



# A VISION FOR EQUITY

RESULTS FROM AAC&U'S PROJECT

*Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence:  
Campus-Based Strategies for Student Success*



Association  
of American  
Colleges and  
Universities



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*Association  
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## FROM THE FUNDERS

# Strada Education Network

Addressing equity gaps in postsecondary education will help more students thrive in college, complete their degrees, and find fulfilling careers. At Strada Education Network<sup>SM</sup>, we call that Completion With a Purpose<sup>®</sup>—and it's at the core of all that we do. That's why we are excited to support the *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence: Campus-Based Strategies for Student Success* project—and the outcomes the project is yielding.

Since 2015, Strada has been proud to partner with the Association of American Colleges and Universities on this important project. With support from other partners, including Great Lakes Higher Education Corporation & Affiliates, the thirteen participating institutions have shown their commitment to improving outcomes for all students, especially first-generation, low-income, and students of color.

And the project is already making an impact by

- increasing student access to and participation in high-impact practices,
- narrowing achievement gaps,
- engaging faculty in professional development on active learning strategies, and
- infusing into curricula the twenty-first-century skills that put students on a path to success in college and careers.

We at Strada are confident that these outcomes have set the stage for even greater success moving forward.

The average college student today may come from a diverse background, return to postsecondary education after working, or be a first-generation student. These thirteen institutions have learned—and shared—lessons about the importance of committing to practices that lead to sustainable change.

When we commit to equitable education and excellence for all, we are strengthening the pathways between education and employment that help more students achieve fulfilling careers and lives.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lorenzo L. Esters". The signature is fluid and cursive.

**LORENZO L. ESTERS**

*Vice President, Philanthropy  
Strada Education Network*





## FROM THE FUNDERS

# Great Lakes Higher Education Corporation & Affiliates

Great Lakes Higher Education Corporation & Affiliates is honored to have partnered with the Association of American Colleges and Universities and the Strada Education Network to advance equity in student achievement. We saw the *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence: Campus-Based Strategies for Student Success* project as a way to further our shared commitment to reducing equity gaps in higher education.

With over half of jobs now requiring a postsecondary degree or credential, college completion has never been more important (Center on Education and the Workforce 2013). Yet it remains elusive for too many students—especially students from low-income backgrounds, students of color, and first-generation students.

For these groups, the path to college completion is often a difficult journey. Financial challenges, readiness for college-level coursework, and even fitting in to college life are among the roadblocks that can impede progress and dash hopes of self-improvement. For fifty years, Great Lakes has focused on helping these underserved students.

We learned early on that finding solutions to the challenges students face—vexing in number and complexity—requires a broad approach. So we look to make progress on multiple fronts, and the work completed through the *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence* project has been instrumental in helping address some of the challenges.

Moreover, it's easy to think that improving equity in college graduation rates is simply a matter of “fixing the student.” Make sure students have enough preparation, guidance, and resources, and the rest will take care of itself, right? While there are certainly many student-related issues that affect outcomes, there are also barriers to completion beyond students' control, rooted in the practices and policies of the colleges they attend. The *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence* project recognized this fact and required colleges to take a hard look in the mirror, at their data, and at their practices to identify some of the causes.

We commend all the hard work that was put into these important plans to improve equity. The partnering colleges have taken a brave step forward by acknowledging there is work to be done, and then by rolling up their sleeves and implementing plans.

These colleges have made an important decision to improve equity, and we look forward to the work that will continue on each and every one of these campuses.

**BENJAMIN P. DOBNER**

*Director of Education Grantmaking*

*Great Lakes Higher Education Corporation & Affiliates*



## FOREWORD

# The Equity Imperative

LYNN PASQUERELLA, *President, AAC&U*

During the past year, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) has been engaged in a comprehensive, integrative planning process centered around our mission of advancing the vitality and public standing of liberal education by making quality and equity the foundations for excellence in undergraduate education in service to democracy. The resulting strategic plan serves as a collective call to action to create an ascendant narrative that contests accusations of irrelevancy and illegitimacy leveled against higher education in general, and liberal education in particular. For those of us who deem higher education as inextricably linked to our nation's historical mission of educating for citizenship, there is a sense of urgency with respect to rebuilding public trust in the promise of liberal education and inclusive excellence.

The most significant challenge facing higher education today is a growing economic and racial segregation, and the incorporation of equity as one of AAC&U's foundational principles reflects the ideal that access to educational excellence for all students is critical, not only for our nation's economy but, more importantly, for the preservation of our democratic society. The equity imperative takes on new import given the emergence of industry-led earn-and-learn programs that would allow institutions to outsource the entirety of a student's academic program to unaccredited education providers. Within the context of a growing emphasis on vocational education and competency-based programs, such maneuvers run the risk of creating an intellectual oligarchy where only the richest have access to liberal arts traditions.

In a globally interdependent, rapidly changing world, the best education that colleges and universities can offer is one in which students are prepared to think critically, communicate effectively, engage in ethical decision making, and work in diverse teams to address the complex, unscripted problems of the future. Indeed, economic growth in a postindustrial, knowledge-based global economy will require implementing curricular changes that ensure all students have equal access to high-impact practices that prepare them to thrive in the workplace and in life. These practices include first-year seminars, learning communities, writing-intensive courses, collaborative projects, undergraduate research, internships, community-based learning, capstone courses, immersion in long-term projects, and engagement with educational mentors inside and outside of the classroom. Such experiences have a disparately positive impact on underserved students with respect to self-reported gains, GPA, and retention (Finley and McNair 2013; Vande Zande, n.d.). Moreover, within-group comparisons of the relationship between participation in multiple high-impact practices and perceptions of learning indicate significant benefits among first-generation and transfer students that include gains in deep learning, practical competence, and personal and social development (Kinzie 2012).

As educators, we aim to open minds, share ideas, ignite imaginations, and guide our students toward a future we can only partially apprehend. It is good and purposeful work, made even more meaningful by the recognition that education has changed every one of us, and will continue to do so by the sheer transformational force of its possibility. Amidst increasing fragmentation and complexity, it is work that enables the students we serve to flourish fully as human beings, enriching them as individuals and as members of a community. Only by drawing attention to the persistent economic and cultural barriers that continue to undermine the equity imperative upon which the American Dream is built will we be able to fulfill the true promise of American higher education.



## FOREWORD

# A Vision for Equity

TIA BROWN MCNAIR, *Vice President for Diversity, Equity, and Student Success, AAC&U*

In 2015, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), in partnership with the Center for Urban Education at the University of Southern California, launched a multiyear 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. At that time, many higher education institutions were, and continue to be, engaged in conversations and institutional efforts to advance student success. As indicated by evidence from AAC&U's member survey report, *Bringing Equity and Quality Learning Together: Institutional Priorities for Tracking and Advancing Underserved Students' Success* (Hart Research Associates 2015), many AAC&U member institutions are tracking and disaggregating data on the retention and graduation rates of students from traditionally underserved groups, but far fewer are disaggregating data on students' participation in high-impact educational practices or on their achievement of institutional learning outcomes. In addition, strategies for closing equity gaps are works in progress, and many institutions do not have explicit equity goals for student success outcomes. In other words, campus efforts to ask and answer questions about equity in student outcomes were not a core component of student success initiatives. With the most diverse student population in the history of US higher education, we do a disservice to our students by not engaging in equity-driven data analysis leading to institutional change that supports underserved student success. A failure to engage in such analysis is a failure of our educational system.

*A Vision for Equity* includes chapters from the thirteen campuses that sought to build internal capacity to address inequities in student outcomes and narrow equity gaps through the following objectives:

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

The participating campuses have implemented targeted student interventions, improved curricular designs and student pathways, enhanced academic support programs, strengthened high-impact practices, leveraged resources, created institutional tracking models, and designed professional development training for faculty and staff. The campuses have designed mechanisms for sharing data (e.g., equity dashboards, reports, regular campus-wide meetings, newsletters, and websites) and have embedded equity goals as strategic priorities. Several of the campuses have opened offices focused on equity and inclusion, and others have hired additional staff to advance equity goals.

The significant strides made by the campus teams—from expanding their initial understanding of why equity matters to creating internal systems and structures to ask and answer difficult questions about student success—speak to the dedication and commitment of all involved. Why equity matters should be a question that every educator should be able to answer, and ensuring student success should be the shared goal that we all have in common.



# Building and Sustaining an Equity-Minded Campus

MICHAEL GAVIN, *Vice President for Learning*

KATHY BOLTON, *Special Assistant to the Vice President for Learning*

RICKA FINE, *Dean of Planning, Research, and Institutional Assessment*

ALICIA MORSE, *Dean, School of Liberal Arts*

The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) project, *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence: Campus-Based Strategies for Student Success*, has been a catalyst for major transformation at Anne Arundel Community College (AACC). The development of our campus action plan for equity provided focus, intentionality, and resources to help us better address persistent inequalities in student outcomes. Furthering the urgency of this work is the fact that AACC is serving an increasingly diverse student population, with 35.6 percent of our credit-taking student body being nonwhite students in fall 2016, up from 32.0 percent in fall 2012.

This project served as a catalyst for substantive change at all levels of the institution. Because of it, we better understand the necessity of focusing our campus on being equity-minded. This required us to first educate all employees around a shared definition of equity adopted from *Achieving the Dream*: “Equity is grounded in the principle of fairness. Equity refers to ensuring that each student receives what they need to be successful through the intentional design of the college experience” (n.d.). Another outcome of the project was the introduction of the Center for Urban Education’s “[Indicators of Equity-Mindedness](#)” (2016), a critical tool that helped hundreds of stakeholders “recognize and address racialized structures, policies, and practices that produce and sustain racial inequities” as they began the difficult work of redesigning the student experience around academic pathways.

The college has separated itself from many others working within the national paradigm of academic pathways by placing equity front and center of each change while also ensuring that teaching and learning remain central tenets of our work. While this project required us to pilot several initiatives, it was also the harbinger of the entire institution committing to the transformation of its very core.

## THREE ESSENTIALS FOR ACHIEVING EQUITY TO ADVANCE STUDENT SUCCESS

### 1. Committed Leadership

In the context of the AAC&U project, AACC President Dawn Lindsay challenged the college community at convocation to focus on designing and implementing structured academic and career pathways for all students in order to increase completion of high-quality academic credentials. From the beginning of the *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence* project, the president and vice presidents made it clear that this work is different in that the campus culture was undergoing a transformation from its traditional focus on access to a broader focus on access and completion, strongly rooted in equity.

College leadership “hit the road” immediately after convocation and met with stakeholders from all levels of the organization to collectively share their vision for change, framed by compelling disaggregated data that many of the stakeholders had never seen. The college is also committed to disseminating best practices and lessons learned from our experiences with this project.

## **2. A Campus Action Plan for Equity That Is Foundational to the Strategic Planning Process**

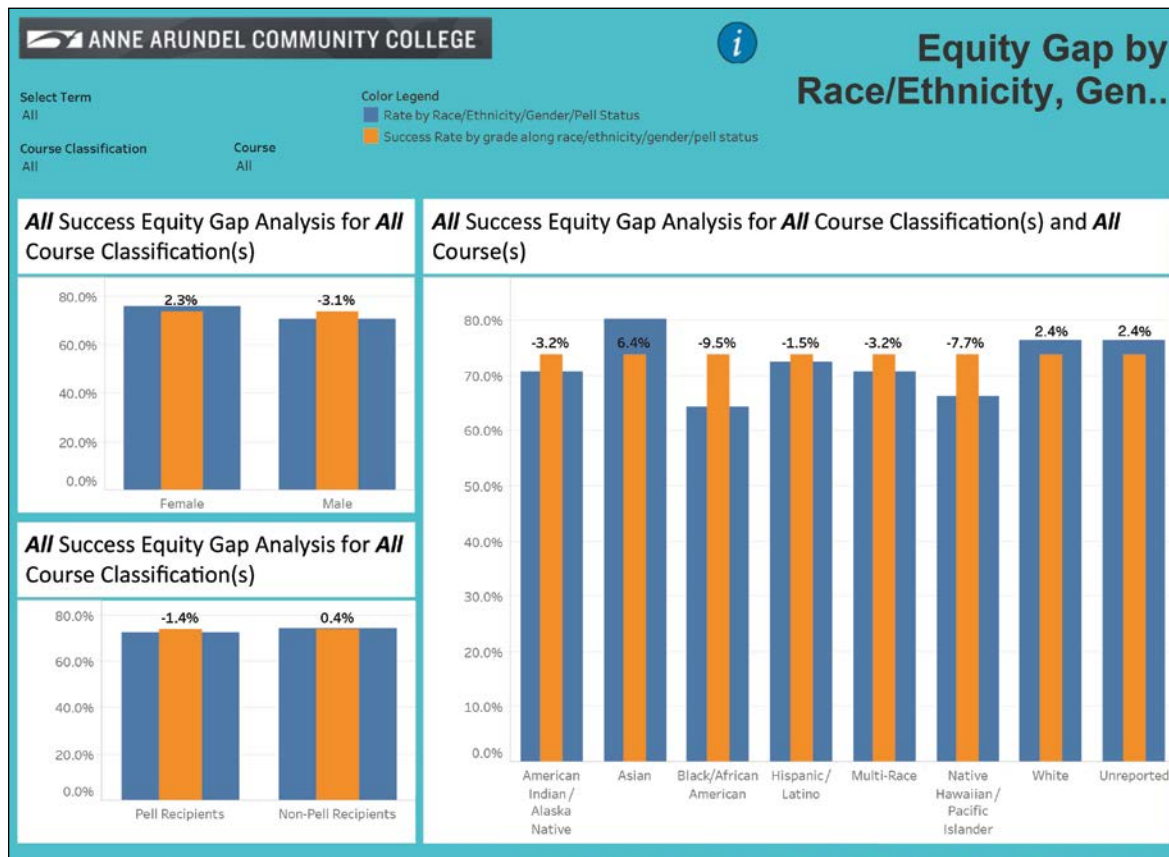
This equity project provided an urgent call to action that was a major impetus for AACC’s launching a completely transformed student experience in fall 2018 that will be grounded in a pathways model and rooted in equity and high-impact practices. When the new student experience has been fully scaled, all students will participate in robust onboarding and first-year experience programming (on-time registration, mandatory orientation, meetings with assigned advisors, exploration of fields-of-interest pathways, academic planning and goal setting, mandatory advising at certain milestones, and career exploration). Equity goals and strategies are now regularly communicated across campus, including at fall and spring convocations. Progress toward achievement of institutional goals is transparent and monitored through improved approaches to using data.

## **3. Equity-Focused Assessment and Increasing Access to Disaggregated Data**

Investing in human and fiscal resources to develop new data tools with equity lenses has been vital to transforming AACC’s culture. This has rapidly shifted our culture from one where data is simply reported after the fact to one where data spurs action. AACC acquired new software that includes a series of interactive, easily accessible dashboards that disaggregate data by any combination of race/ethnicity, gender, or Pell status (see fig. 1). The dashboards provide simple visuals for real-time analysis of enrollment, retention, and completion in relation to fiscal-year goals, allowing for midcourse corrections. Weekly meetings allow college leadership the structured time for reflection, a review of progress, and an evidence-based process for communicating the need for change to appropriate stakeholders.

As a result of sharing data at the course, program, and institutional levels, faculty, staff, and administrators have found a common purpose and a mutual understanding of the critical need to eradicate pervasive equity gaps. New dashboards also track fourteen key institutional performance indicators, helping to focus the college on disaggregated rates of progression and completion. Dashboards are coupled with training and guidance for faculty and staff, benchmarks are set, and departments work toward achieving these benchmarks. Such an approach has shifted the culture, empowering departments to access and use data to support continuous improvement while also attending to equity in their conversations.

**FIGURE 1. AACC Dashboard: Equity Gap Analysis by Race/Ethnicity, Gender, and Pell-Recipient Status for All Courses**



### MAJOR PROJECT FINDINGS

As mentioned above, this project allowed AACC to frame our strategic plan around equity. However, in developing our campus action plan for equity, we intentionally focused on improving teaching in the classroom. To that end, we have seen the most promise in the following initiatives.

#### Increasing Student Success in Developmental Mathematics and Scaling Up Accelerated Mathematics Developmental Education

Until recently, many students requiring remediation needed up to three semesters of courses before qualifying to take a for-credit mathematics course. New pathways in statistics, college algebra, and precalculus have been developed that allow developmental mathematics course sequences to be completed within two semesters. The first to be scaled was the accelerated statistics pathway, and success rates are very promising in comparison to outcomes in the traditional format (see fig. 2). Note also that the equity gap is trending toward being eliminated.



**FIGURE 2. Comparison of Traditional and Accelerated Developmental Math Course Success Rates (Grades of A, B, or C)**

COURSE NAME	RACE/ETHNICITY	SPRING 2016		FALL 2016		SPRING 2017	
		STUDENTS	SUCCESS RATE	STUDENTS	SUCCESS RATE	STUDENTS	SUCCESS RATE
Traditional Intermediate Algebra	African American	52	30%	75	44%	66	38%
	Hispanic	28	40%	47	50%	40	44%
	White	196	39%	266	48%	234	52%
	Total*	330	37%	473	49%	398	47%
Accelerated Intermediate Algebra (Statistics)	African American	60	86%	46	72%	34	81%
	Hispanic	19	86%	18	82%	14	93%
	White	140	77%	112	81%	105	83%
	Total*	261	81%	208	79%	190	83%

\*Totals also include students who do not identify as African American, Hispanic, or white.

### Increasing Student Success in High-Enrollment Gateway Courses and Scaling Up Best Practices

AACC piloted equity resource teams (ERTs), which are proving to be fundamental in implementing equitable access to high-impact practices in the classroom that meet AAC&U’s recommendation to support “faculty professional development that . . . connects inclusive, student-centered pedagogies to equitable outcomes” (Association of American Colleges and Universities, n.d.) The first ERTs developed best practices for culturally responsive teaching in high-enrollment courses in biology, business, chemistry, mathematics, and psychology. Four broad strategies have emerged that can apply to all disciplines:

1. Provide the opportunity for faculty cohorts to participate in yearlong professional development programs.
2. Focus on teaching excellence by implementing required group assignments in classrooms (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.
4. Ensure that each course’s content is inclusive of a diverse set of identities.

Preliminary data have shown promising results in Biology 101, Chemistry 101, and Developmental Mathematics. Psychology has implemented drastic changes to its introductory course and has integrated learning outcomes into its best practices toolbox. Faculty involved in this project have been leaders in changing the general culture on campus to focus on equity. Although data is not yet available to show this project’s impact on course success, there is much to be proud of.

We have come a long way in a short period of time, but there is still much to do. As we progress in this journey of building and sustaining an equity-minded campus, we strive to distinguish ourselves, with equity remaining the guiding force for all strategic initiatives across campus.



