

What is equity?

*In education, the term **equity** refers to the principle of fairness. While it is often used interchangeably with the related principle of equality, equity encompasses a wide variety of educational models, programs, and strategies that may be considered fair, but not necessarily equal. It has been said that “equity is the process; equality is the outcome,” given that equity—what is fair and just—may not, in the process of educating students, reflect strict equality—what is applied, allocated, or distributed equally. – edglossary.org*

How is equity different than equality?

To understand equity is to understand power and the ways in which power operates throughout society.

Power may feel like an intimidating subject, but it need not be. Understanding power is really about seeing how privilege and disadvantage operate throughout society and, therefore, how these operations affect individuals and groups of people over time. Concepts like privilege and disadvantage emphasize structural and institutional patterns that, when examined from a macro level, position individuals and groups of people in particular advantageous and/or disadvantageous ways throughout society. In the context of community college practice, privilege and disadvantage can be seen in the ways that students interact with and are positioned by the resources made available to them: financial aid policies, academic advising practices, student support services, and everyday interactions with college administrators, faculty, and staff, among other resources. – Castro, 2015

But I already treat everyone equally already, why isn't that good enough?

Plainly stated, equity in higher education is the idea that students from historically and contemporarily marginalized and minoritized communities have access to what they need in order to be successful. This is not a radical proposition and in the abstract, it is probably something with which we can all agree. Providing students with what they need in order to be successful is not simply reasonable, it's our job. – Castro, 2015

New York has one of the most racially and ethnically diversified populations in the nation, and continually undergoes significant demographic change. It is also an economically diverse state, with sweeping differences in the socio-economic profiles of its numerous counties. These are challenges to achieving an economically just society and to the formation of a common national civic culture. However, these vexing characteristics of our society can be mitigated by providing accessible, affordable, quality public higher education to the people of New York State.

Educational equity, particularly enhanced access for the economically disadvantaged populations of the state must be a SUNY priority. While SUNY's educational mission cannot be confined to work force development, it has a special responsibility to provide the residents of New York an educational experience that empowers them with the requisite competences and skills so that they may achieve their potential. Countless numbers of studies document that education is the single best avenue to escape poverty. Historically public higher education has

played an important role in leveling the economic playing field and creating new opportunities for upward social mobility for the economically disadvantaged. It is incumbent on SUNY to recommit to this promise to provide an affordable and quality education that is the basis for upward social mobility for its residents and citizens. – SUNY Office of Diversity and Educational Opportunity, 2007

Why can't we judge our students based on merit of their performance?

In one company study, Castilla examined almost 9,000 employees who worked as support-staff at a large service-sector company. The company was committed to diversity and had implemented a merit-driven compensation system intended to reward high-level performance and to reward all employees equitably.

But Castilla's analysis revealed some very non-meritocratic outcomes. Women, ethnic minorities, and non-U.S.-born employees received a smaller increase in compensation compared with white men, despite holding the same jobs, working in the same units, having the same supervisors, the same human capital, and importantly, receiving the same performance score. Despite stating that "performance is the primary bases for all salary increases," the reality was that women, minorities, and those born outside the U.S. needed "to work harder and obtain higher performance scores in order to receive similar salary increases to white men." – Cooper, 2015

Why is using data important?

Imagine harnessing data to ensure student learning and success across the curriculum. For example, if we know how students' performance in a gateway math course affects their performance in the next math course or a chemistry course in their major, we can help ensure that course content, course sequences, and even course schedules are better aligned. Better yet, if we know how their performance in that math course affects the likelihood that they'll graduate on time, we can identify appropriate supports and when best to deliver them.

Or imagine gleaning insights about what really facilitates equitable student success. If we knew the combinations of academic and student services that help narrow success gaps for students of color, low-income students, and first-generation-college students, we could ensure that faculty, academic advisers, and residence-hall directors align their efforts and allocate their finite resources accordingly.

And imagine being better able to tell our students' success stories to policy makers and the public. We know that student success isn't adequately captured by graduation rates. But if we knew the post-college outcomes of our students — broken down by academic program and by certain student characteristics — we could better articulate the value of a college education. - Cubarrubia, 2019

But isn't the data imperfect? Or That's not what I see in my classroom.

Academics may be highly vulnerable to succumbing to biases and blind spots. Our entire community might be made up of highly intelligent, but irredeemably wrongheaded, higher ed insiders. Why might academics be susceptible to the intelligence trap? Robson explores how the relationship between wisdom and intelligence is, at best, tenuous. Someone with a high IQ might be more likely to develop a worldview that is as skewed by misinformation, or self-interest, than individuals who test at the IQ mean. Those with high measured intelligence, however, may disproportionately excel at coming up with arguments and evidence to support their blinkered views.

