the transformative experiences that our institution offers are accessible to all students. In other words, we needed to examine the culture of the institution and promote change where it was needed.

**FOCUSBING ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT GAPS**
The Pomona Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence project team’s first steps involved identifying areas of inequity in the college and then formulating strategies to address them. Pomona College’s graduation rates rank among the highest in the nation; for the 2010 cohort, six-year rates were at or above 95 percent for all domestic student groups. Yet data on student performance and persistence identified achievement gaps for certain groups of students. Notably, most of the inequities identified were within quantitatively focused majors like the sciences. Data showed that many incoming first-year students who had indicated an interest in a quantitatively focused major and who struggled through the introductory courses eventually moved to a different major.

Data showed that many incoming first-year students who had indicated an interest in a quantitatively focused major and who struggled through the introductory courses eventually moved to a different major. A pilot program led by a joint effort from student and academic affairs, called the Pomona Science Scholars, featured a tailored cohort-only section of Introductory Biology. This began in 2013 with the goal of alleviating some of these inequities, and the preliminary evidence is that this program has been successful in enhancing student...
progression in biology and decreasing the achievement gaps.

Our campus action plan is focused on expanding what we have learned from the Pomona Science Scholars experience into other quantitative fields where student achievement gaps are also persistent: chemistry and economics. The first stage of the research project consisted of understanding differences in quantitative literacy. As a small liberal arts college, many of our courses have only a single section. But the introductory courses in economics and chemistry (Principles of Macroeconomics and General Chemistry) are very popular and have multiple sections every semester. Our choice of Principles of Macroeconomics and General Chemistry was also a strategic one, because more than 70 percent of all students take at least one of these courses, and performance gaps by race/ethnicity have been evident over time. By focusing on these two courses, we can gather data on a substantial portion of our first-year students and begin to formulate strategies for generating equitable outcomes within those quantitative-based majors.

The campus action plan involved the formulation of shared questions and evaluation rubrics that would allow us to examine final examination achievement for first-generation students, traditionally underrepresented students, and other students in introductory chemistry and economics courses. This project has led to focused, coordinated work on the persistence and success of first-generation, Black, and Latino/a students who are interested in majoring in STEM and other quantitative fields at Pomona. Besides documenting differences in quantitative literacy in introductory courses, the project addresses equity by assessing the capacity of academic cohorts and student support strategies. Preliminary data show better persistence by underrepresented minority students in STEM cohorts, and early innovations in introductory course design show strong promise in closing equity gaps. Additional data will allow us to implement an approach to directly assess quantitative reasoning, develop models for scaling up student support strategies within STEM, and experiment with cohort approaches in other areas of the curriculum.

Pomona is committed to equity-minded assessment that can carefully inform our next steps as we scale up these efforts (Bensimon and Malcom 2012). These assessments, while still in various stages of implementation, so far have yielded powerful insights about the design of small-section introductory courses and the integration of cocurricular support mechanisms. Through iterative stages of innovation and assessment, Pomona has begun to organize around several promising practices that include an emphasis on interactive lecture and group learning; weekly, mandatory cohort meetings that integrate high-touch advising around “doing college”; and direct engagement by faculty and academic advisors in managing potential stereotype risks and minimizing their impact on students as they navigate STEM at a highly selective institution like Pomona.

**PROMISING SIGNS OF PROGRESS**

During this work, we have seen promising signs of progress. We are encouraged by a dramatic reduction in performance gaps in a key introductory genetics course, the locus of the Pomona Science Scholars program and targeted pedagogical change in recent years. In addition, the proportion of students persisting through fourth semester STEM has improved by almost 20 percent for first-generation students since 2013, and persistence rates have gone up for Black and Latino/a students participating in STEM cohorts. So far, 81 percent of Black cohort students have persisted in STEM through four semesters, compared to 71 percent of Black students not in a cohort; the comparable figures for Latino/a students are 91 percent (in a cohort) and 71 percent (not in a cohort). These successes give us hope for implementing similar pedagogical changes in economics and chemistry. Moreover, in addition to the data from Pomona College’s participation in the *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence* project, we are seeing changes in the college’s culture. Individual faculty members in economics and chemistry became more knowledgeable about issues of equity, and they are committed to working to improve student success.

These trends, though promising, are still very preliminary, and much work lies ahead of us to understand and replicate them. In the meantime, we have gained valuable insights about mobilizing change on our campus, including the importance of faculty-led collaboration supported by equity-minded assessment and the need to attend to campus structures and routines that support this collaboration. Our participation in the *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence* project dedicated time and space for faculty to convene and reflect on course data from an equity perspective and design common assessments to support their future work. Moving forward, our challenge will be to ensure that the preliminary gains we’ve seen so far can be implemented consistently across varying contexts (different courses and instructors, an evolving landscape for campus climate, etc.) and that mechanisms for faculty collaboration are carefully nurtured and sustained.