# Becoming a Student-Ready University

KRISTY MICHAUD, *Director, Office of Student Success Innovations*

LINDA BOWEN, *Chair, Department of Journalism*

JANET OH, *Senior Director, Institutional Research*

ELIZABETH ADAMS, *Associate Vice President for Student Success*

The efforts of California State University–Northridge (CSUN) to increase educational equity have centered around engaging a critical mass of faculty and staff in data-informed problem definition and solving. This inquiry-based, faculty-led approach has allowed us to institutionalize our ongoing efforts to make changes to the structural, systemic, and cultural barriers to equity on our campus.

## PROVIDING SUPPORT FOR FACULTY TEACHING HIGH-GAP COURSES

In fall 2016, we created a report for each of CSUN’s colleges that included a list of the courses with the largest gaps in D, F, and unauthorized withdrawal (DFU) rates between better-served and underserved students to inform decisions about where to target resources.<sup>1</sup> The dean from each college chose three courses from the list and invited the faculty who teach them to participate as a team in one of three professional development programs (see table 1):

1. The Inclusive Innovations Series, which was supported by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence* project grant. This program was offered in fall 2016 and winter 2017, and faculty began applying the strategies in spring 2017.
2. The eLearning Institute, which was supported by a CSU Graduation Initiative 2025 grant. The program was offered in summer 2017, and faculty began applying the strategies in fall 2017.
3. Yearlong student success faculty learning communities (FLCs) housed in and funded by each college. The communities will run through spring 2018.

The first two programs involved the Offices of Faculty Development and Student Success Innovations, and participants were provided with course- and section-level data on racial/ethnic gaps in classes they teach, as well as support to navigate reactions to the data. The third program is college-based, so content varies. All three programs invite participants to consider the principles of equity-mindedness outlined in the *Equity Academy Participant Workbook* (Center for Urban Education 2015), and faculty were provided with evidence-based strategies to close the gaps.

TABLE 1. Faculty Served by Programming Focused on Closing Gaps

PROGRAM	NUMBER OF FACULTY SERVED	NUMBER OF HIGH-GAP COURSES REPRESENTED
Inclusive Innovations Series	22	7
eLearning Institute	34	16
Student Success Faculty Learning Communities (FLCs)	56	27

<sup>1</sup> In this context, we consider white and Asian American students to be “better served,” and Latina/o, black, and American Indian students to be “underserved.”

In fall 2017, the lists of courses with the largest gaps in DFU rates within each college were updated to include 2016–17 data and course grade point averages (see table 2). The 2017 report also includes a list of classes that first-time freshmen take in their first year so that each college can focus attention on the first-year experience in support of closing gaps in one-year retention. While the 2016 report included only lower-division courses, the 2017 report expanded to upper-division courses. That way, colleges can address the transfer student experience and the experiences of students in their majors.

**TABLE 2. Sample List of Course Gap Information Provided to Each College**

Course	DFU rate	Enrollment	Better-served DFU Rate	Underserved DFU Rate	GAP (percentage points)	Better-served GPA (GPA points)	Underserved GPA (GPA points)	GAP (GPA points)
X161	48%	143	27%	53%	26	2.39	1.48	0.91
X103	38%	165	26%	40%	14	2.06	1.76	0.30
X108	37%	120	26%	43%	17	1.93	1.62	0.31
X113	36%	216	33%	37%	4	2.33	1.97	0.36
X114	36%	154	15%	35%	20	2.57	1.96	0.61
X161	35%	217	33%	36%	3	1.78	1.96	-0.18
X151	35%	450	17%	39%	22	2.69	1.82	0.87
X101	31%	468	19%	37%	18	2.46	1.81	0.65

The updated course lists will inform our efforts in 2017–18. The student success FLCs are underway. The Inclusive Innovations Series will be offered again in spring 2018 under a new name: the Institute for Transformative Teaching and Learning. Using university funds and the remaining funding from AAC&U’s *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence* project grant, we will serve at least twenty-five faculty in this semester-long program. In addition, the university will fund the eLearning Institute with a focus on inclusive teaching in summer 2018.

Over the 2016–17 academic year, we dramatically expanded the number of faculty participating in programming dedicated to closing gaps, as well as the numbers of high-gap courses included in our efforts. Growing the number of faculty aware of inequity in higher education and equipped with strategies to reduce it at the course level is central to our goal of creating institutional change. We will begin evaluating changes in course outcomes in May 2018, when the faculty who have been through programming have had at least one semester to implement their practices.

As we discuss below, gaps in one-year retention rates decreased for the fall 2016 cohort of first-time freshmen, many of whom took the targeted classes in spring 2017. Although other factors likely contributed to the narrowing of gaps in retention, it is possible that some of this programming has already had an impact.

### **EMPOWERING FACULTY AND STAFF WITH INSTITUTIONAL DATA**

The Offices of Institutional Research and Student Success Innovations launched a workshop series that provides training for faculty, staff, and administrators to learn to use institutional data tools. Employing an inquiry-based approach, the workshops guide faculty through their college and department data, allowing them to uncover opportunities to serve their students of color better.

The dashboards, created by the Office of Institutional Research, allow faculty to learn about the demographic characteristics of students in their major, as well as gaps in retention rates, graduation rates, and average course grades. Known as Data Workshop 1.0, the trainings were offered throughout 2016–17 to the colleges’ leadership, data champions, and untenured assistant professors. Data Workshop 1.0 offerings continue this year, and we added Data Workshop 2.0 to the series to give those who completed 1.0 a deeper dive into the data to answer their student success questions.



## CLOSING GAPS IN ONE-YEAR RETENTION RATES

We also engaged in a number of other activities in 2016–17 that led to an increase in our one-year freshman continuation rate from 77 percent for the 2015 cohort to a new record of 81 percent. As table 3 shows, the largest increase in retention was among black freshmen, followed by Latina/o students. As a result, the gap in one-year retention rates between black and white students decreased by 34 percent. The gap between Latina/o and white students decreased by 36 percent.

**TABLE 3. First-Time Freshman One-Year Continuation Rates**

	FALL 2015 COHORT	FALL 2016 COHORT	PERCENT INCREASE
<b>Total</b>	77%	81%	5.6%
<b>Black</b>	68.6%	74.6%	8.7%
<b>Asian American</b>	84.2%	87.3%	3.7%
<b>Latina/o</b>	75%	79.1%	5.5%
<b>White</b>	86.1%	86.2%	<1%

One of the most dramatic changes we made last year involved revising a policy that was disproportionately affecting low-income students and students of color—the Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) financial aid policy. The requirement that students pass 80 percent of the units they attempt was lowered to 71 percent, dramatically increasing the number of students who were eligible to continue receiving financial aid.

Another change we made involved hiring eleven new staff advisors, known as graduation and retention specialists, tasked specifically with reaching out to students to ensure that they were on track to continue and to succeed. Among other things, these advisors called first-time freshmen during the spring 2017 and fall 2017 registration periods if they noticed the students were not registered for classes.

## COMMUNICATION WITH STAKEHOLDERS

The *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence* project has helped to support opportunities to collaborate with stakeholders from across campus in a number of ways, including the following three:

1. A town hall series on the current higher education environment that focuses on equity and student success. Town hall meeting attendance has averaged 150 people per session, including staff, administrators, faculty, and students.
2. The provost’s planning and professional development series, held bimonthly in 2016–17. Each meeting included a wider group of stakeholders than the previous meeting, so we could gradually bring more people on board.
3. The Data Champions program, which invited thirty-seven faculty in 2016–17, and thirty-five in 2017–18, from across campus to learn how to use the data tools available to explore questions about student success. Data Champions play a key role in leading discussions in their own departments and colleges about student success.

## CONCLUSION

At CSUN, the shift toward becoming a student-ready university has involved intentionally engaging faculty in data-informed conversations about inequity. This approach, coupled with other efforts such as policy review, has led to observable outcomes this year. While we still have a lot of work to do to become a student-ready university, we are pleased to be moving the needle.

# Project LAUNCH: From “Can’t Do” to “Can Do”

SHEREE L. MEYER, *Dean, College of Arts and Letters*

Project LAUNCH (Learning to Advance Underserved Communities in Higher Ed), our Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence* project, provided us with the opportunity to enact local targeted strategies to complement global institutional efforts at California State University–Sacramento (Sacramento State). It has been part of a larger paradigm shift away from a deficit model, or “can’t do” approach to diversity, equity, and inclusion, to what our students, faculty, and staff “can do.”

Sacramento State ranked fourth in *U.S. News & World Report’s* “Best Colleges” rankings in the “Campus Ethnic Diversity: Regional Universities West” category for the 2016–17 academic year. The California State University system has set long-term system and campus-specific goals for increasing graduation rates and closing achievement gaps between underrepresented minority (URM) and non-URM students, as well as Pell-eligible and non-Pell-eligible students. By 2025, we will reduce the URM graduation rate gap from 8 percentage points to zero and the Pell gap from 7 percentage points to zero. To do so, it is critical to drill down and disaggregate the data, generate short-term goals, and effectively target strategies to accomplish those goals.

This report focuses on three key components of Project LAUNCH and university-wide efforts to effect change: diversity, equity, and inclusion in (1) faculty hiring and development, (2) student success, and (3) attaining AAC&U’s LEAP (Liberal Education and America’s Promise) outcomes through high-impact practices.

## **FACULTY HIRING AND DEVELOPMENT**

Concurrent with early stages of Project LAUNCH in 2016, President Robert S. Nelsen announced the establishment of the Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) and the appointment of Robin Carter as its interim executive director. EDI identified the following strategies as being particularly relevant to Project LAUNCH’s goals of increasing student access to and participation in high-impact practices and increasing course completion for minority students:

- Enhance the recruitment and employment of underrepresented faculty and staff, as well as the recruitment of underrepresented students.
- Create and sustain a welcoming campus climate that promotes and engenders respect for all members of the campus community.
- Using institutional data, assess and report on campus progress as it relates to diversity and inclusion.

The recruitment, hiring, retention, and success of a faculty that reflects the diversity of the students is key to creating an environment in which our students can succeed. While funding for Project LAUNCH directly engaged faculty in curricular and pedagogical development to further the project’s goals, EDI played an essential role in initiating a successful plan for recruiting, hiring, orienting, and retaining diverse faculty. To that end, EDI took a number of actions, including

(1) developing resources about best practices for faculty searches, such as scouting, preparation, outreach, assessment, recruitment, and retention; and (2) providing face-to-face consultation to deans, chairs, and faculty search committees on best practices for diversity hiring.

As we enter a hiring cycle informed by the efforts of EDI, a review of sixty faculty and staff job postings showed that forty-three identified embracing diversity as a minimum qualification or requirement, and another nine listed it as a preferred qualification. The provost distributed faculty demographic data for the last three years for each department, revealing some progress but also showing that we still have much to do.

Project LAUNCH directly funded a professional learning community (PLC). In pre- and post-PLC surveys, participants indicated significant positive changes in their understanding of equity (a change of .71 on a five-point scale;  $p < .01$ ) and how course material reflects cultural and/or class background (a change of 1.0 on a five-point scale;  $p < .05$ ). One participant stated that the “PLC made me really tuned in to what’s happening around campus,” and another shared, “I want to initiate related conversations in my department.” Perhaps the best evidence of its impact and subsequent institutionalization is the continuation of the program this year with a new cohort of faculty and staff.

EDI has also been providing workshops to staff and administrators on managing unconscious bias, and the campus has actively organized DREAMer ally workshops.<sup>1</sup> With the establishment of the Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, work toward the goals of Project LAUNCH will continue.

## STUDENT SUCCESS

One of the courses originally identified for intervention through Project LAUNCH was remedial math, and funding allowed us to provide additional support for students through first-year programs. The California State University system and Sacramento State, however, have chosen to move away from the deficit model endemic to standard placement systems and high-risk testing. Too often, such mechanisms exacerbate achievement gaps. Remedial courses in math and English filled first-year students’ schedules with not-for-credit courses that delayed their access to courses within their majors and ultimately delayed graduation. Furthermore, even with the best of intentions, placement in remedial courses based on single-measure assessments sent a highly discouraging message to students who subsequently were retained and persisted at lower rates than those placed directly in baccalaureate courses.

In 2010, the English department at Sacramento State began the process of eliminating remedial courses in composition and replacing them with “stretch” courses—identical to general education first-year composition courses but stretched over two semesters—and with peer-supported tutorials for one-semester courses. All options offer baccalaureate credit. A few years later, the campus adopted “directed self-placement” for all first-year students instead of using the system-wide English Placement Test. In directed self-placement, students are empowered to select their placement with guidance based on multiple measures. Since this policy was adopted, nearly half of the students who previously would have been placed in low-level remedial courses have placed themselves in the one-semester course, and nearly 90 percent of all students, including those who would previously have been placed in remedial courses, have successfully completed their written communication requirement in their first year at Sacramento State.

This year, a task force has been formed to address remediation in math; the campus is working toward alternative multiple-measure placement methods that provide greater access and equity for

<sup>1</sup> The DREAM (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors) Act, which was proposed in the US Senate in 2001, would have provided legal resident status to qualifying minors. “DREAMers” refers to undocumented immigrants who arrived in the United States as children.

students. The reduction of remedial courses contributes to higher retention and progression rates by increasing student enrollment in credit-bearing courses and allowing students to complete fifteen units per semester in their first year.

Shortly after receiving funding for Project LAUNCH, Sacramento State also received funding for Project INSPIRE (Institutional Network for Student Success, Peer Programs, and Instructional Redesign Efforts) as a “developing Hispanic-serving institution.” Project INSPIRE focuses on two critical components of student success: peer mentoring and data analytics. While Project LAUNCH provided support for specific gateway courses, Project INSPIRE prompted an institution-wide examination of and collaboration on peer mentoring programs across the campus and sought to set up a more productive data analytics network to improve assessment of various interventions and targeted programs. Consistent with the *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence* project’s recommendations, all data collected for these programs are disaggregated by gender, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

To optimize the impact of targeted and general interventions for student success, we need better data collection and analysis. Indeed, one of the ongoing challenges we have faced with Project LAUNCH is the difficulty of accessing pertinent data. Given both internal and external pressures, Sacramento State is now in the process of implementing a technology ecosystem that provides improved data on course demand and predictive analytics for improving student success. The goal is to place real-time disaggregated and individualized data in the hands of faculty and student support staff.

Such data would be useful in determining which strategies for academic support are most effective, financially feasible, and sustainable, and which work best for diverse students facing various challenges. Project LAUNCH funding for two gateway courses in psychology and criminal justice allowed instructors to determine and assess interventions. The psychology program reports:

The Project LAUNCH [introductory psychology] tutor sent targeted outreach emails to those scoring below a C on the first exam, as well as to the entire class via Blackboard. Eleven more students reached out for Project LAUNCH services to date in October, six of whom were identified to be at-risk given their Exam 1 performance, totaling fifteen students (of eighty-eight enrolled) served this semester. . . . Additionally, our tutor visited class at the end of September to administer a brief in-class activity to better understand the types of services students most desire. Based on this feedback, additional drop-in hours prior to exams were added, as well as additional modules developed pertaining to study skills and time management for future Project LAUNCH sessions, in addition to continuing weekly tutoring.

Project LAUNCH also permits individual instructors to determine the scope of their ongoing research and improvement of equity related to student success. “It facilitates data collection to assist in more systematic assessment to develop treatment of the problem identified through the data,” said Marlyn Jones, professor of criminal justice. Similarly, Casey Knifsend, Misha Haghighat, and Damien Brunt, all faculty members from psychology, report: “Supplementing the demographic factors already examined, it would be important to know how other factors are linked with participation in tutoring.”

### **ATTAINING LEAP OUTCOMES THROUGH HIGH-IMPACT PRACTICES**

Project LAUNCH also focused on increased achievement of learning outcomes for underserved students, using direct measures to assess student work. We developed rubrics for two high-impact practices: the first-year seminar and Writing Partners @ Sac State, a service-learning project often,





but not exclusively, incorporated into first-year seminars. Again, this encouraged movement beyond the broad student success goals of retention, persistence, and graduation and toward the assessment of actual student learning. In the first-year experience (FYE) program, an initial assessment led directly to the development of a common signature assignment that was piloted last year, assessed again, and finally required of all courses for fall 2017. The FYE program reports:

The Signature Assignment helped faculty to integrate key learning foci that were being measured by the rubric into the class. This falls in line with the previous year's survey that found that integration into the class of key pieces of information only helps to enhance the learning experience of students. Based on this, all sections should integrate the Signature Assignment, but not simply to require it but to engage all aspects of what it is supposed to help students to learn throughout the semester. The more integrated this assignment (and any other key component of the First-Year Seminar experience) is into the class, the better students will likely learn.

In her evaluation of Writing Partners @ Sac State (WP), Rachel August, professor of psychology and faculty fellow in the Community Engagement Center (CEC), concluded:

Sacramento State students who participated in the WP program, and whose reflections were evaluated by the CEC, achieved the level of "intermediate" in terms of meeting the WP goals overall. With regard to achievement of the three specific goals, Sacramento State students nearly reached, or did reach, the level of "intermediate" on two of the goals—having an understanding of and ability to analyze voice, tone, and audience and having an understanding of one's self in relation to the community. On the third—having an understanding of the relationship between the WP experience and overall course material—Sacramento State students reached somewhere between "emerging" and "intermediate" achievement.

Furthermore, CEC drew conclusions about improving both the methodology of its assessment and certain areas that had been targeted for reform. One of the common conclusions drawn from the assessment of FYE and Writing Partners is the importance of full integration of high-impact practices into the curriculum.

We are proud to have participated in AAC&U's *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence* project. The best evidence of Sacramento State's commitment to and progress toward the goals of Project LAUNCH are the most recent graduation rates. A 10-percentage-point gap in the six-year graduation rate between URM and non-URM students in the cohort that began in fall 2009 has been reduced to 1 percentage point for the fall 2011 cohort. In addition, four-year graduation rates for URM transfer students actually exceeded those for non-URM transfer students by 2 percentage points. While graduation-rate gaps for Asian and Hispanic students as compared to their white peers have narrowed to the low single digits, for the most recent cohorts of African American students, gaps in six-year graduation rates (for students who enrolled as freshmen) and four-year graduation rates (for transfer students) still lag behind those of white students by 10 percentage points and 11 percentage points, respectively. This is work that we know can and must be done.