One of the biases that Robson discusses, and which academics may be especially susceptible, includes that of earned dogmatism. Anyone with a PhD is at particular risk for this bias, in which we believe that our credentials give us the right to claim expertise across a range of subjects. What Robson advocates for is that we embrace the new discipline of evidence-based wisdom and that we approach the work of formulating our beliefs with openness and humility. – Kim, 2019

Even though the data may not be perfect in terms of what it can tell us, this is the current operating reality of the institution and what we have to work with. Part of the planning process will be focused on helping the institution to synchronize its process of gathering data and how that data is packaged, presented and used in assessment, planning and evaluation. – *Equity-Driven Systems Change Model*

Why use an equity scorecard?

Dashboards as 'dumb' reporting and scorecards as 'intelligent' reporting: Dashboards do not communicate why something matters, why someone should care about the reported measure or what the impact may be if an undesirable declining measure continues. In short, dashboards report what you can measure...scorecards report what you should measure.

Scorecards chart progress toward strategic objectives. A scorecard displays periodic snapshots of performance associated with an organization's strategic objectives and plans. It measures organizational activity at a summary level against pre-defined targets to see if performance is within acceptable ranges. Its selection of strategic objectives or KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) helps executives communicate strategy to employees and focuses users on the highest priority projects, initiatives, actions and tasks required to execute plans. The adjective "key" differentiates strategic objectives or KPIs from the PIs (Performance Indicators) reported in dashboards. Scorecard KPIs ideally should be derived from a strategy map rather than just a list of important measures that executives have requested.

Dashboards monitor and measure processes. A dashboard, on the other hand, is operational and reports information typically more frequently than scorecards and usually with measures. Each dashboard measure is reported with little regard to its relationship to other dashboard

measures. Dashboard measures do not directly reflect the context of strategic objectives. – CREDO - 2014

But the students are just not prepared to be in college.

Research suggests that across a variety of approaches, accelerated developmental education is associated with increased enrollment in and completion of gatekeeper math and English. It also suggests that students who take accelerated developmental courses typically perform about as well in gatekeeper courses as their non-accelerated peers. In some cases, acceleration may also provide a boost to students' overall college-level credit accumulation, furthering their progress along the path to a degree. The apparent benefits of acceleration are likely due at least in part to the reduced number of exit points and reduced time to complete remedial requirements. – Community College Research Center, 2014

This just means you want to me to lower the bar in my class.

College students aren't blank slates. They have spent years acquiring an excellent education, or a crummy one. They have been encouraged by the adults in their lives, or they have been undermined. Long before they arrive on campus, they have the assurance that the world is theirs for the taking, or the knowledge that their intelligence and worth will be questioned at every turn because of where they come from or what their parents do or the color of their skin.

So perhaps another professor might have chalked up the racial gaps in Biology 101 to these existing, and seemingly inevitable, inequities. But Hogan saw it differently. These gaps, she thought, were her problem. Inequality has plenty of time to fester in the 18 years or so it takes to get to college. But the way undergraduates are usually taught, Hogan is now convinced, makes it even worse.

In a typical college course, students hear dozens of lectures. They might be assigned hundreds of pages of reading. Then they're asked to demonstrate their understanding of what all of that information adds up to in a handful of high-stakes papers or exams. How they should prepare for those papers or tests is a matter usually left to the student. The arrangement works well for those whose high schools provided strong preparation or who are comfortable asking professors for help when they need it — traits that have as much to do with privilege as anything else. Students without those advantages, though, can flounder — not because they can't do the work, but because no one has taught them how to navigate the system.

Inclusive teaching has two main components: putting more structure into a course, giving clear instructions so that all students know what to do before, during, and after class; and thoughtfully facilitating class discussion, so that everyone can participate.

While closing achievement gaps motivated Hogan to change how she teaches, she rarely refers to those disparities when communicating with her students. One part of her syllabus comes the closest: "This course is designed to equalize your readiness before class — while you may take several hours reading and preparing, another student may need less time. Yet when you get to

class, your effort will pay off as we practice these concepts together and you gain confidence in your ability!"

Seeing the results from Hogan's course might persuade some professors to embrace inclusive teaching. But she isn't banking on it. Instead, she's working to give her colleagues at Chapel Hill better information about what's happening in their own classrooms. – Supiano, 2018

References and Other Resources

The Glossary of Education Reform. - <https://www.edglossary.org/equity/>

Addressing the Conceptual Challenges of Equity Work: A Blueprint for Getting Started. Erin L. Castro. NEW DIRECTIONS FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGES, no. 172, Winter 2015, Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

ACCESS, EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE AND THE PUBLIC UNIVERSITY. State University of New York, Office of Diversity and Educational Equity. November 20, 2007. Available Online at <https://system.suny.edu/media/suny/content-assets/documents/faculty-senate/diversity/DivAccessEquityExcellence.pdf>