**REFERENCE**

Wright College’s Equity Initiative: Moving from Implicit to Explicit

Luz-Maritza Cordero, Associate Professor, Psychology and Addiction Studies, Wilbur Wright College
Maureen Fitzpatrick, Associate Dean of Instruction, Wilbur Wright College
Janet Knapp-Caporale, Associate Professor, English, Wilbur Wright College
Iris Millan, Community Affairs Liaison, Wilbur Wright College
Nicole Reaves, Vice President, Academic Affairs, Wilbur Wright College

Wilbur Wright College, which serves more than 20,000 total students annually, is the largest of the City Colleges of Chicago. As a federally designated Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI), Wright College’s student body reflects the evolving demographic shifts from predominantly white ethnic communities on Chicago’s Northwest side (where Wright is located) to a growing majority of first-generation Latino students. Wright College was one of thirteen colleges selected in 2015 by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) to create a campus action plan as part of the Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence project. The launch of the campus action plan, which we call the Wright Equity Initiative, required the college community to move away from an implicit approach based on the idea that “a rising tide lifts all boats” to an explicit, race-conscious equity framework.

TALKING ABOUT RACE

The Wright Equity Initiative is rooted in the school’s identity as an HSI, and frank conversations about race relations have taken place on campus and in the community. Although some of these conversations were challenging and uncomfortable, they provided a foundation to move thoughtfully toward reflecting on cultural competencies and analyses of student performance. The disaggregation of student data by race was also central to the project. Chicago has a long history of racial segregation that permeates the identities of neighborhoods and institutions, and college stakeholders—faculty, administrators, staff, and students—engaged in direct conversations about racial segregation and white privilege. The dialogue enabled many stakeholders in the college community to openly discuss the challenges faced by many of Wright’s students of color and the need for thoughtful and data-driven practices to improve student success.

EQUITY VERSUS EQUALITY

Estela Mara Bensimon from the University of Southern California’s Center for Urban Education presented at AAC&U’s first convening of teams from the thirteen colleges in the Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence project. The simple graphic that she included in her presentation served as a valuable tool for Wright College to think about equity versus equality. The image has been used widely throughout the college, from intimate roundtable conversations to college-wide presentations. The Equity Steering Committee initially experienced defensiveness and resistance to this work. However, rooting conversations in the college’s HSI identity has helped to keep the dialogue student-centered and tied to core institutional goals. The image has helped to focus conversations on the college’s core goal of supporting student success and has encouraged investigation into what obstacles may be obstructing student pathways. The work and time building consensus around equity versus equality have been major change agents at the college.

COMPOSITION OF THE STEERING COMMITTEE

The relational work of the steering committee deserves much of the credit for the Wright Equity Initiative’s initial success. Cochaired by the vice president of academic affairs and an associate professor of
psychology, this joint leadership between an administrator and faculty member has helped this work move effectively through the different institutional and cultural groupings of the college. The five-member steering committee also included the associate dean of Wright College Humboldt Park, an associate professor of English, and the community affairs liaison. The steering committee was charged with leading communication efforts, particularly integrating the Wright Equity Initiative into work already underway at the college. The Wright Equity Initiative advanced the importance of examining strategies through an “equity lens” and created an intentional space for dialogue among faculty, administrators, staff, and students on the college’s identity as an HSI.

**DISAGGREGATING THE DATA**
Disaggregating student data by race was an early goal of this work. Prior to the initiative, Wright College had not disaggregated data by race to examine levels of participation and success for students of color in college courses and high-impact practices. The repeated and reinforced discussions on equity versus equality positioned the steering committee to share disaggregated student data by race and engage in tough conversations with academic department chairs and administrators about equity gaps in retention and completion for students of color. Wright’s Research and Planning team has created a standardized report template within the college’s OpenBook system—a business intelligence platform—to facilitate an institutional data tracking system. With baseline disaggregated data, Wright College is now positioned to close gaps through the improved use and assessment of high-impact practices.

**INTENTIONALITY OF THE DESIGN**
The Wright Equity Initiative goals outlined ambitious yet achievable targets for this work through tying outcomes to college-wide goals and the City Colleges of Chicago’s district-wide key performance indicators. Given the limited resources available and the multitude of initiatives at the college, the committee intentionally designed the work in tandem to college-wide efforts already underway. Wright College already acted as the hub of information technology (IT) pathways as part of the City Colleges of Chicago’s College to Careers (C2C) initiative. Studying the C2C IT pathways through an “equity lens” was particularly beneficial, as it highlighted the need for intentional IT recruitment efforts to bring students of color into the pathway. Additionally, an initial examination of Wright data showed a disparity in success in developmental math for Latino students compared to white students. The math faculty designed cocurricular courses to provide students with wraparound support, which has resulted in initial substantial impacts on student completion rates. Intentional embedding of the equity work allowed it to be owned college-wide, rather than as a finite boutique initiative.