## CARTHAGE COLLEGE

# Combining Grassroots and Institutional Leadership to Promote Equity

DANA GARRIGAN, *Associate Provost for Planning and Assessment; Associate Professor of Biology*

MICHELE HANCOCK, *Director of Equity and Inclusion; Visiting Professor of Education*

AIDANA LIRA, *Director of Sponsored Programs*

Early in the fall 2017 semester, forty-one African American male students gathered at a Carthage College faculty member's home for a barbecue. With no formal agenda, the students enjoyed an afternoon of conversation with men from the campus and the surrounding community who might serve as resources and role models for them during their time at college and beyond. Conversations ranged from sports, food, and where to get a haircut to identity, leadership, and issues of social justice. Students and community members lingered into the evening as new friendships were formed and social networks expanded. The barbecue served as a springboard for a new student organization, United Men of Color, that would complement existing student organizations supporting diverse student populations on campus (e.g., United Women of Color, Latinos Unidos). Both the barbecue and the social interactions offered by these student organizations helped to establish a network of support and a sense of belonging for students of color—important elements of student retention and college completion.

Promoting academic and social engagement is at the heart of many of Carthage's efforts to increase retention, persistence, and completion. During the past three years, however, the college has committed itself to an equity-minded approach to ensuring student success, seeking to better understand patterns of student achievement and the ways the institution can foster the success of all students. Thus, Carthage College was pleased to participate in the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence* project.

This work was timely for Carthage, a mid-sized liberal arts college in the Midwest. In recent years, the college has sought to increase the racial/ethnic diversity of students and has experienced significant growth in the proportion of students of color in the entering cohort and overall student body. (For example, in fall 2017, the incoming cohort was 28.3 percent students of color, compared to only 13.6 percent just five years earlier.)

### **INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE: EQUITY ANALYSES OF STUDENT SUCCESS**

In the *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence* project, Carthage sought to increase graduation rates for African American and Hispanic students. A review of recent data on four-year and six-year graduation rates had identified a significant disparity between the graduation rates of these populations and those of non-Hispanic white students at Carthage. As noted by project mentors from the University of Southern California's Center for Urban Education, developing an equity-minded framework requires institutions to be race-conscious in an "affirmative sense," critically examining patterns of student success and taking institutional responsibility for narrowing equity gaps in educational achievement (Malcom-Piqueux and Bensimon 2017). Carthage faced a challenge, however, in our ability to explore equality in educational outcomes. Without an office of institutional research, the project team had been restricted to using the limited data that were disaggregated by race for the purposes of reporting to the US Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System. One of our first and most significant

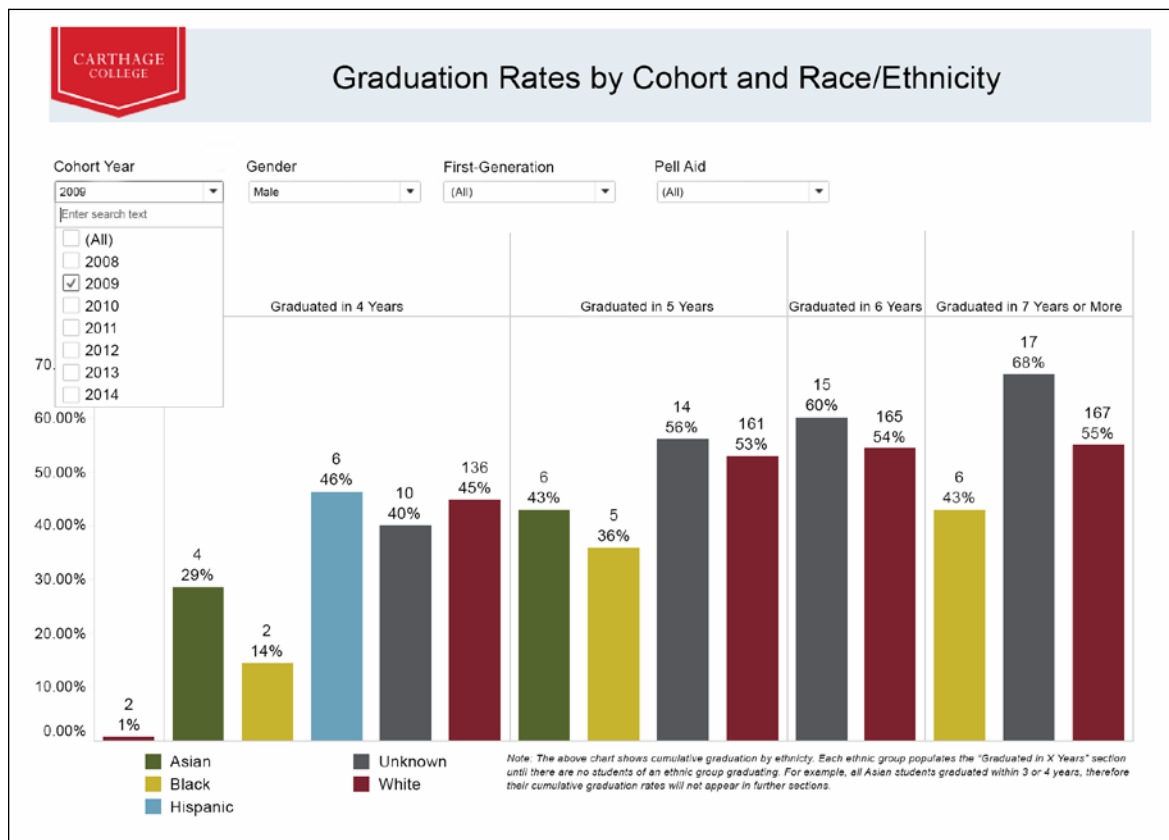


initiatives focused on refining our institutional data practices to enable the routine reporting of disaggregated data on student achievement.

For this work, the project team initially partnered with Carthage’s registrar and Library and Information Services department to develop more robust practices for defining, collecting, storing, and accessing data on variables of interest such as race/ethnicity, first-generation status, and socioeconomic status. In the second and third years of the project, we partnered with the new Office of Institutional Effectiveness to develop and refine an interactive tool for visually exploring a variety of student engagement and outcome measures (first-year to second-year retention, four- and six-year graduation rates, dean’s list recognition, academic probation status, etc.) using these data. The resulting dashboards use Tableau Software to allow end users to quickly disaggregate student success measures based on their own questions of interest using drop-down filters for variables including race/ethnicity, gender, first-generation status, and Pell eligibility (see fig. 1).

The new student success dashboards have allowed the project team and others to explore equity gaps in greater detail and assess the effectiveness of our work to narrow these gaps. For example, figure 1 reveals the discrepancies between four-, five-, and six-year graduation rates for black and white males. Only 36 percent of black males in the fall 2009 cohort graduated within five years, compared to 53 percent of white males. Because female students tend to complete degrees at a higher rate than males, the equity gap for black males widens when compared, using the dashboard, with the overall five-year graduation rate for white students (60 percent). In response to these patterns, Carthage is fostering initiatives such as the men of color barbecue as a means of promoting greater social engagement for students of color, especially early in their college experience.

**FIGURE 1. Sample of the Newly Developed Interactive Dashboard for Exploring Equity in Student Success**



In terms of assessing early success, the 2009 cohort represents a baseline for six-year graduation rates since it was the latest cohort for whom six-year graduation rates could be measured prior to the start of the project period (fall 2015). Looking at the most recent cohort for which four-year graduation data was available (the 2013 cohort) and that could be expected to be influenced by project initiatives, 38 percent of black males and 46 percent of black students of all genders graduated within four years, a promising indicator of early success in moving toward higher six-year graduation rates for black students overall and black males in particular. The dashboards allow us to examine other early indicators such as first-year to second-year retention rate, which also shows promising trends (79 percent of black students were retained from the fall 2015 cohort, versus only 61 percent of black students from the fall 2014 cohort).

Consistent with the *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence* project's objective of increasing achievement of learning outcomes for underserved students using direct assessment measures, we have also used Tableau to explore data on student achievement of learning outcomes in the college's required two-semester course sequence for first-year students (Foundations of Western Heritage I and II). These two courses are part of our Writing Across the Curriculum program, with specific learning outcomes related to the development of writing and critical thinking skills. Members of the project team worked with members of the Western Heritage Oversight Committee to develop a rubric for evaluating key learning outcomes that was informed by AAC&U's VALUE rubrics for written communication and critical thinking (see <https://www.aacu.org/value-rubrics>). Disaggregating the data by race/ethnicity, the team found no significant differences in the measures of student learning outcomes evaluated on the rubric. However, when grades for the courses were disaggregated by race/ethnicity, it was found that students of color were separated from white students by nearly one-half of a letter grade. The Western Heritage Oversight Committee is following up on this difference to identify other factors that may contribute to this grade difference and to identify opportunities to better support diverse student populations. In a parallel review of the general education curriculum, faculty leaders are also considering changes to the required two-semester course sequence for first-year students to introduce more diverse perspectives in the first-year curriculum, which could provide additional opportunities for engagement with the course material for the diverse mix of Carthage students.

### **FROM DATA TO ACTION**

Having identified equity gaps in student achievement, Carthage has developed an extensive range of institutional initiatives that we believe have helped to promote inclusive excellence. These initiatives have taken seriously the institution's responsibility to promote more effective practices rather than view gaps in student achievement as a student deficiency problem (Malcom-Piqueux and Bensimon 2017; McNair et al. 2016). Our initiatives have benefited from broad participation and support from both the college's leadership team and faculty and staff who have come together to support and extend project initiatives.

Carthage has been served by two presidents during the project period. Both have provided steadfast leadership in promoting equity and inclusion. Carthage has also added new positions that support the college's equity goals (e.g., director of equity and inclusion; assistant director of student involvement for diversity, equity, and inclusion; and vice president for institutional effectiveness).

On the grassroots level, the college has fostered the development of an Equity and Inclusion Committee made up of faculty, staff, and student volunteers representing all areas of the institution. The committee has served as an essential driver in making excellence inclusive by (1) facilitating organizational learning to expand traditional norms of educational excellence and equity; (2) building coalitions across campus; and (3) mobilizing change agents.



Our work has been informed by recent data from campus climate surveys and the National Survey of Student Engagement's topical module on inclusiveness and engagement with diversity. This information has helped us identify opportunities to improve the climate for traditionally underrepresented students. Specific initiatives to improve the campus climate and support all students have included

- piloting a preorientation program for first-generation college students;
- providing training on inclusive hiring practices for faculty search committees;
- providing professional development on inclusive classroom practices for new and existing faculty; and
- developing an equity and inclusion certificate program for faculty and staff.

## **LESSONS LEARNED**

Carthage's participation in the *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence* project has been most successful when it has aligned with institutional priorities identified through our formal planning processes as well as those that have bubbled up from campus constituents through grassroots initiatives. We have enjoyed success by collaborating extensively with our colleagues across campus. In addition, the opportunity to share the journey with other institutions participating in the project has provided (1) inspiration; (2) examples of effective practices on other campuses; and (3) a structure for exploring our data to identify equity gaps, to identify opportunities to expand inclusive practices, and to develop specific institutional strategies for furthering inclusive excellence across campus. We are grateful to AAC&U, its funding partners, our mentors at the University of Southern California's Center for Urban Education, and the twelve other participating institutions in the *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence* project.

# Moving Forward in Advancing Equity for Student Success

**OBIE CLAYTON**, *Director, Center for Undergraduate Research and Creativity*

**ERIC MINTZ**, *Director, CPI Initiative*

**GWEN MITCHELL**, *Director, Center for Innovative Teaching, Learning, and Engagement*

**ANDRE MCKINNEY**, *Associate Dean, Student Life*

**MICHELLE RHODES**, *Transfer Specialist, Transfer Student Services*

As a member of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence* project, Clark Atlanta University (CAU), the largest United Negro College Fund institution, has expanded our commitment to equity, access, and success for the student population we serve. Actively engaging in the project has advanced the progress of the university's quality enhancement plan and strategic plan by generating paths to improved academic outcomes and highlighting the importance of faculty and student engagement in high-impact practices, along with lifelong teaching and learning opportunities. Increasing students' academic and career success is one of the strategic drivers fostered under the leadership of our president and parallels our commitment to equity and inclusive excellence. Ensuring that our students succeed and graduate with a purpose is a priority at CAU.

## **OVERVIEW, IMPACT, AND PURPOSE OF THE RESTRUCTURED GENERAL CORE**

Starting in the fall 2016 semester, CAU implemented new general education requirements based on the following student learning outcomes: proficiency in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and nonverbal communication; competency in financial, quantitative, technological, and scientific literacy; skill in integrative and collaborative learning; competency in critical and creative thinking; competency in multicultural and global interactions; appreciation of the humanities and the fine arts; and dedication to personal and professional ethics, human values, and holistic wellness. These student learning outcomes are to be met through a combination of general education courses, comprising thirty to thirty-six credit hours as determined by a student's major. The general education courses are organized around learning areas that include humanities/fine arts; social and behavioral sciences; natural sciences, mathematics, and statistics; reading, writing, and oral communication; and financial and technological understanding. Students must complete at least one three-credit-hour course in each area, and no more than nine credit hours from any area can be counted in the thirty to thirty-six general education credit hours.

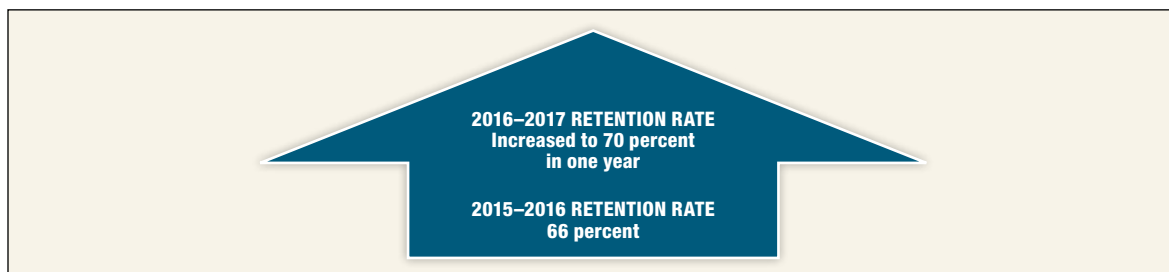
The restructured undergraduate curriculum supports student retention, persistence, and on-time degree completion by

- allowing the development and implementation of academic degree programs and experiences with improved program relevance leading to better job placement or further advanced study;
- enabling CAU students to take courses for a minor or stackable credentials, which will improve the preparation and marketability of CAU's graduates and enhance CAU's position as a preferred university for students seeking job prospects that pay well and lead to satisfying professional careers;
- allowing students to have flexibility and choice in their educational programs, in line with trends in higher education;

- using minisemesters to develop boot camp–style courses about emerging careers that will rapidly prepare students for the changing, technology-driven job market;
- revising general education requirements and program plans so they are designed and implemented in a manner that incorporates cocurricular engagement into the fabric of students’ degree plans;
- documenting cocurricular activities in students’ eportfolios and evaluating them to ensure that students meet the required student learning outcomes; and
- enabling all CAU students, and particularly STEM students, to have space in their course plan for undergraduate research.

Retention rates for first-year students increased with the new design of the general education core, first-year seminar, and intrusive advising (see fig. 1).

**FIGURE 1. Increase in Freshman Retention Rates**



### **REDESIGNING THE FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR**

The emphasis on first-year seminars (FYS) is enabling CAU students to identify clear pathways to success from their first area of interest to their targeted educational goals. This new design aims to broaden our students’ understanding of integrative learning and provide consistent exposure to high-impact practices in the first-year experience. In the spring and fall of 2017, staff from the Center for Undergraduate Research and Creativity (CURC) exposed all first-year students to CAU research opportunities by going to all FYS classes and having discussions with students. Additionally, CURC partnered with Woodruff Library staff to give presentations to the incoming class during new student orientation in August 2017. These presentations focused on the who, what, when, where, why, and how of undergraduate research. CURC also gave the students an overview of the Student Opportunity Center ([www.studentopportunitycenter.com](http://www.studentopportunitycenter.com)), a platform that connects students to research opportunities, internships, and presentation opportunities at both CAU and schools and agencies around the country.

### **IMPACT AND EMPHASIS ON UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH**

CAU has selected “Mentored Undergraduate Scholarly Endeavors” (MUSE) as the topic of its Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). Supported by CAU’s vision “to increasingly become a dynamic 21st century research university,” one of the hallmarks of the CAU community is its commitment to promoting innovation and collaboration and to making significant contributions to the knowledge of humankind. Scholarly Endeavors, which encompasses both creative and research activities, engages students in “a systematic or focused inquiry, investigation, experimentation, or exploration—predicated upon intense use of mind—that makes an original, revised, expanded, or interpretive contribution to one or more disciplines in pursuit of knowledge, understanding, and the public good” (Clark Atlanta University 2016). Undergraduate research is a high-impact educational practice and has been shown to improve both college success and persistence; this

is especially true for at-risk groups (Kuh 2008). During the past year, CURC launched several initiatives to infuse creative and research activities into the culture of the university at various levels, both within the curriculum and through cocurricular support.

With support from a research course development grant, seven courses across several departments were redesigned to stress research. CURC also conducted cocurricular student workshops and mentoring sessions on topics such as the nature and purpose of research and best practices for organizing, editing, finalizing, and presenting research posters. It also hosted the second annual Undergraduate Research Symposium (which had 141 student participants, 38 faculty participants, and 508 attendees) and provided funding to send approximately twenty students and four faculty members to present research at national conferences.

### **UNITED NEGRO COLLEGE FUND CAREER PATHWAYS INITIATIVES**

The modernization and curriculum reforms described above will allow CAU to better prepare our students for productive careers or admission into graduate and professional school. CAU has instituted these reforms while maintaining its liberal arts tradition emphasizing critical thinking, creative problem-solving, effective oral communication and writing skills, and diverse and global perspectives, coupled with sound preparation of students in their disciplines and research and project-based learning that address economic, social, and technological challenges in the twenty-first century.

The United Negro College Fund Career Pathways Initiative (CPI) serves to accelerate CAU's ongoing efforts to align and augment its curricula by incorporating behavioral, social, and career development skills, stackable credentials, and eportfolios that encourage students to reflect on and take ownership of their own learning journeys. Our CPI program is driven by CAU administration, faculty, professional staff, and student government undergraduate and graduate presidents to ensure full implementation and buy-in from all constituencies.

CPI supports the overall performance of our Office of Career and Professional Development and increases the connections among campus career services, faculty mentorship, and employers to help students secure job placements upon graduation. The CPI project enables CAU to increase the number of graduates who are prepared to immediately transition to meaningful jobs and careers.

All students are exposed to discovery and scholarly inquiry through the first-year seminar and general education courses during their freshman and sophomore years. As part of CPI, alumni-led workshops and seminars will continue to introduce CAU faculty and academic staff to stackable credentials, eportfolios, and best practices in student professional and career development. Faculty participate in meetings with alumni and recruiters to discuss the skill sets that employers require. All CAU schools and departments will develop professional and career courses for their majors, similar to those currently offered in our School of Business. The CPI project is accelerating CAU's work to upgrade the Office of Career and Professional Development and the university's efforts to implement best practices to improve career placement of our graduates. As part of this CPI effort, CAU will aggressively collect data on employment of our students upon graduation and over their careers.