The False Promise of Meritocracy. Marianne Cooper. The Atlantic, 2015. Available online at <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/12/meritocracy/418074/>

We All Need to Be Data People. Archie Cubarrubia. The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2019. Available online at <https://www.chronicle.com/article/We-All-Need-to-Be-Data-People/247306>

Academics and the "Intelligence Trap." Joshua Kim. Inside Higher Education, 2019. Available online at <https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/technology-and-learning/academics-and-intelligence-trap>

Dashboards Vs. Scorecards for Data Tracking. CREDO Higher Ed, 2014. Available online at <https://www.credohighered.com/blog/2014/6/30/dashboards-vs.-scorecards-for-data-tracking>

What We Know About Accelerated Developmental Education. Community College Research Center, 2014. Available online at <https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/accelerated-developmental-education.pdf>

Traditional Teaching May Deepen Inequality. Can a Different Approach Fix It? Beckie Supiano. The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2018. Available online at <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Traditional-Teaching-May/243339/>

I This chapter provides an introduction to and description of educational equity. It outlines common traps to avoid when engaging equity-oriented practices in community college contexts.

Addressing the Conceptual Challenges of Equity Work: A Blueprint for Getting Started

Erin L. Castro

What is equity? I want to begin this chapter by asking what it means to think about equity in a particularly difficult social moment, one of widening economic inequality and social fracture. A seemingly obvious question, but perhaps this is why it begs further attention. Many of us routinely use the word equity, participate in and facilitate programs that aim to increase equity, and work for institutions that espouse commitments to equity. But what does equity really mean? And, conversely, what might it mean to think about equity? I am interested in how we think about equity and how this thinking influences practice: how it influences our perceptions of students, our interactions with students, and the programs we design to help facilitate their success.

Although it is rather easy to agree with broad rhetorical commitments to a more just and equitable society, the barriers to *practicing* equity are many. In fact, equity-oriented practices are difficult to engage because of a complex system of sociopolitical and economic relations. Thus, walking the walk, so to speak, requires a thoughtful understanding of how community colleges are situated within a larger social landscape and accordingly, how community college practice affects the scope of opportunities made available to students on campus. In their latest book, Dowd and Bensimon (2015) contend that equity can be thought of as a standard. Equity as a standard can then be used in community college practice to judge “whether a state of affairs is just or unjust” (p. 9). Thinking about equity as a standard is useful because it surfaces important considerations related to ideas of fairness. What do we believe that people deserve, and why? In the context of community college practice, what do we believe that our students deserve, and why?

Although our individual answers may slightly differ, I believe that we all want students to be successful and we want them to be provided with the tools and resources to thrive. We know, however, that not all students—or potential students—are provided with what they need in order to realize their full potential and this is really at the heart of equity. What I'd like to propose in this first chapter is that it is not only important for us to design programming around equity but also to think deeply about what equity means, what it might look like, and what it might feel like on community college campuses. Practice is greatly influenced by the way we think about equity and what we think equity means. Because equity is a contextually dependent construct, how we consider that context—that is, where we decide to look and what we decide to see—greatly matters. In fact, I might go so far as to say that vision is the most important element of engaging equity-oriented practice: to see our current circumstances for what they are and then to envision a reality-based path toward equitable change. Accordingly, my purpose in this chapter is to focus on vision and in so doing, encourage a rethinking of commonplace approaches, attitudes, and assumptions toward persistent challenges of disparity in community college spaces and to outline common pitfalls in attempting equity work.

What Is Equity (and What Is It Not)?

Popular rhetoric around difference in U.S. higher education routinely includes buzzwords such as “diversity” and “inclusion,” but these terms are not synonymous with equity. Issues of diversity and inclusion are important concepts to understand, to be certain, but they are not the same thing as understanding equity. To understand equity is to understand power and the ways in which power operates throughout society.

Power may feel like an intimidating subject, but it need not be. Understanding power is really about seeing how privilege and disadvantage operate throughout society and, therefore, how these operations affect individuals and groups of people over time. Concepts like privilege and disadvantage emphasize structural and institutional patterns that, when examined from a macro level, position individuals and groups of people in particular advantageous and/or disadvantageous ways throughout society. In the context of community college practice, privilege and disadvantage can be seen in the ways that students interact with and are positioned by the resources made available to them: financial aid policies, academic advising practices, student support services, and everyday interactions with college administrators, faculty, and staff, among other resources.

Plainly stated, equity in higher education is the idea that students from historically and contemporarily marginalized and minoritized communities have access to what they need in order to be successful. This is not a radical proposition and in the abstract, it is probably something with which we can all agree. Providing students with what they need in order to be successful

is not simply reasonable, it's our job. However, understanding equity as a function of power can quickly become complicated; what if we aren't quite sure what students need? How do we know if we are adequately providing students with what they need? Because some students' needs are different from others', is it fair to give different kinds of resources to different groups of students?