**SUSTAINABILITY AND SCALABILITY**
The resources allocated by AAC&U’s three-year project grant have rippled through Wright by grounding this work in the human resources and relational networks of the college. Sustainability and scalability are the emphases for the upcoming year, particularly with the continued challenges ahead caused by Illinois’s fiscal state. Wright College is exploring ways of rooting equity in the college’s foundational statements and values. The academic planning committee has identified five core values of Wright College: (1) diversity, equity, and inclusion; (2) academic quality; (3) community; (4) student-centered; and (5) innovation. These core values are driving the academic planning underway throughout the college community. The steering committee is eager to support the leadership and initiatives of fellow faculty and administrators to multiply this work within their respective departments. The current climate in Chicago, Illinois, and our country requires the college to be explicit in our unabashed support of our students of color, particularly in implementing institutional practices and policies supporting the most vulnerable students.
Students Thrive When Institutions Commit to Equity and Excellence

Lorenzo Esters, Vice President, Philanthropy, Strada Education Network

Across the country, a cohort of thirteen institutions are working toward improving student success by focusing on their commitment to equity and excellence for all students, particularly low-income, first-generation, adult, and minority students. These institutions are part of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U)’s three-year project, Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence: Campus-Based Strategies for Student Success.

Strada Education Network, formerly USA Funds, is proud to support this work, as we believe it will lead to more students thriving in college, completing their degree, and finding a fulfilling career. With additional funding and assistance from the Great Lakes Higher Education Corporation & Affiliates, the goal of these thirteen institutions is to address their equity gaps by raising student awareness and understanding of guided learning pathways. These guided pathways are intended to better prepare students for what they will experience upon graduation when they enter the workforce and their chosen career field.

The success of this project will be seen in three ways: increased course completion, retention, and graduation rates for their target student populations; increased achievement of learning outcomes for underserved students using direct assessment methods; and increased student understanding of guided learning pathways that incorporate workforce preparation and engaged citizenship practices.

Over the last year, the participating institutions have set progression metrics to mark their success in providing more equitable education that is relevant to careers for all students.

While it may take several years to see the full influence of this work on students, participating institutions have already learned lessons that can benefit all colleges and universities. The first major takeaway for those interested in increasing their commitment to equity is that faculty understanding and support is critical to advancing this work. Constant communication and professional development opportunities are essential to the success of this initiative and any that another institution seeks to progress. Faculty need professional development in multiple ways, most notably to improve their cultural competence in working with students from diverse backgrounds and to understand how to use data effectively so that they can tailor it to the individual student.

And even more important than faculty buy-in is the commitment of leadership and administrators. There is no shortage of major initiatives that postsecondary institutions face each year, and many campuses face initiative fatigue. That’s why it is vital that college presidents and administrators make this work a priority, communicate its importance through their strategic plan, and participate in the development of staff and faculty from start to finish.

These lessons are being applied to the participating institutions now, and we will see next year how better communication, prioritization, and professional development affect the ability of these institutions to advance their commitment to equity and excellence for all students.

We at Strada Education are eager to see this work continue and hope that other AAC&U institutions will join the efforts of these thirteen pioneers. The average college student today comes from a diverse background, often returns to postsecondary education after working, or may be a first-generation student. We must work with these students to help them overcome barriers and succeed. When we commit to equitable education and excellence for all, more students will complete with a purpose and achieve a fulfilling career and life.
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. Its mission is to reinforce the collective commitment to liberal education and inclusive excellence at both the national and local levels, and to help individual institutions keep the quality of student learning at the core of their work as they evolve to meet new economic and social challenges.

Information about AAC&U membership, programs, and publications can be found at www.aacu.org.

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**BECOMING A STUDENT-READY COLLEGE: A NEW CULTURE OF LEADERSHIP FOR STUDENT SUCCESS**

PUBLISHED BY JOSSEY-BASS IN PARTNERSHIP WITH AAC&U

By prompting readers to ask what their institutions can do to support incoming students, *Becoming a Student-Ready College* shifts the conversation about student success from a focus on student preparedness to a focus on institutional preparedness. The book’s co-authors include AAC&U Vice President for Diversity, Equity, and Student Success Tia Brown McNair and AAC&U Senior Scholar Susan Albertine, writing with Michelle Asha Cooper of the Institute for Higher Education Policy, Nicole McDonald of Lumina Foundation, and Thomas Major, Jr. of Lumina Foundation.