### **FACULTY TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT PILOT**

Faculty training is critical to the success of the *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence* project. The primary training goal was to implement professional development workshops to support the new general education requirements, the QEP, and CPI. Thirteen faculty members from the four schools at Clark Atlanta University (arts and sciences, business administration, education, and social work) participated in training workshops in January 2017. The workshops were





designed to assist faculty in integrating and aligning high-impact practices, rubrics, and signature assignments with general education requirements and components of the QEP and CPI. The workshops addressed additional student-centered topics such as active learning strategies, flipped classrooms, just-in-time teaching, and various technological applications. Upon completion of the workshops, faculty members were expected to redesign and implement at least one course and share their new knowledge with colleagues during departmental faculty meetings, interdisciplinary training opportunities, and other university events, with the goal of reaching at least 80 percent of the faculty in their departments through this “train-the-trainer” model.

By the end of the spring semester in May 2017, the training initiative expanded to include ten additional faculty as well as a new focus on redesigning general education courses in biology, English, and math, using technology to improve student learning, retention, and graduation rates across disciplines. Several courses in the targeted disciplines were recently identified as having at least 50 percent student failure rates. The university’s goal is to improve students’ passing rates by redesigning courses to integrate the abovementioned strategies and applications. As they achieve CAU’s learning outcomes, students will follow a clear academic pathway toward their graduation and career goals. The *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence* project was instrumental in establishing a foundation to ensure that students achieve these important learning outcomes and goals.

### **STUDENT TRANSITION SERVICES, A ONE-STOP CENTER FOR SUCCESS**

The university has developed a transition center to further advance equity on an ongoing basis. The center is under renovation and is scheduled for completion in spring 2018. The center has collaborated with enrollment services, academic departments and services, student organizations, alumni, and community groups to provide transition services and opportunities for students to actively engage in the planning and development of guided pathways to success. The center supports students by

- raising awareness in our campus community about engaging with and measuring high-impact practices;
- developing campus outreach and transition programs;
- creating a resource office for students to develop guided pathways at any point of transition into CAU; and
- developing links with academic departments to assist students in their transition to the university.

Clark Atlanta University will continue to move in an upward trajectory. Assessments will continue to play a key role in determining how the university advances equity and improves students’ learning experiences as a result of our participation in the *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence* project. With collaborative effort and engagement and continued investments in student success, we will develop viable, robust guided pathways that will close CAU’s equity gaps and allow our students to become engaged scholars who complete college with a purpose.

## DOMINICAN UNIVERSITY

# Promising Pathways: Anatomy of a Successful Pilot

SHEILA RADFORD-HILL, *Chief Diversity Officer*

ANNE DEETER, *Director of Continuous Improvement, Office of Institutional Effectiveness*

ANGELA FRAZIER, *Assistant Dean, Rosary College of Arts and Sciences*

GEMA ORTEGA, *Director of Transitions Program and Lecturer, English Department*

KATHLEEN O'CONNOR, *Assistant Professor, Psychology*

NORAH COLLINS PIENTA, *Associate Dean of Students*

PAUL SIMPSON, *Executive Director, Academic Enrichment Center*

MICHELE SWEENEY, *Professor, English, and Codirector of the Honors Program*

TINA TAYLOR-RITZLER, *Associate Professor, Psychology*

Dominican University, founded by the Sinsinawa Dominican Sisters, is a private liberal arts and sciences university in River Forest, Illinois. In 2015, concerns over gaps in retention and graduation rates by race and ethnicity encouraged the university to partner with the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) to develop the Promising Pathways Intervention (PPI) project, an equity-minded pilot designed to improve freshman retention for African American, first-generation, and low-income students. In April 2017, the project ended its first year with an ice cream social for freshman participants. Celebrating PPI students energized our campus equity team, especially as we analyzed student outcomes and found that from fall 2016 to spring 2017, retention for the PPI group was 83.2 percent compared to 79.6 percent for the comparison group. Throughout the summer, the team continued to analyze student data and found that retention for first-generation students in PPI was 80.9 percent compared to 78.6 percent for students in the comparison group. Despite experiencing additional risk factors, the PPI group accumulated an average of 30.3 credits over the first year, compared to 30.7 credits for the comparison group.<sup>1</sup> Given these first-year results, the team went ahead with its plan to double the number of students participating in the intervention in the 2017–18 academic year. This chapter explains the need for Dominican to work toward inclusive excellence; reports student outcomes from the first year of PPI; explains key strategies used to develop, implement, and expand PPI; and discusses PPI's impact on the institution.

## PROMISING PATHWAYS: GUIDELINES AND PRINCIPLES

The PPI project was guided by AAC&U's *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence* project, in partnership with the Center for Urban Education at the University of Southern California. With their support, the equity team created an action plan that targeted key project principles by

- focusing on meeting student needs and AAC&U equity objectives;
- aligning with the Dominican mission, identity, and ethos;
- basing key decisions on data;
- innovating by building an equity-minded culture on campus;
- making the project sustainable so that its impact will remain beyond 2018; and
- influencing other programs on campus.

These principles ensured that the project was consistent with Dominican's mission and strategically aligned with the university's ongoing programs and initiatives. To develop a viable plan of action, the team conducted research to compare retention and six-year graduation rates

<sup>1</sup> The figure for PPI credit accumulation cited here does not include data for students from the Transitions Program, a program for students whose admission is contingent on their participation in Promising Pathways. Credit accumulation for the PPI group when including Transitions Program students was 28.9.



from the cohorts of students who first enrolled in 2008, 2013, 2014, and 2015 (see tables 1 and 2). The research initially focused on retention and graduation rates disaggregated by race and ethnicity.

**TABLE 1. Dominican University Fall-to-Fall Retention Rates by Race and Ethnicity**

ACADEMIC YEAR	HISPANIC	AFRICAN AMERICAN	WHITE	TOTAL RETENTION
2008 Cohort	83.0%	54.0%	83.1%	81.7%
2013 Cohort	74.0%	82.0%	83.0%	80.7%
2014 Cohort	76.7%	66.7%	84.4%	78.6%
2015 Cohort	75.6%	58.3%	75.6%	72.0%

**TABLE 2. Dominican University Six-Year Graduation Rates by Race and Ethnicity**

ACADEMIC YEAR	HISPANIC	AFRICAN AMERICAN	WHITE	OVERALL GRADUATION RATE
2008 Cohort	51.5%	40.0%	69.6%	62.8%
2009 Cohort	63.1%	62.5%	68.3%	66.0%
2010 Cohort	63.4%	40.9%	69.3%	63.1%

As we analyzed our data and read research on undergraduate student success, the team determined that integrating holistic advising and psychosocial interventions in the freshman seminar program could improve student outcomes. To test this hypothesis, the team developed PPI as an innovative response to improve academic outcomes for low-income and African American students. The pilot was designed to close equity gaps in an innovative and sustainable way.

To guide our work, the team created a strategy for how the project would succeed. The strategy involved the following tactics:

- a **flexible approach** to implementation
- a plan **to build ownership** in the project as it evolved
- a process to foster a **community of practice** for faculty to become more equity minded
- a **carefully recruited faculty cohort** who would become deeply involved in implementing the project and could serve as project ambassadors during the scaling-up process
- an **evaluation team** whose evaluation plan and data analysis enabled robust monitoring of the project’s success

### PROMISING PATHWAYS: DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVENTION

The Promising Pathways Intervention project became a research-based, equity-focused pilot project to increase student retention and academic success. The project focused on the first-year freshman seminar experience, and its key components are outlined in table 3.

**TABLE 3. Components of Promising Pathways Intervention (PPI)**

RIGOROUS ACADEMIC CONTENT	HOLISTIC ADVISING	GUIDED PATHWAYS DEVELOPMENT	PSYCHOSOCIAL INTERVENTIONS	COLLEGE SUCCESS WORKSHOPS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Liberal Arts and Sciences (LAS) seminars; the freshman seminar, The Examined Life, is the first in a series of four.</li> <li>• Integration of PPI with Dominican’s distinctive core curriculum</li> <li>• Focus on self and self-awareness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blend of academic advising, vocational discernment, and mentoring within the advising framework</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guided pathway workbooks for all students</li> <li>• Personal plans for college success, including goals for participating in HIPs, developed by each student.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student panel on meeting college challenges</li> <li>• Brain plasticity module</li> <li>• Second-semester student engagement workshops and incentive program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workshops on time management, note-taking, studying, and exam-performance skills</li> </ul>

## LAUNCHING PPI

To implement the PPI interventions, the equity team recruited a committed team of six seminar instructors to teach an enhanced seminar pilot. The summer before the project began, the team met with the faculty volunteers to finalize the schedule for the interventions, discuss technical support, clarify the advising format, and review each component of the intervention. To support the project goal of ensuring that students complete college with a purpose, the Equity Team created a guided pathways workbook. The workbook was designed to encourage students to reflect on their personal goals, learn what the university has to offer, plan to participate in high-impact practices, explore intended majors, and work on course planners to guide program completion in four years. An initial cohort of 103 students was randomly selected for the PPI program, and the team worked with the assistant dean for advising to ensure that students with certain traditional risk factors—including first-generation, low-income, and African American students—were somewhat overrepresented in the six PPI seminars.

After the project began, the team worked with instructors to solve problems and field test each component of the intervention. Prescheduled faculty focus groups provided the team with valuable feedback about how faculty were responding to the pilot. Each faculty member expressed concerns about balancing course content, advising, and the time needed for follow-up on skill building and noncognitive interventions; however, each felt that students responded well, especially to the advising model. During these group meetings, faculty also shared course assignments, pedagogy, and the instructional materials they used to connect the goals of the project with those of their individual seminars. In short, the focus groups evolved into a Promising Pathways community of practice, and their first intensive project was to revise guided pathways materials. Based on what faculty learned in the first year of implementation, they made adjustments to the project's implementation strategies. Through this process, faculty worked together across their different disciplines to increase their ownership of the intervention. They were invaluable in recruiting the new faculty needed to scale up the project. In the second semester, Promising Pathways promoted university-sponsored cocurricular activities and monitored attendance at ten student engagement programs and four student leadership events. Opportunities to become Dominican University leaders, as well as workshops on financial aid, finding summer jobs, and applying for internships, were well received by the students who participated.

## PPI OUTCOMES

PPI compared student outcomes, such as retention and credits earned for the six intervention seminars, with outcomes for sixteen freshman seminars that did not participate in the project. At the end of the first semester, PPI students had a 97.4 percent retention rate compared to a 94.6 percent retention rate for the comparison group. In part because of improved retention through PPI, freshmen retention increased from 72 percent in 2015–16 to 81 percent in 2016–17. Yet, despite progress in student retention, equity gaps remain. For example, the fall 2016 to fall 2017 retention rate for African American students in PPI was 4.8 percentage points higher than for the comparison group but 14.8 percentage points lower than the rate for the PPI group overall (see table 4).

**TABLE 4. Promising Pathways Fall 2016 to Fall 2017 Retention by Race and Ethnicity**

GROUP	BLACK/AFRICAN AMERICAN	HISPANICS OF ANY RACE	WHITE	TOTAL
Comparison Group	63.6%	79.7%	82.6%	79.3%
PPI Intervention	68.4%	86.0%	90.9%	83.2%
All Freshmen	65.9%	81.5%	85.3%	80.8%

## PROMISING PATHWAYS: INFLUENCING STUDENT SUCCESS ACROSS THE CAMPUS

The Promising Pathways Intervention project fostered equity-mindedness on our campus. From an institutional standpoint, the university's new strategic vision for 2017–22 reflects equity and inclusive excellence priorities, including student persistence, engagement, and degree completion with a purpose. Structurally, the university will launch a new student success and engagement division in January 2018. The PPI model is incorporated into the three priorities for the programs and services of this new division: helping students develop academic, interpersonal, and intercultural skills; providing holistic advising; and helping students finish on time. From a curricular perspective, Promising Pathways has also been incorporated into a new proposal for the first-year experience that integrates academic skill building into the seminar series. From a governance perspective, the faculty senate developed a high-impact practices committee to ensure that faculty monitor strategic outcomes related to closing gaps in student participation in high-impact practices. From an assessment perspective, the Office of Institutional Effectiveness collects data annually on equity and inclusive excellence. From the perspective of administration, equity-mindedness was the theme of Dominican's senior leadership retreat and the subject of a recent presentation on equity and inclusive excellence for Dominican University's board of trustees.

Another significant outcome of Dominican's focus on equity is the recent awarding of a US Department of Education Title V grant to Dominican as a Hispanic-Serving Institution. Dominican's proposal included elements of the Promising Pathways intervention, including holistic advising and enhanced faculty development. PPI also influenced a three-day on-campus mentorship and college readiness program for African American high school students sponsored by the honors program. The program, titled Justice through Knowledge (JtK), adapted the guided pathways workbook for its college knowledge component. JtK is an important model for a pipeline program with the potential to increase African American students' access to rigorous institutions of higher learning like Dominican, where African Americans represent only 7.8 percent of 2017–18 total undergraduate enrollment and 6.6 percent of the 2017–18 freshman class.

AAC&U's *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence* project has laid a foundation for Dominican's equity team to partner with Dominican's Borra Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence (CTLE) to develop a faculty academy focused on direct assessment of student learning using AAC&U VALUE rubrics (<https://www.aacu.org/value-rubrics>). The work of Dominican University's equity team will continue to move our campus toward the goal of building a culturally inclusive community that supports every student's pursuit of excellence.

## Campus-Based Strategies for African American Student Success

JAFFUS HARDRICK, *Vice Provost, Student Access and Success*

SONJA MONTAS-HUNTER, *Assistant Vice Provost, Student Access and Success*

TEKLA NICHOLAS, *Senior Statistical Researcher, Florida International University Analysis and Information Management*

As one of the largest Hispanic-Serving Institutions in the United States, Florida International University (FIU) leads the nation in awarding bachelor's and master's degrees to Hispanic students. A top-tier research institution, FIU earned the R1 Carnegie classification for highest research activity. FIU's "BeyondPossible2020 Strategic Plan" outlines critical performance goals that are well aligned with the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence* project. These goals include increasing access to and participation in high-impact practices; increasing completion, retention, and graduation rates for low-income, first-generation, and minority students; increasing achievement of learning outcomes for underserved students; and increasing student awareness and understanding of the value of guided learning pathways.

An important motivation for FIU to participate in the *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence* project was to address racial disparities in academic achievement. African American students represented 13 percent of total student enrollment for 2014–15. While the six-year graduation rate of the most recent freshman cohort (2011–12) was 55 percent overall, the graduation rate for African American students was 41 percent. Our project objectives were to understand the circumstances that affect the retention and graduation rates of African American students at FIU, to improve the academic success of these students, and to ensure that African American students are positioned to achieve success after graduation.

The equity project was led by the Office of Student Access and Success (SAS), created in 2014 to facilitate and develop programs that support first-generation and underrepresented students in navigating the university experience at FIU. SAS houses precollegiate programs and undergraduate college access programs, and it facilitates graduate fellowships for underrepresented minority students. SAS serves approximately five hundred undergraduate students; 48 percent are African American. Goals for our AAC&U *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence* project included

- increasing four- and six-year graduation rates for African American students by 10 percentage points so they are equivalent to the graduation rate for all students;
- determining what percentage of African American students participate in high-impact practices not required by FIU;
- increasing understanding of learning outcomes among African American students; and
- measuring achievement of learning outcomes among African American students.

Success of the initiative relied on intentional collaboration among key stakeholders at the university, including the Honors College, the Office of Analysis and Information Management, the Center for Advancement of Teaching, Student Affairs (specifically the Student Life Black Student Union), and Academic Affairs.

Although the graduation-rate goals for the project are long-term, this initiative succeeded in improving our understanding of African American students' perceptions of the value of learning



outcomes and high-impact practices. We report here on three elements of the project: student perspectives, faculty initiatives, and academic success. In addition, we discuss challenges and provide recommendations for achieving equity to advance student success.

## STUDENT PERSPECTIVES

According to FIU’s 2014 Institutional Report from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), 50 percent of the FIU student body has participated in at least two high-impact practices (HIPs). To assess participation in high-impact practices and better understand the learning outcomes of African American students at FIU, we collected qualitative data through surveys and focus groups. In fall 2016 and fall 2017, African American students responded to surveys that were designed to dig deeper into student responses to NSSE regarding HIPs. The surveys included questions on the use of university programs and services that facilitate high-impact practices, such as the writing center, the Center for Leadership, and study abroad. Students were also asked about their research experiences and about where they obtained their information about HIPs. The report indicated slight gains in participation in the career center, study abroad, and mentoring, but there was no statistically significant change. The most significant finding is that although most of the students surveyed knew these services exist, many had not tried the services or didn’t know what they do (see table 1).

**TABLE 1. African American Students’ Participation in and Knowledge of Campus Resources**

	FIU CAREER AND TALENT SERVICES		UNIVERSITY LEARNING CENTER (TUTORING)		CENTER FOR WRITING EXCELLENCE		STUDY ABROAD		MENTORING PROGRAMS		CENTER FOR LEADERSHIP	
	2016	2017	2016	2017	2016	2017	2016	2017	2016	2017	2016	2017
<b>Participation</b>	23%	27%	23%	22%	26%	25%	5%	9%	4%	6%	13%	11%
<b>I didn't know we had this at FIU</b>	22%	14%	8%	6%	14%	13%	3%	3%	41%	35%	22%	26%
<b>I heard about it, but don't really know what they do</b>	19%	27%	12%	13%	11%	12%	12%	13%	19%	20%	39%	21%
<b>I know about it, but haven't tried it</b>	35%	31%	54%	56%	46%	46%	76%	72%	31%	34%	21%	36%
<b>Response Count</b>	221	252	221	252	221	252	221	252	221	252	221	252

In focus groups, African American students provided insight about their interest in HIPs, as well as some reasons they and their peers might be hesitant to engage in these activities. Students expressed a desire to participate in HIPs and other enrichment activities, including involvement in organizations for their majors or future careers, career-readiness programs and activities, or leadership opportunities. However, many students did not know how to connect with such opportunities. Most participants learned about programs and activities through internet searches but found it intimidating to show up in situations where they did not really know what to expect or whether they would be welcomed. In contrast, students who reported active engagement in HIPs explained that they overcame the obstacles of lack of knowledge and reticence to participate when (1) the activity had been required or suggested (often for extra credit) by a professor in one of their courses, or (2) they had learned about the opportunity through a social network. (Organizations such as the Black Student Union or the Haitian Student Organization were seen as reliable gateways for this type of information.) The findings of our surveys and focus groups provided a better understanding of effective outreach strategies that we have since implemented and continue

to expand. Bringing in faculty and organizations that already engage students is central to our endeavors to increase student participation in HIPs.