The answers to these questions are varied, but asking them is an important step in the process of engaging equity-oriented practices in community colleges. The unfortunate reality is that we do not spend enough time asking these kinds of questions and as a result, we may not have the opportunity to think deeply about how to achieve equity. Accordingly, our attempts to appropriately address disparities in student access, experience, and outcomes may be misguided.

Because equity is about power, to engage equity-oriented practices in community college contexts means to work toward changing powerful systems: systemic practices, regulations, norms, and habits of the institution. This is difficult work, at least in part, because it can be hard for the individuals performing habits and norms to see them. In order for policy and programming to be equity oriented, they need to be aimed at transforming permanent institutional assumptions and practices that privilege some student groups and not others. An emphasis on diversity or inclusion falls short of this aim.

Commitments to diversity or inclusion do not require a critical attention to power in the same way as equity. For example, we can appeal to notions of diversity and never disrupt the practices that make it difficult for lower income students to persist. Or, we can commit to notions of inclusivity without ever addressing hostile campus climates for students of Color. Or, we can celebrate difference through ceremonial gatherings and special weeks dedicated to disenfranchised groups without adequately addressing deeply held assumptions about particular student communities, including undocumented students; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer (LGBTQ+) students; or pregnant and parenting students; among others. Certainly, these kinds of events serve a purpose on campus and I am not arguing that we need to eliminate them, but we need to recognize them for what they are and what they do, as well as where they fall short.

I would like for us to move us away from ideas of diversity and inclusion, not because they do not matter, but because they are simply not enough to address entrenched disparity in higher education. We need a politics of equity in community college practice that moves beyond simply increasing numerical representation of underrepresented groups or celebrating difference, because the mere presence of difference does not equal equity. Normative structural and institutional patterns that place underrepresented students in disadvantaged positions must be addressed, and the only way to do this is to see them for what they are and understand how they operate. Certainly numerical representation is one aspect of this

work, but creating the capacity to successfully and humanely serve and support growing numbers of underrepresented students should be the ultimate institutional goal.

Challenges in Doing Equity Work

There are a number of challenges in transforming community college spaces to become more equitable. In what follows, I focus on three broad challenges that are common throughout higher education in general, as well as community college practice. My fundamental assumption in providing the following challenges is that equity is about power. Many of the following examples may alleviate short-term issues; however, they collectively neglect to address structural conditions that perpetuate inequity. The following dispositions all function to alleviate the immediate, which is surely an important component of working toward equity but not enough to engage transformational change. Falling into any of the following thinking patterns ultimately works to sustain inequity in the long term because the following habits do not disrupt the root causes of inequity: unfair distributions of power.

Focusing on the Student Instead of the Institution. Throughout higher education there exists a commonsensical culture as it relates to addressing disparity. If a group of students is not performing well in developmental reading courses, for example, the popular response is to target individual students for academic intervention programming. If women are underrepresented in advanced math courses, the likely response is to recruit more women into such programs. Likewise, if African-American students are not persisting and completing at the same rates as their White peers, then a program is typically designed to assist individual African-American students in completing. The institutional responses to student failure rates, issues of racialized academic achievement, or gendered representation overwhelmingly privilege intervention programming aimed at assisting individual students.

Although targeting individual student communities is perhaps one component of working toward equity, doing so is only a partial fix to a more complex problem. It makes sense to target individual student communities only if individual students are the problem. What I've tried to point out thus far is that individual student communities are not the problem, but rather the way we tend to think about equity is the problem. As practitioners, we need to look in different directions in order to see more complex problems and imagine more appropriate solutions. In essence, we need to relearn where to look and what to see.

Because intervention programs aimed at individuals tend only to scratch the surface of the deeper work that needs to be done, important examinations of institutional thinking and practice may not occur. Programs that target individual students can be thought of as surface-level

programming because they do not interrupt more permanent institutional practices. In fact, surface-level programming may *assist* in the maintenance of inequitable structures because such programming fails to disrupt normative routines and processes that perpetually position individual students as “in need” of assistance. The important point of consideration here is this: who is being blamed for educational neglect (popularly known as “underpreparation”) and consequently targeted for intervention programming? If individual students rather than institutional structures (e.g., policies, practices, and people) are the focus, then even well-intended intervention programming may contribute to the maintenance of inequity.

Thinking About Students From a Deficit Perspective. One of the most common ways that underrepresented students are conceptualized in postsecondary education is through a deficit lens. There is a deeply rooted history in the United States related to deficit framing of underrepresented students in higher education, particularly students of Color, women, and lower income students. Valencia (2010) refers to the practice of deficit framing in education as educational deficit thinking, which has negative consequences for students and is incongruent with equity-oriented practices.