One direct achievement resulting from this project is SAS's professional development program: Live, Grow, Learn. With the program's initiation in fall 2016, 126 students participated in biweekly workshops focused on preparing students for postgraduation success. Student feedback about the workshops was very positive, demonstrating students' plans to take action on the suggestions presented. Among the fourteen workshop topics, students showed particular interest in sessions on using LinkedIn, public speaking, networking, and building relationships with faculty. We received a 30 percent response rate on the evaluation, and 100 percent of students that responded indicated that the skills and concepts they learned can help them enhance educational and postgraduation experiences.

### **FACULTY INITIATIVES**

Numerous campus constituents—including faculty who teach gateway courses, student affairs staff, and staff who conduct the Center for the Advancement of Teaching workshops for culturally responsive teaching—participated in programming to integrate an equity-minded approach into their student success efforts. In these workshops, colleagues assessed the ways their expectations and practices might create obstacles for some students to participate or fully benefit from programs, services, or learning opportunities. The groups recognized that traditional strategies for communication and interaction were often at odds with students' time constraints and competing obligations. They considered ways to provide better outreach and more flexible opportunities through expanded use of online resources, social media, and collaboration across departments.

Principles of equity-mindedness were incorporated into FIU's ongoing work to improve student outcomes in gateway courses. Students in thirty-one courses (n = 3,537) participated in surveys to enhance FIU's understanding of how they responded to classroom environments and pedagogical practices. As part of the dissemination of findings, all gateway course passing rates were disaggregated by race/ethnicity and gender to increase faculty awareness of existing disparities and foster discussion of strategies to address gaps. Survey results helped to illustrate obstacles to student success that keep some students from benefitting equally from learning experiences in their classes. For example, nearly a third of respondents said that "other obligations (e.g., work or family) made it hard to come to class" and 24 percent reported, "I didn't have enough time to do the work required." Student feedback highlighted the importance of predictable weekly schedules for assignments and deadlines that provided reasonable flexibility for students to plan around work schedules or other responsibilities. Faculty considered course design strategies that might minimize the impacts of these obstacles on student success in their courses.

### **ACADEMIC SUCCESS**

Although not a direct result of the *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence* project, the university has experienced success with its redesign of gateway courses and an early alert system, which have improved student learning, increased passing rates, and assisted students in engaging with guided learning pathways. Across fifteen key gateway courses in arts and sciences, with combined enrollment of nearly 30,000 each academic year, improved passing rates for the last three years resulted in an additional 4,600 successful course completions. As passing rates have improved, the racial gaps that once were typical in these courses have eroded. Among the seven gateway courses that showed the greatest improvements in passing rates in 2016–17 compared to the prior academic year, six had eliminated racial/ethnic gaps in passing rates. These results suggest that equity-minded approaches are essential to achieving our strategic goals for student success.





The early warning system is a high-touch and high-tech system to alert advisers when students fall behind. The system is intended to ensure efficient intervention, and the university has adopted an academic success coaching model defined by NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising (n.d.). This model involves an interactive process focusing on students becoming more self-aware about how to meet academic goals and recognize their own strengths and weaknesses. In SAS, we have hired three success coaches who meet regularly with students to discuss goals, academic plans, and postgraduation transition plans.

Through these and other university efforts, African American student retention from the first to second year has improved from 75.2 percent in the 2011–12 cohort to 86.7 percent among students admitted in 2014–15.

## **CHALLENGES, ACHIEVEMENTS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The challenge in participating in this initiative is FIU's size and its many moving parts. Although we are both a research university and a teaching- and student-centered university, our performance funding model determines our priorities.

Achievements resulting from this project include the initiation of Live, Learn, Grow—the HIPs-based professional development program—and, more importantly, the exploration of the academic experiences of African American students at FIU. The Black Student Union made it a priority for the 2017–18 academic year to focus on professional development related to HIPs and enhancing postgraduation success. Among SAS students, first-to-second-year retention (87 percent) is higher than the university rate, and gains in HIPs participation were made over the last year. More students transitioned to graduate school or completed study abroad programs this year, encouraged by doctoral students participating in SAS graduate fellowships. The first SAS annual report, which highlights many achievements resulting from the AAC&U project, can be found on our website.<sup>1</sup>

Several important practices emerged for addressing equity gaps in student success. First, awareness is key for student engagement. According to survey and focus group responses, African American students often did not connect specific services to specific offices and resources at FIU. For example, it was not clear to students that Talent Management and Development provides career services or that the University Learning Center facilitates tutoring. Students emphasized the need for better promotion of valuable services and programs. Second, the classroom is a critical arena for addressing equity goals, so it is important to engage intentionally with faculty about culturally responsive teaching. Direction from faculty helped students engage in HIPs. Third, participating in this process demonstrated that building equity-minded practices requires intentional collaboration from top to bottom and across all university units, including administration, faculty, student services, and—importantly—student organizations and leaders.

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<sup>1</sup> To access the SAS annual report, visit [https://issuu.com/fiupublications/docs/17278\\_sas\\_redesign\\_annual\\_report\\_si?e=1346729/54694544](https://issuu.com/fiupublications/docs/17278_sas_redesign_annual_report_si?e=1346729/54694544).

## GOVERNORS STATE UNIVERSITY

# Building an Equity-Minded Pathway for Transfer Students

AURÉLIO MANUEL VALENTE, *Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students*

DARCIE CAMPOS, *Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs and Director of Career Services*

NED LAFF, *Director of the Center for the Junior Year*

MARISTELA ZELL, *Professor of Social Work and Director of General Education*

Governors State University (GSU) is a public regional university located thirty miles south of Chicago, Illinois. As the only public university in our region, we serve urban, suburban, and rural students. Our fall 2017 undergraduate student population (3,288) mirrors what Rendón and Hope (1996) have called America's "new majority" student population: 51 percent are students of color, 56 percent receive Pell grants, and 42 percent are first generation. Since its founding in 1969, GSU has always maintained a strong commitment to ensuring an accessible and high-quality education with wrap-around, comprehensive, and innovative services supporting student success. Given our designation as a completion college (Johnson and Bell 2014) enrolling the vast majority of our undergraduates (89 percent) as transfer students, we focused the work of our *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence* project on four goals (outlined below) that address the dual emphases of faculty development for teaching diverse populations *and* eliminating equity gaps related to the retention of African American transfer students by 2020.

## MAJOR PROJECT FINDINGS

### GOAL 1: Implement Equity-Minded Practices to Close the Student Success Gap for African American Transfer Students

In 2014–15, the retention rate for African American transfer students from junior year to senior year was 67 percent compared to 72 percent for all transfer students. Our project aims to increase retention for all students, but it also aims to close this gap by 2020. Since the launch of the Association of American Colleges and Universities *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence* project, we have reduced the equity gap for the retention of African American transfer students from 5.1 percentage points in 2014–15 to 3.7 percentage points in 2016–17. This significant accomplishment toward our 2020 goal is attributable to the adoption of the "principles of equity-mindedness" that Lindsey Malcom-Piqueux and Estela Mara Bensimon (2017) define as "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."

To help advance our goal, GSU adopted and implemented the Equity Scorecard developed by the Center for Urban Education at the Rossier School of Education at the University of Southern California (Bensimon and Malcom 2012). Since 2015, the Equity Scorecard has helped GSU identify inequities by examining institutional data, and then act on inequities by developing recommendations and action plans. At GSU, the Equity Scorecard is used to disaggregate student success data such as retention rates, GPA, and credits earned across socially constructed identities that include age, gender, race, first-generation status, and income (using Pell eligibility as a proxy). Specifically, Equity Scorecard data have revealed that our Latinx students have outperformed all other racial groups each year in which the scorecard has been administered, and has highlighted





disparities in the experiences of African American transfer students at GSU as compared to those of transfer students from other groups. Overall, the data indicated that GSU's African American transfer students were experiencing equity gaps. However, the study highlighted departments such as business administration, psychology, and nursing that do not have equity gaps in the retention of African American transfer students. In addition, deeper analysis of the areas in which we disaggregated information made clear that equity gaps were pronounced not simply for African American transfer students, but specifically for African American women adult learners. This information motivated our institution to launch GSU4U in fall 2017. GSU4U is a program that connects students to campus and community resources when they are facing personal and financial difficulties that might otherwise compromise their academic success. In its first semester, GSU4U directly connected an estimated 120 students to community-based social services and trained nearly thirty faculty and staff as GSU4U ambassadors. A participating student recently described GSU4U as a "bridge [that helped] me to succeed at GSU." Additionally, the student continues, "GSU4U has given me access to resources and stability that will help me to succeed in my program and to continue towards graduation."

### **GOAL 2: Develop and Offer Quality High-Impact Practices in the Junior Year of Study**

To advance the second of our four goals, GSU sponsored faculty development workshops to plan and organize high-impact practices in the junior seminar and in support services focused on serving transfer students. Specifically, these faculty development workshops focused on instructors teaching our innovative junior seminars. By design, the junior seminars enroll transfer students converging from lower-division courses, dual-degree programs, and transfer admission into core curriculum courses in their academic programs, with a focus on equity-minded practices and outcomes. To share information about the initiative and related minigrant opportunities, GSU's *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence* campus planning team hosted workshops to promote our four project goals and the use of equity-minded practices. To date, fifty-six faculty members, advisors, and academic support staff members have participated in a two-hour workshop. Since the target population includes those working with junior students, the fifty-six attendees constitute 37 percent of 150 possible participants among faculty and academic enrichment professionals. In total, twenty-one (37.5 percent) of the fifty-six participants submitted successful minigrant proposals, affecting nearly 65 percent of our undergraduate student population. In evaluating our workshops, 73 percent of faculty reported that they plan to adopt equity-minded practices in their classrooms. Consequently, faculty who teach in the junior year of study have increased the opportunities for African American transfer students to access high-impact practices such as undergraduate research, service learning, internships, and international study abroad programs.

### **GOAL 3: Create and Assess a Signature Assignment Focusing on the Social Responsibility Learning Outcome in the Junior Seminar**

Social responsibility is the student learning outcome associated with the junior year, the year when our transfer students and our rising juniors come together to explore academic majors. As defined by our general education curriculum, social responsibility is "the development of an awareness of the personal and social obligations needed for success in a diverse and global society" (Governors State University, n.d.). Learning outcomes in this area include those related to civic engagement, intercultural knowledge, ethical reasoning, and appreciation for lifelong learning. Consistent with GSU's mission to build an institution that is socially responsible, we utilized grant funds during this cycle to create and assess signature assignments that emphasized social responsibility; 76 percent of the minigrants addressed this project goal.

The junior seminar course was offered for the first time in fall 2016. The *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence* campus planning team and the general education program worked together, leading faculty development workshops about equity-minded high-impact practices and disseminating minigrants. The director of general education led junior seminar instructors from fifteen different majors in developing signature assignments, collecting student artifacts, creating rubrics, and analyzing the findings. The work of two faculty members who were awarded minigrants for using signature assignments is briefly described below.

One instructor taught the junior seminar in the psychology major, creating an ethical decision-making model that students used to analyze cases concerning underrepresented groups. The goal was for students to demonstrate intercultural knowledge, work collaboratively in groups to complete a service-learning project, and reflect on their obligation as future psychologists to interact successfully with diverse individuals and communities.

Another recipient of the minigrant, an instructor in the art major, designed a signature assignment in which students had to demonstrate understanding and appreciation for individual cultural perspectives, including non-Western and nondominant ways of knowing. To complete this assignment, students attended art exhibits and wrote critiques involving analysis of art, language, history, and cultural relevance. The goal was to encourage a lifelong commitment to viewing and participating within the art criticism world.

Overall, instructors who participated in the project found it to be a valuable experience. Challenges encountered during the process included designing signature assignments that properly assessed the social responsibility outcome and creating rubrics that incorporated clear, specific, and mutually exclusive tasks or student behaviors that corresponded to social responsibility.

#### **GOAL 4: Develop Pathways for Internships and Workforce Preparation**

Staff from the Center for the Junior Year (CJY) visited twenty-one junior seminars to connect with a total of 395 students. The presentations focused on demonstrating to students how understanding their vocational purpose provides them the means to integrate the five basic components of their undergraduate education (core learning, learning in the major, electives/course clusters, leadership opportunities on campus, and experiential learning). Students then learned how to design a “field of study” that brought together their personal, educational, and professional goals in ways that would make them marketable in the “hidden job” market. Common insights that emerged from this activity included “Why didn’t somebody talk to us about this before?” and “This would have changed what I am doing in college.” Another common theme was that many students could not explain what they were trying to accomplish with their undergraduate educations or how their educations would lead to personally satisfying career prospects—whether preparing for jobs after graduation or for graduate study. CJY staff’s visits to the junior seminars generated over 190 student visits to the CJY. This resulted in 145 continuing visits in which students were linked with peer success coaches. From the work with the CJY, more than seventy-five students matched an experiential learning opportunity to their academic program.

In addition to the work the CJY has done specifically within the junior seminars, we also saw success from the minigrant outcomes for internship and workforce preparation: 71 percent of the minigrants addressed this project goal. A specific example is a minigrant that supported the sponsorship of a professional development program by career services. This workshop allowed participating students the opportunity to build the cultural capital needed to advance professionally in today’s global workplace.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACHIEVING EQUITY TO ADVANCE STUDENT SUCCESS

Based on our *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence* project, our campus team identified three recommendations for replicating our project for campuses with similar goals. These recommendations include (1) focusing on faculty development and support, (2) moving beyond specific dimensions of diversity and addressing the whole student through an intersectional perspective, and (3) supporting the sustainability of equity goals by connecting this work with other campus-wide initiatives.

### Faculty Development and Support

After introducing the concept of equity-minded practices and highlighting equity gaps in academic programs by using the Equity Scorecard, we have learned that faculty and academic support professionals operate under the premise that you should treat everyone equally to mitigate claims of bias. As a result, shifting to equitable outcomes—including some that require varying support and differentiated strategies—caused a great deal of tension, particularly at a minority-serving institution (MSI) with majority white faculty and staff. Deeper conversations than those originally planned were needed in the minigrant workshops. To address this concern, we redesigned our program presentation, sponsored “deep dives” (workshops focused specifically on equity-minded practices), redesigned the minigrant application, and integrated equity-minded practices in all of our goals so that these principles were not isolated in the first campus goal. As a result, the number of awarded minigrants addressing the equity goal increased from 50 to 85 percent.

### Applying an Intersectional Lens in Equity-Minded Practices

Adopting the Equity Scorecard was a significant step in actualizing equity-minded practices, and initially we looked only at the racial dimensions of equity gaps. It was not until we examined these gaps more closely that we realized that simply focusing on success strategies for African American students was insufficient given our student population. We needed to focus more specifically on supporting African American women adult learners given the intersecting nature of social groups and identities such as race, gender, and class and the effects of overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage. This observation changed the direction of our support from offering traditional mentoring interventions to launching GSU4U. In addition, a minigrant supported through this project titled “An Appreciative Study of African American Women Students at Governors State University who Successfully Navigated the Junior Year” will engage African American transfer students as undergraduate researchers to explore this topic further from an asset-based perspective.

### Sustaining Pervasive Campus Equity Efforts

Lastly, given that the project is currently in its third and final year, the campus planning team is focused on sustaining our efforts by integrating the work on our four campus goals with other connected initiatives. Because 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.

# Embedding Equity through the Practice of Real Talk

ANNE M. HEUTSCHE, *Assistant Professor of History*

KAREN HICKS, *Director of Assessment*

The scholarship demonstrating equity gaps in our educational system is indisputable, powerful, and daunting. Conversations about how to address questions of equity, inclusion, and student success, along with the development of solutions, are taking place on college campuses across the nation at every level of the institutions. While there are many possible interventions to close equity gaps, it is crucial for each institution to understand its own performance context and culture, and to be able to use that knowledge to inform a strategic roadmap before beginning the work. As we began our equity and inclusion work at Lansing Community College (LCC), we quickly learned that we needed to take two steps backward in order to truly influence equity gaps. We posit that our findings and results relied upon these lessons that we learned along the journey.

Returning to campus after participating in workshops for the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence* project, our team began by exploring various interventions to address our goal of reducing equity gaps for our African American and Latino/a students. These discussions identified numerous faculty-driven and student-centered interventions, including workshops on selected high-impact practices, networks of equity collaborators across the college, presentations and workshops on implicit bias for faculty and staff, projects that focused on engaging students (e.g., employing an academic advisor to work with the men's basketball team), a faculty resource fair, and the development of a Faculty Institute. To begin the work, we focused on the implementation of the Faculty Institute in the summer of 2016 due to its alignment with pedagogy and student outcomes. We also began to lay the foundation for other interventions based on multiple campus-wide discussions pertaining to equity and inclusion involving the perspectives of students, faculty, staff, and administrators.

## THE FACULTY INSTITUTE—THE PEDAGOGY OF REAL TALK

The Faculty Institute is based on Paul Hernandez's book, *The Pedagogy of Real Talk: Engaging, Teaching, and Connecting with Students at Risk* (2015), which addresses issues of student success and belonging for all students in the classroom. Working collaboratively with faculty, Hernandez developed a three-year faculty training program to teach faculty how to transform their teaching by creating classrooms that actively promote meaningful student engagement through the two key pedagogical tools of Real Talk and Alternative Lessons.<sup>1</sup> By learning how to cultivate thoughtful connections with students, faculty participants—who are content experts—develop tools that lead to higher levels of student engagement, retention, and success. Hernandez taught participants in the Faculty Institute the pedagogical tools from *The Pedagogy of Real Talk* that encourage faculty participants to explore, be creative, and try new techniques for developing and implementing content material in their classrooms, with lasting impacts for both students and the instructor.

<sup>1</sup> Real Talks are concise personal conversations between faculty and students that are used sporadically throughout the semester to foster connections among faculty and students. Alternative Lessons are creative and innovative approaches to introducing specific content materials that are relevant and engaging to students.



From the beginning, a sense of possibility surrounded the Faculty Institute. Faculty participants offered their insights into the most useful lessons learned from their training. One faculty participant wrote, “I believe it would be easy for students to disengage unless we find ways to make personal and emotional connections that serve as bridges to the actual material. But also, from Paul’s book and his demonstrations, I got a sense of how gaining the confidence of students through personal connections and confidence in the instructor can go a long way to engaging them in difficult material.”

Initial survey findings after implementing the design and delivery changes in the classroom were encouraging. Faculty participants indicated high levels of openness to designing and using class activities that are inclusive of all students and that challenge students’ perspectives of the world (69 percent) as well as high levels of intent to try new and different strategies to improve student learning outcomes (60 percent). Faculty attendance and participation were motivated by attendees’ desire for professional development (78 percent), a personal invitation to attend from another faculty member (56 percent), an interest in the topic (44 percent), and an interest in improving student success (11 percent). One participant, who had been struggling in the classroom, wrote, “I gave my first Real Talk in the classroom the first day of Summer Semester. I gotta tell ya’—I felt like skipping all the way home. It was such a ‘high’ for me to see the change in the students’ faces, the way they identified, asked questions, and were sincerely engaged, and have been all semester long.” Another faculty participant remarked, “By better understanding where our students are coming from, we will be better equipped to tailor or customize our teaching methodology and engagement in order to encourage a more captive audience and thus foster greater student achievement in our classrooms.”

Outcomes data also showed early promise. Faculty Institute data were collected following the fall 2016 semester, the first semester after the 2016 Faculty Institute, and the first opportunity for faculty to apply their learning in the classroom. Progressive, institutional performance indicators were selected to better understand the impact of the Real Talk pedagogical practices both within the classroom and on institutional indicators after the intervention. A comparison of Faculty Institute and the college’s overall average results was conducted. The Faculty Institute’s 2016 faculty cohort showed higher results for three of the four performance indicators listed above (i.e., a student success rate of 78.6 percent, a course completion rate of 92 percent, and a persistence rate of 77.6 percent) when compared to LCC overall results (a student success rate of 77.6 percent, a course completion rate of 91.2 percent, and a persistence rate of 73.1 percent).<sup>2</sup> While we expected little or no change in the retention rate as the project was just completing its first year, we were delighted with early improvements in the persistence rate, which showed an average increase of 4.5 percent in the first year compared to LCC’s overall rate.<sup>3</sup>

## **COMMON DEFINITIONS OF EQUITY FROM STUDENTS, FACULTY, STAFF, AND ADMINISTRATORS**

With this promising start from one intervention, we worked to expand equity and inclusion conversations campus-wide through two activities during professional development days in January 2016. First, we invited Tia Brown McNair, AAC&U’s vice president for diversity, equity, and student success, to speak on the book she cowrote, *Becoming a Student-Ready College: A New Culture of Leadership for Student Success* (2016), and to place our work in the context of the larger national dialogue. We then provided each program with program-specific and college-wide data

<sup>2</sup> Student success is defined as greater than or equal to a 2.0 course grade.

<sup>3</sup> Persistence is defined as the number of students who persist term to term. Retention is defined as the number of students who persist semester to semester, specifically from fall to fall.



from the fall 2015 semester that examined student success through the lenses of Pell eligibility, sex/gender, race/ethnicity, and delivery method (face to face, online, or hybrid). We asked each program to identify their specific priority in closing the equity gap, define a reasonable percentage goal to address the equity gap in their program, identify solutions, and align their work in the classroom with that of their program and the college. We then came together again in a campus-wide conversation to share solutions and to identify both opportunities and barriers as we worked toward closing the equity gaps. It was during this activity that we stumbled three steps backward. We realized that we had made three basic, but major, oversights in our equity and inclusion work at LCC: (1) we did not have a common definition or understanding of equity across the college; (2) while we could identify many potential solutions for the equity gaps, without applying multiple perspectives to definitions of equity, we were missing a collaboratively defined problem statement; and (3) without a shared problem statement, we could not define our needs (i.e., we could not document related equity gaps in student achievement data).

The feedback from our college community expanded our lens of equity across various roles and along multiple dimensions. We applied a systemic alignment process to help us navigate the complexities of aligning multiple points of view, establishing shared goals, collaboratively defining desired outcomes, and designing plans for implementation and monitoring. We followed Guerra-López and Hicks's (2017) four-phase alignment process of (1) aligning expectations, (2) aligning desired outcomes, (3) aligning interventions, and (4) aligning implementation plans. We began with the first phase of aligning expectations by asking three questions in a variety of settings, including an online survey, town hall meetings, focus groups, and in-class surveys throughout the spring semester. These questions were as follows: How do you define equity? What is one way that LCC demonstrates equity according to your definition? Can you describe one way to improve equity at LCC based on your definition? Of our respondents, 31 percent were students, 10 percent were staff, 47 percent were faculty, and 11 percent were administrators.

Based on these responses, we learned that the LCC community defined equity within five dimensions: (1) fairness in policy and procedures, (2) expectations, (3) interactions and involvement, (4) culture, and (5) resources. We coded responses according to dimension and by role, as noted in table 1.

It was here that we changed our focus and understanding of our equity and inclusion work. Our faculty- and student-focused Real Talk pedagogical intervention was already showing promising results in the classroom. When we applied our alignment process, it allowed us to gather additional insight into the ways we could address equity gaps *outside* the classroom, strengthening our relationships with our students and within our college community.

### **SCALING UP REAL TALK AND FACULTY INSTITUTES**

The already high levels of engagement of the LCC community continue to grow. In the classroom, Real Talk has expanded to additional faculty through the Faculty Institute. Currently, we are in the second year of the Faculty Institute and added a new cohort of participants from the Center for Transitional Learning and Accounting. Faculty are continuing to develop and create the two Real Talk pedagogical tools by exploring creative approaches, innovative teaching pedagogies, and delivery methods.

**TABLE 1. LCC Equity and Inclusion Dimensions, Definitions, and Definition Responses by Role in Organization**


		DIMENSIONS				
		POLICY OR PROCEDURE	EXPECTATIONS	INTERACTION AND INVOLVEMENT	CULTURE	RESOURCES
DEFINITIONS BY ROLE	DIMENSION DEFINITION (BASED ON CAMPUS-WIDE RESPONSES)	A plan that is put in place to evaluate a process Written documentation that describes our guidelines for work Steps that describe how we apply guidelines	How a policy is read and implemented What is deemed appropriate of myself and others Can be written or unwritten Criteria applied to define and implement How work is operationalized (e.g., fidelity of work across campus)	Who gets to be involved in the design and application of policy and procedures Who is involved in decision making How messages (e.g., expectations) are communicated Who has authority Level of autonomy The makeup of work groups Participation in college work and projects	Symbols Can be spoken and unspoken Attitude and atmosphere Where work, worker, and workplace converge Treatment, recognition, and rewards What is valued and how that value is demonstrated Alignment of words and action	How money and other resources are allocated Awareness of access to physical spaces Prioritization of resources Allocation of resources to align with strategic priorities
	STUDENT	Grading	Awareness of learning style	Meaningful connections Diversity of thought	Being kind toward all Doing your best	n/a
	FACULTY	Faculty accountability	Easy to provide input	Involved in decision making	Climate of learning	Awareness of resources Distribution
	STAFF	Opportunities and advancement	Ongoing education	Ask about needs	Encouragement	Pay
ADMINISTRATOR	Work distribution	Guidelines	Ask about needs	Modeling and commitment	Pay	

Outside the classroom, an Equity Work Day was developed that focuses on five key elements: (1) placing LCC voices at the center of the narrative, (2) building community and a sense of belonging, (3) reporting on the progress of the Faculty Institute intervention, (4) moving equity beyond the classroom, and (5) digging deeper into the definitions of equity and inclusion. We also organized and held the first annual Engagement and Resource Fair for faculty and staff to highlight available resources and the work that is taking place at LCC. Across the two events, more than sixty individual programs, departments, or areas offered information to more than 350 individuals.

### LISTENING AND LEARNING FROM THE LCC COMMUNITY

We started with multiple interventions to address the equity gaps at LCC. However, we realized that in order to have sustainable and meaningful institutional change, we had to reimagine the equity and inclusion project. By cultivating open and honest conversations, the LCC community developed an equity framework that included common understandings, expectations, and solutions. We then created alignment between the framework and our shared goals and developed a strong foundation and direction for targeted interventions and institutional change. During the 2016–17 academic year, we compiled expectations; we are now moving forward by defining desired results, having discussions at the program level, and integrating equity into daily work and operating plans. We are also working to design a toolbox to promote the alignment of our





work (e.g., our interventions) with our shared desired outcomes. Finally, we are strengthening and expanding the Faculty Institute by adding new faculty cohorts, building additional structural supports, and developing train-the-trainer sessions. To create an equitable and inclusive community where all voices are welcomed and valued, we continue to weave equity and inclusion into the fabric of Lansing Community College.

## Increasing Student Access to High-Impact Practices: Inclusive Excellence Project Findings

SOLOMON ALAO, *Assistant Vice President for Outcome Assessment*

CHERYL ROLLINS, *Director of the Office of Institutional Research*

LISA D. BROWN, *Associate Professor and Associate Chair of Biology*

HENRIETTA L. WRIGHT, *Lecturer in the Department of Teacher Education and Professional Development*

YOLANDA SEABROOKS, *Career Pathways Initiative Project Manager*

TIFFANY THOMPSON-JOHNSON, *Senior Researcher in the Office of Institutional Research*

LINDA HARDGES-SCRUGGS, *Budget Manager in the Office of Assessment*

In October 2015, Morgan State University was one of thirteen institutions of higher learning selected to participate in a three-year Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) project, *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence: Campus-Based Strategies for Student Success*. The aim of the project is to advance equity and improve the quality of college learning for all students. Resources (e.g., a grant and educational leadership) from AAC&U increased our ability to build institutional capacity to create, implement, and assess equity-focused action plans for improving student achievement outcomes. Factors influencing our success include, but are not limited to, the role of leadership, campus-wide partnerships, the alignment of institutional goals, and professional development.

Support of project initiatives by the Morgan State president, provost, deans, and chairs, as well as the leadership team from AAC&U, made it possible to acquire buy-in from faculty members, students, and administrators. 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 connected with this equity and inclusive excellence project. Participation in this project has changed institutional culture with three distinct results: (1) the campus-wide development, implementation, and assessment of equity-focused action plans; (2) the intentional tracking of the use of high-impact practices (HIPs) and the use of AAC&U VALUE (Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education) rubrics by general education faculty; and (3) the creation of professional development opportunities to improve faculty’s awareness about and use of equity-minded strategies (e.g., culturally responsive pedagogical practices).

### **EQUITY AND INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK**

Our data-driven framework included the use of disaggregated data to evaluate key outcomes; increased participation by students, staff, faculty, and administrators in professional development opportunities related to student success and inclusive excellence; a redesign of general education courses to increase access to and participation in HIPs and the use of VALUE rubrics; and the creation of action plans with measurable objectives. Prior to developing action plans, the team collected and reviewed data on student demographics; course-level data on the general education program (e.g., completion and attrition rates; grades of D, F, or withdrawal; and student evaluations); institutional data (e.g., retention and graduation rates, results from the National Survey of Student Engagement); and annual reports related to Morgan State’s diversity and inclusive excellence. The data leadership team, action plans with measurable goals, assessment system, and professional development are key elements of our framework for improving student success and inclusive excellence.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See the *Equity Academy Participant Workbook* designed by the Center for Urban Education (2015) for more information on data-driven frameworks for equity and inclusive excellence.

## MAJOR PROJECT FINDINGS

The project was primarily designed to increase student access to and participation in HIPs. The objective was to increase the number of HIPs implemented by faculty members teaching first- and second-year courses by 20 percentage points from a baseline of 30 percent. Participation in HIPs is associated with persistence, conceptual understanding, and adoption of deep processing strategies (Kuh et al. 2005).

Development and implementation of a HIPs survey was the first action strategy. In February and March 2016, fifty-three members of the general education program faculty completed a HIPs survey. Of these respondents, 56 percent reported that they needed more training on HIPs, and 63 percent reported that they lacked educational resources to implement HIPs effectively. The second action strategy was the offering of professional development workshops. The number of general education faculty engaged in professional development on HIPs and VALUE rubrics increased from three at the beginning of the project in 2015 to twenty-two in 2017. During a faculty institute offered in August 2017, more than four hundred faculty members from across campus participated in workshops on “Integrated Teaching: Expanding Distinctive, Diverse, and Equitable Practices.” In addition, the number of signature assignments implemented by members of our general education faculty and assessed using VALUE rubrics rose from two in 2015 to a total of ten in fall 2017.<sup>2</sup>

Redesigning general education courses to bolster student success and academic excellence was the third action strategy, with a goal of increasing student access to and participation in HIPs. Beginning in fall 2015, all new and redesigned general education course proposals were required to include one to three HIPs for engaging students in the teaching and learning process. Of our undergraduate students, 55 percent are eligible for Pell grants and 82 percent of the student body is African American, and HIPs are effective strategies for engaging students from these groups in the teaching and learning process (Kuh et al. 2005). See table 1 for the number of redesigned courses, the nature of the HIPs included in these courses, student course enrollment, and the total impact of participation in HIPs.

**TABLE 1. Number of Redesigned Courses with Access to and Participation in HIPs**

GENERAL EDUCATION COURSES	NUMBER OF REDESIGNED COURSES	SAMPLE HIPs	ENROLLMENT
Mathematics	7	Common Intellectual Experiences	Fall 2016 = 194
History	4	Undergraduate Research	Fall 2017 = 43
Freshman Composition	2	Writing-Intensive Courses	Fall and Spring 2017 = 124
Critical Thinking	6	Collaborative Projects	Fall 2017 = 200
Psychology	1	Learning Communities	Fall 2017 = 97
Sociology	1	Service Learning	Fall 2017 = 87
Economics	2	Collaborative Assignments	Fall 2017 = 200
Humanities	1	Service Learning	Fall 2017 = 87
<b>TOTAL IMPACT</b>			<b>1032</b>

We also conducted an analysis to discern course success rates—the number of students earning a grade of C or better—for general education courses and to compare success rates with a benchmark of 70 percent established at the beginning of this project in fall 2015. Results of this analysis have implications for improving general education courses and, as a result, the general

<sup>2</sup> For more information on signature assignments, see <https://www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/Signature-Assignment-Tool.pdf>.



education program overall. For instance, if an action plan is not already in place, programs with courses performing below average can develop action plans to improve their performance. Programs with courses that meet and exceed standards can share best practices and be recognized for their efforts. An important goal is to identify and implement models of success to achieve strategic goals and objectives at multiple levels (course, program, department, school or college, and university). Another purpose is to disaggregate the data by demographics (gender and race) and review it for unequal student outcomes.

Improving composition skills among undergraduate students is a top priority at Morgan State University, and the course redesign of the composition courses began in summer 2015. Total course success rates for the redesigned sections of Freshman Composition I and II for fall 2015 through spring 2016 exceeded the 70 percent rate set at the beginning of the project (see table 2 for course success rates by gender for Freshman Composition I and II).

**TABLE 2. Course Success Rates for Freshman Composition I and II<sup>3</sup>**

	COMPOSITION I FALL 2015		COMPOSITION I SPRING 2016		COMPOSITION II SPRING 2016	
	SUCCESS RATE	N	SUCCESS RATE	N	SUCCESS RATE	N
<b>Total</b>	74%	44	73%	58	79%	38
<b>Male</b>	75%	16	59%	31	81%	21
<b>Female</b>	73%	28	86%	27	77%	17

Data for other courses identified in table 1 will be analyzed at the end of the fall 2017 semester. In accordance with the goals of this project, we will continue to collaborate with faculty and administrators to ensure that data are disaggregated for other general education course projects (e.g., signature assignments, HIPs-related experiences) that require the use of rubrics and rating scales to better understand and address the issue of conceptual understanding, critical thinking, equity, and inclusive excellence. In addition, we plan to disaggregate the data by ethnicity, age, and international status. An important goal is to discern equity differences and develop action plans to close achievement gaps when they are detected.


### LESSONS LEARNED

Morgan State University learned several lessons from our participation in the *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence* project. During the development, implementation, and assessment of the project, support from provost, deans, and chairs, as well as the AAC&U leadership team, made it possible to acquire buy-in and support from faculty members, students, and administrators. Throughout the entire process, developing a communication plan ensured that information about different aspects of the project was appropriately communicated and that adequate feedback was received from stakeholders. In summary, it takes the whole campus to address different dimensions of equity and inclusive excellence.

### CREATING A SUSTAINABILITY PLAN

The first set of strategies for sustaining acquired momentum and improving the culture of inclusive excellence at Morgan State University include aligning project goals with the strategic goals and mission of the university, collaborating with different units on campus, and integrating equity and inclusive excellence strategies with the work of the general education and professional development

<sup>3</sup> Success rates are the number of students with grades of A, B, or C in each category. The N numbers reflect the number of students who completed each course successfully.



committees. Our leadership team will continue to use monthly meetings and reports to analyze, improve, and disseminate data on project goals and outcomes to stakeholders at the university, local, and national levels through meetings, conferences, workshops, publications, and other venues.

To ensure that we have the resources to fully integrate and sustain project goals and outcomes, members of our leadership team acquired a five-year, \$2 million grant from the United Negro College Fund (UNCF) on guided learning pathways that will incorporate HIPs for workforce preparation and engaged citizenship. Important elements of the UNCF grant include improving undergraduate curricula from freshman through senior years; infusing twenty-first-century skills into the curricula (e.g., problem solving, critical thinking, collaboration/teamwork, self-determination, and decision making); and improving our commitment to equity and inclusive excellence. In summary, Morgan State University is strongly committed to building institutional capacity to create, implement, and assess equity-focused action plans to improve student achievement outcomes.