Educational deficit thinking occurs when institutions, through their policies, practices, language, and thinking, blame individual students for what they perceivably lack. Popular examples include referring to students as “at risk” for failure or labeling students as “underprepared” (Castro, 2014). The problem with locating failure within individual students is that it lets off the hook other institutional and systemic factors such as inadequate programming at the postsecondary level, underresourced secondary schools, and underdeveloped viable career pathways. When individual students are blamed for not having access to academic preparedness and then consequently targeted for intervention programming in college, they become problems to be fixed.

The error in this perspective is that it fails to account for *why* students may arrive on community college campuses with disparate access to sufficient academic preparation. Without attention toward the structural conditions that position students in disadvantaged ways, programming will always be necessary to assist individual students because it is not aimed at challenging the conditions that contribute to their disadvantage. Programs that exist to assist academically “underprepared” students or those who are “at risk” for failure make explicit the goals of the program: change the student to align with the standards of the institution. Certainly, we want students academically proficient and positioned to perform well academically, but intervention programs that are designed to target students’ labeled deficiencies are limited in their ability to turn around and ask the same questions of the institution: How and in what ways is the institution underprepared to successfully serve students? In what ways is the institution “at risk” for failing students?

Neglecting Institutional Climate. A consequence of the previous two challenges is that the institutional environment is neglected when energy is narrowly targeted toward individual students. It is important to think about the larger campus environment into which underrepresented and underserved students are recruited, and this includes both the academic and social spaces that they will navigate. Campus climate (Hurtado, 1992; Hurtado & Ruiz, 2012) is a useful construct to consider when thinking about equity.

Campus climate brings together the social and institutional contexts that affect the ways that students experience colleges and universities. Oftentimes, colleges are unaware of how underrepresented students experience campus and collegiate environments. As a result, well-intended practitioners may be recruiting underrepresented students into hostile or unhealthy environments where students encounter bias, discrimination, and/or feelings of exclusion. It is important to consider how underrepresented students may experience the institution as members of a minoritized group. Students interact with a number of individuals who work for the institution through normative processes, such as registering for classes, meeting with an advisor, attending classes, and interacting in social spaces. It is the responsibility of the institution to ensure that the individuals representing the college are committed to equity and that routine practices—including habits, dispositions, norms, and regulations—reflect this commitment.

Focusing on equitable student outcomes (see Felix et al., Chapter 3) requires that practitioners are attentive to the environment into which they are welcoming underrepresented and traditionally undervalued student communities. Increasing equitable outcomes for students means that we also want to know about students' experiences and interactions with faculty, staff, administrators, and peers on campus or in an online classroom environment. Faculty, staff, and administrators need continual education and new knowledge to help support the success of students who may experience the world and the institution differently than they do. As Rodriguez points out in this volume, practitioners need to know that equity is an institutional value and they should be given the knowledge and resources to work toward this goal. Understanding how underrepresented students experience the climate of the institution is an important place to begin this work.

Relearning Where to Look and What to See

There can never be a single story, there are only ways of seeing.

Arundhati Roy (2002)

The challenges described here stem from a commonsensical and historically rooted culture in higher education as it relates to widening access for traditionally excluded communities. Although popular, these approaches are ineffective in addressing disparity in the long term. Part of our responsibility as practitioners, educators, and scholars is to recognize the work we need to do in order to transform institutions into spaces committed to equity. As I mentioned previously, this work begins by the way that we see things: where we choose to look and what we choose to see.

Felix et al. and Pickel and Bragg (this volume) each provide examples of shifting practitioners' gaze and questioning problematic assumptions. They provide examples and concrete tools to use in working through familiar ways of looking at problems toward more imaginative and bold approaches to justice. At the heart of their suggestions lie useful questions that can help in relearning where to look and avoiding some of the common thinking traps of doing equity work: Are individual students being blamed? Are problems being identified before knowing all of the information? Are issues of institutional climate being considered? These types of questions effectively remove the emphasis of equity away from an individual frame and position it as an institutional one, a key component of engaging equity work.

In the introduction I asked what it might mean to think about equity because thinking about equity beyond program design should push us to (re)consider practice. We may be encouraged to recognize how we see the world and, perhaps, to think about how others might see it, too. At the very least, I believe thinking about equity encourages us to examine concepts like privilege and disadvantage and why some individuals have access to opportunities and others do not. Reflecting upon these questions is the necessary groundwork for equity-oriented practices.

When we desire a more fair and balanced society, one where resources are more equitably distributed and accessible to those with the least economic and political power, we appeal to a fundamental ideal: justice. When we imagine what it might be like to walk in someone else's shoes—to perhaps experience life in unfamiliar ways, we humanize the sociopolitical conditions that comprise the status quo, the very conditions to which we have become so accustomed, such as gross educational inequity along the lines of race and class throughout all levels of education.