# Improving Student Success for Males at a Historically Black University

ANDREA M. FERNANDEZ, *Coordinator of Freshman Studies Courses and Academic Coach*

REGINA W. DAVIS, *Assistant Provost for Student Success and Academic Support*

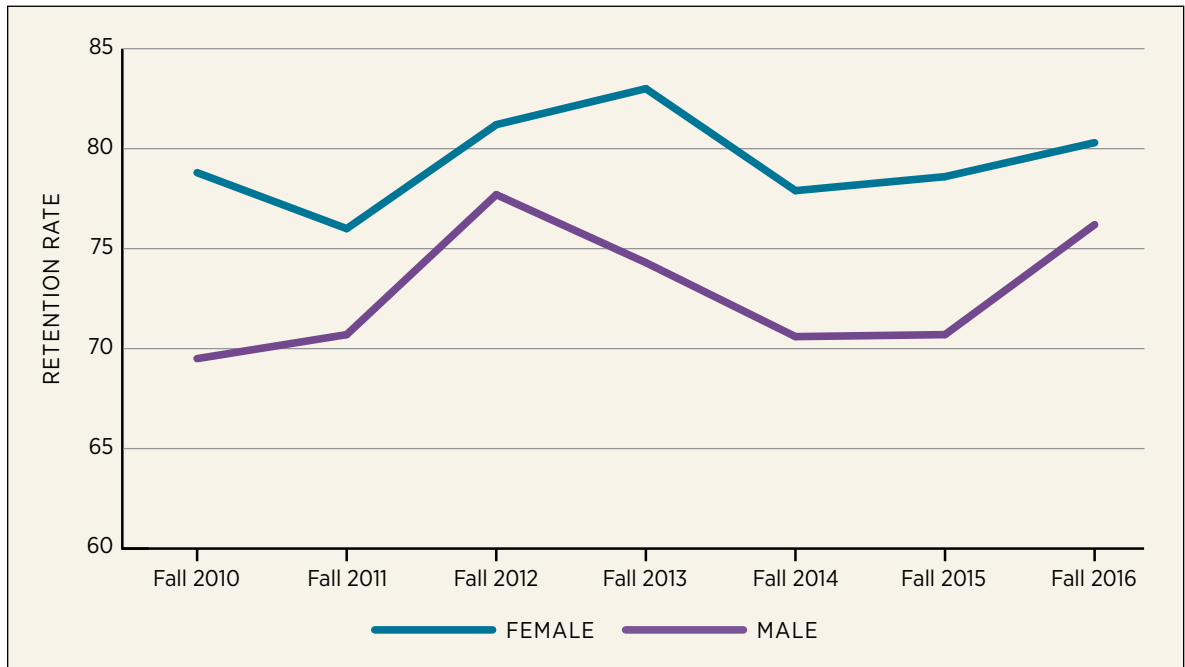
G. SCOTT JENKINS, *Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and Undergraduate Programs*

North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University (NCA&T) is a historically black land-grant doctoral research university in North Carolina. The university provides a wide range of educational opportunities from bachelor's to doctoral degrees in both traditional and online environments. With an emphasis on preeminence in STEM and a commitment to excellence in all its educational, research, and outreach programs, NCA&T fosters a climate of economic competitiveness that prepares students for global society. With an enrollment of 11,800 students, NCA&T is one of sixteen campuses in the University of North Carolina system. Three years ago, NCA&T was selected to participate in the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence: Campus-Based Strategies for Student Success* project. Our initial project objectives included establishing a comprehensive database and monitoring system for high-impact practices (HIPs), increasing faculty development opportunities, creating web portals for HIPs, redesigning the first-year experience, and improving male retention. While these objectives were integral to closing equity gaps, the scope of our initial vision for the project was too broad. Consequently, we asked for a modification to our initial plan and focused our efforts on (1) increasing the retention and completion rates of male students, particularly African American students, via their access to and participation in HIPs; (2) raising student awareness of guided learning pathways; and (3) assessing learning outcomes.

## MALES AND STUDENT SUCCESS

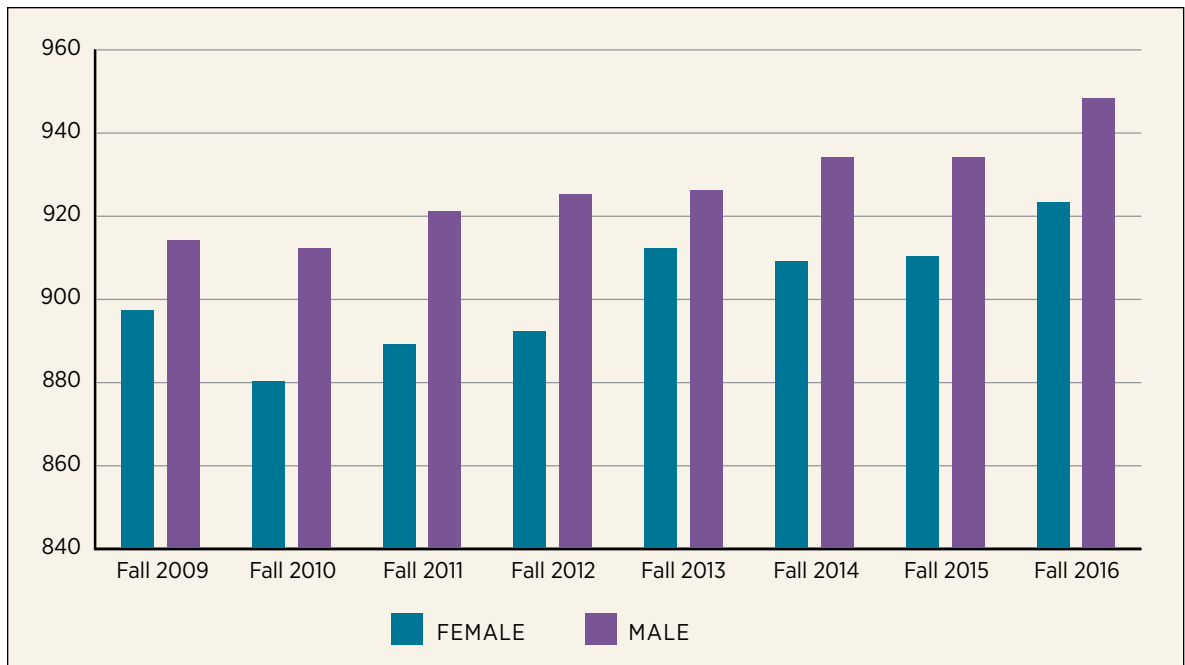
According to data from the Pew Research Center (Krogstad and Fry 2014), blacks make up 14 percent of college-aged students nationwide, but only 9 percent of those students are completing their respective programs. Low retention and completion rates for this population are among the most critical issues in higher education and on our campus. Over the past three years, enrollment of full-time, first-time-in-college (FTIC) students at NCA&T has increased by 14 percent. More specifically, male enrollment has grown by 9 percent. However, despite increased enrollment, males make up less of the entering class than in previous years, dropping from 44 percent to 42 percent. Our institutional data show that male students are retained at an average of 6.6 percent less than females in the FTIC cohort (see fig. 1).

**FIGURE 1. First-Year Retention by Gender for First-Time, Full-Time, Degree-Seeking Undergraduate Students**



Furthermore, when we look at five-year graduation rates, the rate for FTIC males is 14 percent lower than for females. These gaps led us to ask, “Are males less prepared than females?” When reviewing the institutional data, we found that male students average 25 points higher than females on the SAT (see fig. 2).<sup>1</sup> These data led the institution to focus on male student success.

**FIGURE 2. Average SAT Scores by Gender for First-Time-in-College Students at NCA&T**



<sup>1</sup> SAT figures are based on the SAT’s scale prior to the 2016 redesign and include only critical reading and mathematics scores.



## STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE MALE STUDENT SUCCESS

Guided by “Preeminence 2020” (the university’s strategic plan), the University of North Carolina’s Fostering Undergraduate Student Success Policy, and the review of data using the Center for Urban Education’s Equity Scorecard as part of AAC&U’s *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence: Campus-Based Strategies for Student Success* project, we focused our attention on improving retention and completion rates and raising awareness of learning pathways for males.

One initiative that focuses on student success for males is Project Male Aggies Resolved to Change History (MARCH), 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. As part of the LLC, the cohort’s male students attend our FRST 101 Student Success course together. The student success course is a redesigned course that introduces students to many high-impact educational practices including the development of eportfolios. The eportfolio allows each student to create an academic success plan that includes an educational pathway to enhance the student’s ability to efficiently and effectively complete his degree pathway. The eportfolio also contains a goal-setting reflection based on a career-services assessment, knowledge of academic resources, a four-year graduation plan, study abroad goals, and a display of writing skills. The student success course teaches students the basic elements of the research process and introduces skills that help students effectively communicate both orally and in writing. In addition, course instructors serve as academic coaches for students in the course, and in fall 2016 we implemented this co-advising model for all first-year students and certain populations (e.g., athletes, band members, and readmitted students). Academic coaches monitor the early alert system for these students and reach out to students in response to any alerts raised. As figure 1 shows, in fall 2016, the gap between first-year retention rates for males and females decreased to 4.1 percentage points, which is the smallest it has been since 2012. Data from Project MARCH showed a decrease in retention rates; however, several initiatives put in place recently are helping to bolster awareness of the male initiative and increase the overall retention rate.

## SCALING UP AND MOVING FORWARD

Awareness of the male student success issue has grown on campus, and improving male student success has become one of the university’s strategic priorities. The primary goal of this priority is to develop initiatives to reframe student experiences and create equitable outcomes for participants. In fall 2017, a committee of male administrators was formed to review and assess the many initiatives that are focused on male student success. The expected outcomes of the committee include (1) capturing a comprehensive inventory of campus programs focused on males, (2) completing a needs assessment for male undergraduate students, (3) determining the assessment indicators of success, (4) developing university-wide collaborative programming, and (5) developing an implementation plan for proposed programs. From this initial assessment, a male mentoring program was created. AggiePREP: Preparing Men to Lead, Achieve, and Succeed is a male mentoring program spearheaded by our chancellor, with male administrators and faculty serving as informal mentors and academic advisors to a high-risk group of male students. The purposes are to promote a male mentoring support system that fosters the academic, personal, professional, and leadership development of male students, and to provide opportunities for participating in interdisciplinary research on factors that promote male student success in higher education.

In addition, we are beginning to assess the role that noncognitive factors play in student success. The ETS Success Navigator, a noncognitive assessment, was administered to all incoming first-year students before the fall 2017 semester. This assessment is aimed at helping us identify incoming students who require early engagement and resources to improve student retention. Students met with academic advisors to discuss their results, and we are tracking the progress of these students as they matriculate through the university in an effort to determine success indicators, especially for males.

In our efforts to meet our equity goal of increasing retention and completion rates among African American males, we collaborated with campus partners to increase HIPs participation for Project MARCH students. Students shared a common intellectual experience in their freshman seminar course. Additionally, in collaboration with the English department, participants will take a writing-intensive freshman composition course during the spring 2018 semester. In partnership with the Office of International Programs, Project MARCH participants will engage in global learning through study abroad during the spring 2018 semester. We will measure the impact of these HIPs on male student success.

## **CONCLUSION**

Our data indicate that male students show lower rates of success than their female peers along indicators such as first-year retention and five-year graduation, even though they enter NCA&T with higher SAT scores. For our *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence* project, we put effort into improving student success by implementing a co-advising model, revamping our first-year student success course, and monitoring student progression with an early alert system, with a particular focus on male students. However, over the past couple of years, our project has become more attentive to improving male student success. In the past two years, we have improved male student retention, but we have yet to match the retention rates of female students. We have become more intentional with our initiatives, including by making improvements in Project MARCH, by creating the male student success committee, and by implementing programs from that committee (e.g., AggiePREP). This year, we expect to further close the student success gaps between male and female students.

# Designing Quantitative Pathways toward STEM Success

JENNIFER RACHFORD, *Director of Institutional Research*

MARY COFFEY, *Associate Dean of the College*

HECTOR L. SAMBOLIN JR., *Associate Dean for Academic Affairs*

Understanding the educational benefit of diversity in preparing all students for lives of creative leadership, Pomona College's board of trustees adopted a statement in 2005 that articulated the goal of "creating a dynamically diverse community." Since then the college has focused on this goal with a heartening degree of success. Pomona College now enrolls a demonstrably increased percentage of underrepresented, first-generation, and low-income students, and it provides unparalleled resources to help them pursue their passions across a wide variety of fields. Yet, having aspired to create such a diverse community, the college finds itself addressing specific issues of equity in delivering on its promise of educational excellence. In examining data on student performance and persistence, we identified achievement gaps for certain groups of students in majors with a focus on quantitative reasoning. Building on the college's initial success with cohort models, our partnership with the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence* project provided us with an opportunity to gather specific data on student performance and persistence, to engage faculty in substantive conversations about equity and inclusive pedagogy, and to develop initiatives that can be shown to support students from a wide variety of backgrounds through the successful completion of a rigorous curriculum in STEM fields.

## BACKGROUND

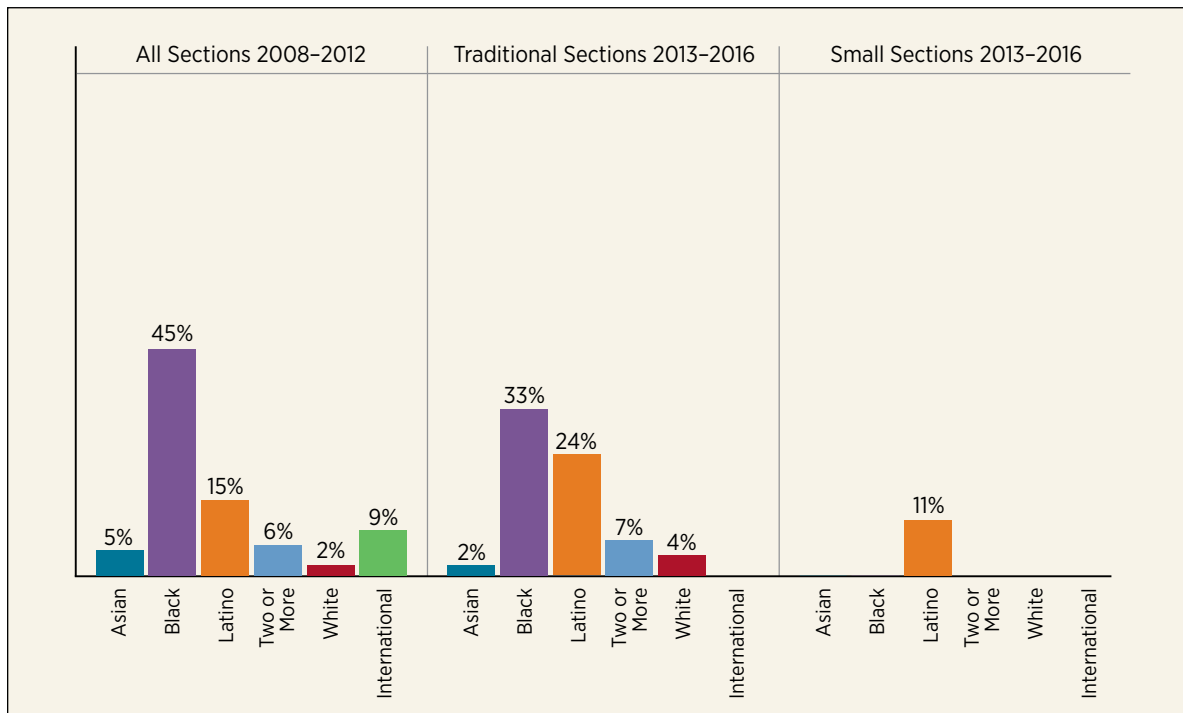
With 45 percent of its student body identifying as domestic students of color, Pomona has become one of the most diverse institutions among highly selective private liberal arts colleges nationally. The makeup of the first-year class went from 11 percent first-generation students to about 20 percent between 2008 and 2017; from 4 percent international students to 12 percent in the same time frame; and from 12 percent receiving Pell grants in 2007 to 22 percent today. Faculty in the sciences have faced not only changing demographics in their classrooms, but also a rapid surge in the demand for majors. An average of 44 percent of majors over the past three graduation cohorts (2015–17) were completed in the sciences, an increase of more than 40 percent from a decade ago.

The pace and scope of change, in some ways, have exceeded Pomona's capacity to adapt the landscape for teaching and learning to meet the needs of a changing student body. Students have struggled with difficult gateway courses in the sciences, and this has been true especially for students whose academic background may have prepared them less for the rigors of the curriculum at Pomona. Black and Latino students, in particular, have been more likely to drop out of science than other groups after their second or third semester of coursework.

Pomona has developed a number of initiatives in response to these trends, including the establishment of a Quantitative Skills Center, better alignment between academic and student affairs in providing cohort-based models of student support, and the redesign of key gateway courses to provide more structured support in the sciences. Preliminary research on these efforts offers evidence suggesting that we *can* intervene in positive ways to change the narrative about

STEM at Pomona for underrepresented students (see fig. 1). Our participation in AAC&U’s *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence* project has given us an opportunity to strengthen these strategies with a continued focus on the persistence and success of first-generation, black, and Latino students interested in majoring in STEM and other quantitative fields.

**FIGURE 1. Percent of Students Earning a Grade of C or Lower in Traditional Sections of an Introductory STEM Course Compared to Redesigned “Small Sections”**



### PROJECT FINDINGS

Pomona College committed to identifying and reducing equity gaps in gateway courses and in the mastery of quantitative reasoning. To date, we have established performance baselines for key introductory courses and convened faculty in equity-minded reflection about these performance data. This work is grounded in important insights about the critical role of faculty—including their knowledge, beliefs, and sense of agency—in shaping student outcomes (Bensimon 2007).

We examined student performance in gateway courses in seven departments with a substantial role in developing students’ quantitative capacities at Pomona: Biology, Chemistry, Computer Science, Economics, Mathematics, Physics, and Psychology. Data were shared with departments in a facilitated medium that encouraged faculty to reflect on any equity gaps related to race/ethnicity, sex, and first-generation status and on the design of introductory courses.

Performance gaps by race/ethnicity and first-generation status are present in many introductory courses that emphasize quantitative learning (see table 1). Gaps by sex are not evident. In addition, we have been looking at the performance of underrepresented minorities (black and Latino students, specifically) who are involved in STEM cohorts, compared to black and Latino students who are not in a STEM cohort. While we have not yet been able to tease out the effects of cohort participation, we are beginning to build a picture of how these cohorts function as a model worth examining for replication in other areas of the college.



**TABLE 1. Summary of Mean GPA on a Twelve-Point Scale, 2013-16**

DEPT / COURSE NO. (MASKED)	UNDERREPRESENTED MINORITIES	ALL OTHER RACES	BLACK/LATINO—STEM COHORT	BLACK/LATINO—NO STEM COHORT	FIRST-GENERATION	NOT FIRST-GENERATION
A/1	*8.2	10.4	8.0	8.3	*8.3	10.2
B/1	*8.4	10.5	*9.1	7.9	*9.8	10.7
C/1	*8.8	10.6	8.3	9.1	*9.1	10.5
C/2	*9.5	10.5	--	--	9.6	10.4
D/1	*9.1	10.8	9.8	9.0	9.2	10.6
D/2	*9.3	11.3	9.1	9.6	9.8	11.0
E/1	*9.4	10.6	9.5	9.3	*9.8	10.3
E/2	*10.1	10.9	10.2	10.1	*10.3	10.7
F/1	*9.4	10.7	9.8	9.2	*9.5	10.6
F/2	*9.7	11.0	10.2	9.7	*10.0	10.8
G/1	*9.6	10.8	9.5	9.6	9.5	10.7
H/1	*9.8	10.8	9.4	9.9	*9.8	10.7

\* Mean is significantly different from comparison mean ( $p \leq .05$ )

--  $N < 5$ ; analysis not conducted

**Underrepresented Minority** = Black, Latino, American Indian/Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander

While course performance data are important to track, we also have sought to develop measures independent of course grades that would provide additional benchmarks in students’ mastery of quantitative skills, frequently identified by faculty as a stumbling block in STEM. An early innovation in one section of a key introductory biology course relied on data from shared exam questions to make the case that improvement in the performance of underrepresented students was not merely an artifact of grade inflation, but the result of mastering rigorous concepts taught across sections of the course. These data proved instrumental in developing faculty buy-in and momentum for change.