Systemic structures, such as entrenched poverty or inequality of educational opportunity, are not insurmountable, but we must see them for what they are and recognize that they need not be permanent fixtures of our society. They can be transformed and community colleges play a crucial role in this transformation. But, because inequity quite literally surrounds us, working for a more just society can be an arduous undertaking. It is easy to become jaded or feel that what we do in everyday practice cannot possibly make a difference.

But it does.

Certainly, we cannot engage mass change overnight. But, we can do small things with conviction that ultimately make a difference at our respective institutions. This work can begin by recognizing how we see our students and their circumstances and asking, quite frankly, what we think they deserve.

Conclusion

We do not exist independently from one another, even if our world is organized in ways to make us believe otherwise. Once we accept this fact, we can engage our work with students with compassion instead of pity and understanding instead of judgment. We can see that we are not able to fix everything, but that we can work across coalitions of difference and use the power we do have to create change. As educators and practitioners, we must see ourselves as part of a larger picture and recognize that what we choose to do at our respective institutions is just as important as what we choose *not* to do. Our work matters not simply for those student communities who we want to assist in being successful but for all of us.

We must locate our work somewhere along the spectrum, where students have the individual agency to overcome great odds and where we, as equity-oriented practitioners, recognize and work against the very real structural obstacles that stand in their way. We need a more meaningful, long-lasting solution to systemic inequity in community college spaces, one that recognizes that the success of any equity-oriented program should ultimately be its own abolishment. The fact that we continue to need programming aimed at increasing equity means that we still have a lot of work to do.

I am inspired by the idea that a more fair and just world is possible. By positioning equity as a function of power, we can better see the origins of systemic inequity and understand their durability. We can then design more effective programming that gets at the source of the problem, not simply its all-too-familiar symptoms.

References

- Castro, E. L. (2014). "Underprepared" and "at-risk": Disrupting deficit discourses in undergraduate STEM recruitment and retention programming. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 51(4), 407–419.
- Dowd, A., & Bensimon, E. (2015). *Engaging the "race question": Accountability and equity in U.S. higher education*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Hurtado, S. (1992). The campus racial climate: Contexts of conflict. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 63(5), 539–569.

- Hurtado, S., & Ruiz, A. (2012). *The climate for underrepresented groups and diversity on campus* (Research Brief). Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA. Retrieved from <http://www.heri.ucla.edu/briefs/urmbriefreport.pdf>
- Roy, A. (2002). *Come September*. Lecture conducted from Santa Fe, NM.
- Valencia, R. (2010). *Dismantling contemporary deficit thinking: Educational thought and practice*. New York, NY: Routledge.

ERIN L. CASTRO is an assistant professor in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy at the University of Utah.

Equity Data Summit – School Data Discussion – Participant Guide

Focusing on Vulnerable Students

For the purposes of discussion, we define outcomes pre-graduation by rate of retention, course success, and persistence and post-graduation by looking at graduation rates, and rates of transfer to four-year institutions. For an equity-driven process, the data under review are those that show outcomes for the college's most vulnerable students, such as first-generation college-goers, low-income students, sex, and students of color, as compared to other student groups. Focusing on these students and developing strategies to better support them can lead to better outcomes for all students.

Vulnerable students often face extraordinary challenges in their academic careers due to a number of factors that practitioners at the institution may or may not be aware of. These factors may include financial barriers, lack of preparation, family obligations, limited expectations of educators about their capacity, and internalized stereotypes. Awareness of the challenges these students face and knowledge of best practices that can improve their success at community colleges can lead to the development of strategies to better serve these and all students.

Ground Rules for Discussion

- Speak from your own experience.
- Ask questions.
- Notice the amount you contribute to dialogue and the effect your words have on others.
- Help create space for everyone to share.
- Be willing to explore differences of experience and opinion.
- Make a commitment to your own and each other's development and learning.
- Respect confidentiality.
- Listen actively.
- Keep an open mind.
- Be passionate.
- Honor your own feelings and the feelings of others.
- Be honest.
- Stay at the table.

Principles of Culturally Responsive Practice

The principles below apply to all areas of our practice as educators, including: outreach; assessment; planning; team building; communications; interactions between and among faculty and staff; interactions with students (instruction and counseling); curriculum; and pedagogy. These principles can be used to engage in collective reflection and dialogue about how well the institution is doing in each area.

Knowledge and Understanding (including both content knowledge and self-knowledge)

1. We value success for all students as central to the goals of the institution and critical to sustaining healthy communities.
2. We have a strong and unwavering commitment to student success, especially for our most vulnerable students.
3. We believe that, given the right supports and opportunities, all students can succeed.
4. We actively work to know ourselves better, including cultural reference points, assumptions, biases, power, and areas for growth, and are committed to continual self-reflection on conscious and unconscious biases.

Equity Data Summit – School Data Discussion – Participant Guide

5. We value and understand the role of strong identity development (for administrators, faculty, staff, and students).
6. We work to build cross-cultural understanding over time with an ongoing commitment to continual growth.
7. We actively work to build our knowledge base and understanding of research on equity, critical pedagogy, and multicultural education, and the implications for our work as individuals and as an institution.
8. We actively work to build our knowledge base and understanding of history and structural inequality, the impacts of both on specific racial and other groups, and implications for our work as individuals, colleagues, and as an institution.

Culture and Context

1. We actively work to build awareness and knowledge of students' life circumstances—including their environments outside the classroom—their strengths, and their needs.
2. We actively work to build awareness and knowledge of the surrounding community in order to better understand students' day-to-day environments and the dynamics common in their lives, so that we can engage more meaningfully and effectively with students.

Professional Practice of Administrators, Faculty, and Staff

1. We consider and draw on the life circumstances and backgrounds of students in our policies and practices and in course curriculum and pedagogy.
2. We actively build knowledge of the strategies that work for different groups of students (e.g., students who have been alienated in their previous educational experiences).
3. We recognize and challenge inequity in all four levels of impact across the institution.
4. We work to heal the wounds of social distress, exclusion, and discrimination through our policies and practices, and through course curriculum and pedagogy.
5. We work to keep culture at the center of all we do, and actively talk about the relationship between culture, equity, and student success, even when it is uncomfortable.
6. We use comprehensive observation protocols to assess facilities, space, materials, instruction, interactions, etc.
7. We regularly use disaggregated data to determine the inequities across different student groups in retention, success, persistence, and completion.
8. We actively work to develop and implement strategies to address inequities we find in our disaggregated data.
9. We continually examine the frequency and effectiveness of personal interactions with students, how curriculum reflects the lives of students, areas for growth, etc.

Competencies for Students

1. We are committed to ensuring that all students master traditional academic skills.
2. We actively teach and build our students' cultural responsiveness/cultural competency skills, including knowledge and appreciation of one's own cultures and that of others, self-efficacy, and socio-emotional skills.
3. We actively teach and build our students' critical reflection and change agency skills so that they can better benefit their communities.

Equity Data Summit – School Data Discussion – Participant Guide

Sample Program:							
Proposed 1 st Semester Courses			Actual 1 st Semester Courses				
Courses	Still In Program	Changed Program	Left MVCC	Courses	Still In Program	Changed Program	Left MVCC
1				1			
2				2			
3				3			
4				4			
5				5			
6				6			
7				7			
8				8			
9				9			
10				10			

a. *What stands out to you from the data?*

b. *What are you most alarmed by?*

c. *What is causing you the most anxiety?*

Equity Data Summit – School Data Discussion – Participant Guide

Step 2 – Examining Specific Programs

Program:								
Proposed 1 st Semester Courses						Actual 1 st Semester Courses		
Courses	Still In Program	Changed Program	Left MVCC	Courses	Still In Program	Changed Program	Left MVCC	
1				1				
2				2				
3				3				
4				4				
5				5				
6				6				
7				7				
8				8				
9				9				
10				10				

Identifying Equity Differences

<p>Are there any courses that have race/ethnicity disparity? (Taken out of sequence, out of program, large numbers of students not in program anymore)</p>	<p>Are there any courses that have sex/gender disparity? (Taken out of sequence, out of program, large numbers of students not in program anymore)</p>
--	--

Equity Data Summit – School Data Discussion – Participant Guide

Step 2 – Examining Specific Programs

- a. What is one thing you notice about this data?

- b. What surprises you as you look at the data?

- c. What concerns do you have?

- d. Is there anything in the data that makes you feel uncomfortable? Why?

- e. What does the data say about the specific issue we are trying to address as a college?

- f. Which students seem most impacted? Why?

- g. What's missing from the data? What more do you want to know?

Equity Data Summit – School Data Discussion – Participant Guide

Step 2 – Examining Specific Courses

Programs Represented in Course	Still In Program	Changed Program	Left MVCC
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			

Identifying Equity Differences

<p>Are there any programs that have race/ethnicity disparity? (Taken out of sequence, out of program, large numbers of students not in program anymore)</p>	<p>Are there any Programs that have sex/gender disparity? (Taken out of sequence, out of program, large numbers of students not in program anymore)</p>
---	---

Equity Data Summit – School Data Discussion – Participant Guide

Step 2 (Alternate) – Examining Specific Courses

- a. What is one thing you notice about this data?

- b. What surprises you as you look at the data?

- c. What concerns do you have?

- d. Is there anything in the data that makes you feel uncomfortable? Why?

- e. What does the data say about the specific issue we are trying to address as a college?

- f. Which students seem most impacted? Why?

- g. What's missing from the data? What more do you want to know?