With this approach as a template, faculty in two departments whose quantitative-based courses service a substantial number of students at Pomona designed common exam questions and rubrics for evaluating quantitative reasoning (QR). Department E designed eleven questions covering a range of quantitative skills (e.g., representation, interpretation, calculation, application/analysis, and communication) for a total of thirty-eight points. These questions were used on the final exam in four sections of an introductory course in the fall 2016 semester. There were no significant differences in performance on quantitative reasoning for the groups analyzed (see table 2). Department F designed six questions testing students’ skills on simple arithmetic, algebra, working with formulas, graphing, and logical reasoning (sixty-four points total). These questions were asked on the final exam in four sections of an introductory course in the fall 2016 semester and again when the course was offered in spring 2017. Underrepresented minority and first-generation students scored significantly below their nongroup counterparts on the QR questions in fall 2016, but no performance gaps emerged in the spring 2017 sections on these items (see table 2).

**TABLE 2. Summary of Quantitative Reasoning (QR) Assessment Results on Final Exam**

	DEPT. E: FALL 2016		DEPT. F: FALL 2016		DEPT. F: SPRING 2017	
	N =	QR SCORE (OUT OF 38 PTS)	N =	QR SCORE (OUT OF 64 PTS)	N =	QR SCORE (OUT OF 64 PTS)
<b>Underrepresented Minorities</b>	38	26.9	21	*46.8	22	52.3
<b>All Other Races</b>	58	31.4	106	52.4	61	52.6
<b>Black/Latino—STEM Cohort</b>	15	26.9	6	--	2	--
<b>Black/Latino—Not in STEM Cohort</b>	23	26.9	15	--	20	--
<b>First-Generation</b>	23	28.1	23	*44.2	11	51.6
<b>Not First-Generation</b>	73	30.1	104	53.2	72	52.6

\* Group mean is significantly different from non-group mean ( $p \leq .05$ ).

-- Small "n"; analyses not conducted

**Underrepresented Minority** = Black, Latino, American Indian/Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander.

## SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Our work with faculty around performance-based data has advanced our understanding of student success in STEM in several ways. Based on our learning from this work so far, we offer the following suite of strategies for supporting students through the successful completion of a rigorous STEM curriculum:

- Establish regular routines and practices that encourage faculty-led, equity-minded departmental collaboration on curricula and assessment.
- Embed in these routines the collective examination of data that advance understanding of the scope and nature of equity gaps in introductory and other key courses.
- Focus on multisection courses as a signature opportunity to facilitate departmental collaboration and align curricula and pedagogy around goals for student success.
- Invest in cohort-based programs that incorporate advising, mentoring, and academic support to help students navigate the STEM pathway.

# Decreasing the Equity Gap Is a Winding Process: A Report of Outcomes

LUZ-MARITZA CORDERO, *Full Professor, Psychology and Addiction Studies*

ANDREA ELZY, *Director of Student Development*

SYDNEY HART, *Full Professor, Sociology and Anthropology*

JANET KNAPP-CAPORALE, *Associate Professor, English*

NICOLE REAVES, *Vice President, Academic and Student Affairs*

One of six colleges that compose the City Colleges of Chicago, Wilbur Wright College is an urban community college located on Chicago's northwest side that serves approximately twenty thousand students. Most of Wright College's students are low income, first generation, and students of color. Roughly 59 percent of our student body is Hispanic, 8 percent is black, 8 percent is Asian, and 22 percent is white.

In spring 2015, Wright College developed an equity action plan as part of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence* project. Who we are, what we do, and who we serve guided this project. To ensure buy-in and support from all stakeholders, Wright's equity committee created goals that strategically aligned and advanced the institution's key performance indicators. We used the college's Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) designation to assert our focus on our Hispanic students while examining existing initiatives through an equity lens.

Disaggregating the available data was a milestone for Wright College. The equity plan outlined strategies for service learning, math courses with corequisites, and information technology (IT) career programs. In the process of developing the plan, our community engaged in a conversation about equity that revealed challenges and new understandings. Now, Wright College is in a better position to assess, sustain, and advance the work of closing the equity gap.

## INITIATIVES AND OUTCOMES

### Service Learning

Service learning, a high-impact practice (HIP), was part of Wright's accreditation plan and is available to all students. Hispanic students make up a little over half of all students in service-learning courses. Wright increased the number of service-learning courses by 250 percent from spring 2015 to fall 2015, leading to a 281-percent gain of Hispanic students participating in service-learning courses. More importantly, the data show a 381-percent gain in these students' successful completion of these courses with a grade of C or better (see table 1). This outcome aligns with research indicating that HIPs increase student success (Kinzie 2012; Kuh 2008), and the data will be used to encourage increased institutional support.



**TABLE 1. Spring 2015 versus Fall 2015 Comparison: Service-Learning Course Offerings, Enrollment, and Course Completion/Success**

	SPRING 2015		FALL 2015		GAINS
	NUMBER	SUCCESS RATE	NUMBER	SUCCESS RATE	
Course Offerings	4	N/A	14	N/A	250%
Total Enrollment	99	N/A	368	N/A	272%
Hispanic Students	54	55%	206	56%	281%
Total Completion/Success	77	N/A	257	N/A	234%
Hispanic Students	31	57%	149	72%	381%

There is still much to do. Direct assessments must be developed. Wright must continue to track service-learning courses and the students who participate in order to maintain the vitality of the initiative and determine its impact on college completion. The data indicating student success will be used to educate and encourage faculty to participate more in service learning, particularly in developmental and gateway classes.

### Developmental Math with Corequisites

This initiative is designed to increase academic skills while allowing students who do not place into college-credit math courses to take a for-credit course concurrent with a basic math and soft-skills course. Wright offers corequisites with three courses (see table 2). Disaggregating the spring 2017 data revealed inconsistent success. Overall, Hispanic students are on par with or exceed their peers in completion and success. The equity gap in Math 140 is low, only 2 percentage points, and *there is no equity gap in Math 125*. However, in Math 118, the most basic level, there is a 21-percentage-point gap, with the majority of Hispanic students persisting but not passing with a transferrable grade. This is troubling, because Math 118 has the highest enrollment overall.

**TABLE 2. Course Retention and Success for Hispanic Students in Math Corequisites**

	MATH 118 GENERAL EDUCATION MATH		MATH 125 INTRODUCTORY STATISTICS			MATH 140 COLLEGE ALGEBRA		
	ALL STUDENTS	HISPANIC STUDENTS		ALL STUDENTS	HISPANIC STUDENTS		ALL STUDENTS	HISPANIC STUDENTS
Enrollment	66 students	50 students 76%	Enrollment	36 students	26 students 72%	Enrollment	27 students	18 students 67%
Retention Rate	89%	92%	Retention Rate	83%	85%	Retention Rate	82%	78%
Success Rate	68%	47%	Success Rate	72%	73%	Success Rate	48%	50%
Equity Gap		21%	Equity Gap		1%	Equity Gap		2%

Wright will use these data to conduct semester-to-semester comparisons of these courses in order to evaluate progress in decreasing the equity gap for students in Math 118. Wright will also evaluate the notable success of Math 125 and Math 140 to identify transferable strategies. Finally, Wright will track student success in subsequent math courses.

### Information Technology Career Programs

Wright College is the information technology hub in our district, and the IT program provides career training that qualifies students for employment. Although course offerings and student enrollment have continued to grow, administrative instability was an obstacle to collecting richer data. In the past two years, IT has added new career programs, with a gain of 105 percent in the



number of course sections. However, these gains are insufficient to draw more Hispanic students. Hispanic enrollment as a percent of all IT students was highest in spring 2015 at 68 percent. It dropped in spring 2016 to 37 percent but experienced new growth in spring 2017, when Hispanic students made up 43 percent of all IT students.

**TABLE 3. IT Course Offerings and Enrollment for Hispanic Students**

	SPRING 2015		SPRING 2016		SPRING 2017		SPRING 2015– SPRING 2017
	NUMBER	PERCENT OF TOTAL ENROLLMENT	NUMBER	PERCENT OF TOTAL ENROLLMENT	NUMBER	PERCENT OF TOTAL ENROLLMENT	GAINS
<b>Course Offerings</b>	18	N/A	21	N/A	23	N/A	28%
<b>Number of Sections</b>	74	N/A	109	N/A	152	N/A	105%
<b>Total Enrollment</b>	171	N/A	242	N/A	451	N/A	164%
<b>Hispanic Enrollment</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>68%</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>193</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>66%</b>

Wright still must disaggregate data to determine any equity gaps in IT courses and programs. Recruitment efforts and qualitative research must be increased to better understand Hispanic students’ career plans and to educate them about IT possibilities.

**PLANS FOR SUSTAINABILITY, SCALABILITY, AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE**

Achieving equity is a winding process. The work to erase the equity gaps twists and turns, responding to new circumstances in the path forward. Wright College cannot change the context of our students’ lives, but we must support equity within the institution. This commitment to close the equity gap includes addressing the needs of black students, who are about 8 percent of the student body. Wright intends to determine if there are equity gaps for the institution as a whole by examining hiring practices, shared governance, academics, and student services.

Several plans to sustain our equity work are already in place. For example, the biology and English departments used the disaggregated data to develop equity action plans for 2017–18. Diversity, inclusion, and equity became fundamental values of Wright’s academic plan, which includes (1) conducting a campus climate survey to better understand student, staff, and faculty equity experiences; (2) diversifying hiring; and (3) institutionalizing Wright’s successful 2017 equity symposium for HSIs in the Chicagoland area.

Over the last two years, Wright College engaged in intentional conversations about race, privilege, and what equity means in an urban Hispanic-serving community college. These conversations have changed the culture at Wright College. While a few of our colleagues still resist the idea of equity, others are eager to move forward in serving our students. The equity committee will continue in its leadership role to ensure that equity remains a top priority of our institution, whether by improving our general education opportunities, helping students master basic skills, or preparing them for their career paths. The college will continue to educate about equity basics even as we plan for sustainability, scalability, and institutional growth and strive to be ever more equity-minded.



## CLOSING THOUGHTS FROM OUR PARTNER

# Making Sense of Data in Equity-Minded Ways

LINDSEY MALCOM-PIQUEUX, *Associate Director for Research and Policy in the Center for Urban Education, University of Southern California*

A key aim of the *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence* project was to build participating institutions' capacity to use data to advance student equity. The Association of American Colleges and Universities enlisted the Center for Urban Education (CUE) in these efforts due to our center's experience with creating and deploying effective data and inquiry tools to promote racial equity in higher education outcomes. Beginning with the equity academy held at the outset of this project, and continuing through the action planning and plan implementation processes, we have modeled how data and inquiry can guide practitioner and institutional learning and change.

The approaches that each campus took to these capacity-building efforts varied widely; yet, all institutions recognized the need to make the reporting and monitoring of disaggregated data a routine practice. Disaggregating data by race/ethnicity makes equity gaps in student outcomes visible, while monitoring disaggregated data over time enables institutions to assess the extent to which they are closing these gaps to meet their equity goals. Equally important to reporting data and monitoring progress is the practice of *equity-minded sensemaking*.

Equity-minded sensemaking goes beyond examining data and noticing equity gaps in outcomes. It involves interpreting these gaps as a signal that practices aren't working as intended and posing critical questions about how and why current practices are failing to serve students experiencing inequities. These critical questions can then be pursued through practitioner inquiry, or the study of one's own practices, with the insights gained in this process acting as a guide for institutional action and change. In this respect, examining data opens the door to examining practices.

Higher education institutions are accustomed to reporting and examining data, but making sense of that data in equity-minded ways is often less familiar to faculty, staff, and administrators. Equity-minded sensemaking requires a change in mindset, where inequities are viewed as a problem of practice and not as resulting from "problem" students. Equity-minded sensemaking also requires that practitioners have adequate time and space to examine data collaboratively and to pose critical questions about how current practices may contribute to the inequities observed in the data. When practitioners lack opportunities for collaborative and authentic engagement with data, data loses much of its power to inform change efforts.

For example, a faculty member viewing disaggregated student success data for her courses on a web-based dashboard may notice race-based inequities in outcomes. But, what then? The faculty member might attribute these inequities to student deficits and feel there is nothing that she can do to address them. Perhaps she may feel the need to take some action, but jumps to conclusions about which best practice can compensate for perceived student deficits. Or, the professor may realize that she needs to make changes to how and what she teaches, but has no inkling of where to begin.

CUE's research, based on nearly two decades of engaging our institutional partners in equity work, shows that learning and change begin with equity-minded sensemaking, and that this occurs most effectively when practitioners can examine and discuss data in a collaborative setting. Making disaggregated data more accessible to faculty, staff, and administrators is an important step to advancing student equity. However, it is also critical that institutions create structured spaces in which practitioners can talk about what they notice about the data, raise questions about their own practices, and pursue those questions through inquiry.



## CLOSING THOUGHTS FROM OUR PARTNER

# Reflections on the Meaning of Equity and the Practice of Equity-Mindedness

ESTELA MARA BENSIMON, *Professor of Higher Education in the Rossier School of Education and Director of the Center for Urban Education, University of Southern California*

I have thoroughly enjoyed reading about these thirteen campuses' efforts to address equity gaps in educational outcomes for student populations that have not been served equitably by their colleges. I am particularly pleased to see that the term "equity" has been embraced so readily. I say this because, not that long ago, "equity talk" was discouraged as polarizing. In higher education, we take pride in serving all students well, and some view the focus on equity as contradictory because it encourages a focus on the educational outcomes of particular student populations. Language is one of the most important tools in institutional change, as it serves the purpose of introducing new ways of thinking, new definitions of what matters, and new visions of institutional aspirations. Language is also important as a means of legitimizing contested values and priorities and for revealing the injustices created by ostensibly neutral and fair structures and practices.

I view the Association of American Colleges and Universities *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence: Campus-Based Strategies for Student Success* project as an opportunity to transform these colleges into institutions that, when measured by the standard of racial equity, will be identified as high performing. Achieving this status, as you know, is challenging; however, it is not impossible. Moreover, having a clear goal—to perform more justly for minoritized students who have historically been failed by higher education—provides direction and purpose. In response to these campuses' reports about their initiatives, I provide three recommendations to support future equity efforts.

### DEFINE RACIAL/ETHNIC EQUITY


The word equity is included in all of the campuses' reports, a sign that shows an understanding that equity is different from diversity and that it is different from equality. To safeguard the term "equity" from being trivialized, it needs to be defined very specifically at the level of populations (e.g., students, faculty, leaders, staff, boards) and at the level of outcomes (e.g., access, retention, high-impact practices, faculty positions). Adopting a definition of racial equity does not preclude adopting definitions of other kinds of equity, including gender and income equity; however, these types of equity need to be treated separately because inequities based on race and ethnicity originate from unique historical, sociocultural, and sociopolitical circumstances, including enslavement, colonization, appropriation of territory, and linguistic hegemony.

### SAY "NO" TO EUPHEMISTIC LANGUAGE

To achieve racial equity, it is necessary to clarify and identify who is experiencing equity and inequity. Terms such as "URM" (underrepresented minority), "at risk," "first generation," "minority," and "non-white" undermine institutional transformation when used without a deeper examination of specific experiences and needs of students from different racial groups. When employed euphemistically, such terminology can render racial stratification among the institution's haves and have-nots invisible while establishing cultural barriers to honest and direct talk about race.

### PUT EQUITY-MINDEDNESS INTO PRACTICE

The Center for Urban Education defines equity-mindedness from the perspective that racism is an endemic condition that we reproduce systematically through routines we believe to be neutral.



Equity-mindedness entails being race conscious in a critical way, as opposed to being color-blind. A critical perspective means that practitioners and leaders are cognizant that racial inequities are produced by everyday practices that systematically disadvantage minoritized populations. Equity-minded individuals have the courage to make racism visible and discussable. Equity-minded individuals recognize whiteness as a racial identity that accrues privilege and power. Now that equity-mindedness has become part of these campuses' vocabulary, it is important to understand its meaning and how to apply it in projects. An equity-minded strategy might be to interrogate routine practices by asking, "In what ways does this practice support the success of minoritized students?"

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## About the Funders

### Strada Education Network



Strada Education Network is a new national nonprofit dedicated to catalyzing more direct and promising pathways between education and employment. Strada engages partners across education, nonprofits, business and government to focus relentlessly on students' success throughout all phases of their working lives. Strada addresses critical postsecondary education and workforce challenges through a combination of strategic philanthropy, research and insights, and mission-aligned affiliates—all focused on advancing the universal right to realized potential, which Strada calls Completion With a Purpose®. For more information, visit [www.stradaeducation.org](http://www.stradaeducation.org) and follow us on Twitter @StradaEducation.

### Great Lakes Higher Education Corporation & Affiliates



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 postsecondary education and student loan repayment. As a leading student loan guarantor and servicer, we have 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. Our group's earnings support one of the largest and most respected education philanthropy programs in the country. Since 2006, we have committed nearly \$260 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](http://home.mygreatlakes.org).

## About Our Partner

### Center for Urban Education



CENTER *for* URBAN  
EDUCATION

The Center for Urban Education (CUE) leads socially conscious research and develops tools for higher education institutions to produce racial/ethnic equity in student outcomes. Racial and ethnic equity in outcomes remains a problem in higher education despite decades of policies and reforms that seek access, opportunity, and success for African American, Latinx, Native American, and other racially minoritized students.

Housed at the USC's Rossier School of Education, CUE works with practitioners and policymakers across the country to devise and implement race-conscious, equity-minded, and context-specific solutions that fundamentally reimagine the kind of change that is needed to achieve equity for racially minoritized students.

Since CUE's founding in 1999, more than 106 two-year and four-year colleges and universities in 14 states have partnered with CUE to use the Equity Scorecard™ and learn about the concept of "equity-mindedness" that is the foundation for institutional responsibility.

**USC**Rossier  
School of Education

## ABOUT AAC&U

AAC&U is the leading national association dedicated to advancing the vitality and public standing of liberal education by making quality and equity the foundations for excellence in undergraduate education in service to democracy. 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 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, faculty, and staff engaged in institutional and curricular planning. Through a broad range of activities, AAC&U reinforces the collective commitment to liberal education at the national, local, and global levels. Its high-quality programs, publications, research, meetings, institutes, public outreach efforts, and campus-based projects help individual institutions ensure that the quality of student learning is central to their work as they evolve to meet new economic and social challenges. Information about AAC&U can be found at [www.aacu.org](http://www.aacu.org).



1818 R St. NW, Washington, DC 20009  
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