Grounding Ourselves in the Voices of Students

- A. When I got divorced, I had to have my husband's permission to bring the kids to Utica, so I got it [but] then he has done nothing but fight through court, dirty tricks, everything. The regular counselors here at community college, they are wonderful, they have really helped me. They let me talk to them, they helped solve the problems. There are no words for it. They have bent over backwards, gone the extra mile. One day my counselor came out and found me—I was just wandering around campus, crying—and the counselor goes, "Well, we didn't finish that little problem." So she got me, took me back, and said, "Let's get this finished." And I would have quit. I would have quit that day, but she found me.

African-American female student, 35

- B. Well, let's just say a typical day for me right now: I'm going to work from 7:30 in the morning until 4:00. I drive straight here. I have my lunch here and then after that I go to class from 5:30 to 7:30, and from there I go home. I say good night to my wife and study a little bit, get ready for bed. That's basically it. Saturday mornings I come to school and then Saturday evenings I'm studying, so that only leaves me with Friday [evening], which I have to go to sleep early so I can get ready for Saturday. That leaves me with Sunday so I can sometimes go to church and do my own little thing, open mail and things like that. As long as nothing goes wrong, as long as everything goes smoothly, it works for me. But I tell you, I'm tired!

White male student, 29, goal AS, transfer, general studies

- C. I don't know anyone on campus, just the people in my class. I got along really well in my other class. This one, I'm just starting to know people. I do feel a little out of place because I'm older compared to most of the students. I say hi to students and they don't say hi back.

Latino male student, 36, goal mechanical engineering technology

- D. I had a writing strategies class last year. The teacher was really set in her way. One day I had to miss class. I called this teacher and left a message on her mailbox saying that I had to miss this day for a certain reason. She called my cell phone back, screamed at me a lot, and told me never to come back to her class, and that if I did, she would flunk me no matter what. So I ended up dropping her class.

African-American male student, 34

- E. I was really having a lot of difficulty. Then a counselor I talked to when I was trying to drop the semester really helped me to understand that it didn't have anything to do with my intelligence, just my ability in understanding and writing English. Because of her advice, I was able to see the benefit of first taking ESL classes to build my skills in English and then transitioning to the regular classes. Since then, I have been doing much better.

Mexican female student, goal to become a teacher, 10+ years in U.S.

- F. I don't think [faculty and staff] are aware of what it is like to be an immigrant. I have a little problem with English. I am not very used to these objective questions so I find it difficult to answer those questions, but when it is an essay question I realize I do much better because most of the questions in my country are essay questions, not multiple choice.

Ghanaian female student, goal registered nursing, 4 years in U.S.

Grounding Ourselves in the Voices of Students

- G. She embraces difference and she brings them up—an African American would do this or a Hispanic would do that or a Laotian would do this [raising children]. In some classes they see everybody as one race. But in working with teachers like her, there are different colors and different cultures, and they are all good. She embraces diversity. I thought that was neat.

Latina female student, 29

- H. It is terrible. I have a full-time job, two kids, and then housework and everything. I had a test today. Yesterday I had three baskets of laundry and my car wasn't running. So the first thing I did was take my car into the shop. I got it done by mid-day. I went back, I went to the laundromat, I went to pick up my kids, and then finally I got some time to study. And then I got here in the morning. I rushed over there. Thankfully, my English teacher, my first class from 8:00 to 9:30, we just came and picked up our test results and she said we could leave. So I had an hour to study. Thank God! And then finally at my test, I did good. I know I did good! But it was a struggle yesterday. And it is like that every single day.

Asian (Chinese) female student, 26, goal AA

- I. Transportation is a little bit difficult. If you miss your bus, you have to wait a full hour to get a second bus. They only come every hour and it's not really evenly on the hours either. So if you miss the bus and are due for a class, you have to hitch-hike, and I don't think that is safe for the students. I think a lot more people ended up dropping a course because the transportation was so bad. If someone has enough money to have a car, there's no problem. But most of us have to take the bus. Sometimes I panic about getting to that bus.

White female student, 19, goal AS, transfer, marine biology

- J. One of the teachers would make negative comments about African Americans and Latinos, to the extent that we would feel disconnected in the class. One time, he asked, "Would it be okay to give a speech if you are disturbing the public?" Someone replied, "Well, it depends." And he said, "Well, Martin Luther King was disturbing the public with all of those people down in Alabama and all in the restaurants and all of that stuff." He was very serious. He was calling that a disturbance. And then one time, this Hispanic girl and I said we wanted to work in the Los Angeles area with poor children and really help them excel in school. And he said, "If you want to live in a combat zone." He says this derogatory stuff and other students will laugh. The other girl and I looked at each other. We felt really, really down about that. Why would someone say stuff like that? I asked another professor if I should say something. But I decided not to. He had been here for 30 years. He had tenure. No way my little comment would mean anything. But I felt disconnected in that class and it made me feel like I didn't really want to associate with anybody.

African-American female student, 24