EVIDENCE BASED DECISION-MAKING FOR UNDERSERVED STUDENT POPULATIONS

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San Diego State University
Purpose of the Session . . .

. . . discuss the critical role of educators in addressing systemic educational inequities

. . . advance the concepts of ‘equity-mindedness’ and ‘institutional-responsibility’ and the central roles they play in campus-based equity efforts

. . . present lessons learned from our work in partnering with colleges to address disparities faced by men of color
What is M²C³?

M²C³ partners with community colleges to build the institutional capacity necessary to facilitate student success for men who have been historically underrepresented and underserved in postsecondary education.
Community College Insights Protocol
A focus group protocol for understanding the perceptions and experiences of students that shape their outcomes in community college settings

Community College Instructional Development Inventory
An institutional-level inventory to inform professional development programming for instructional faculty who teach underserved students

Community College Student Success Inventory
An institutional self-assessment tool for determining an institution’s readiness to facilitate successful outcomes for men of color

Community College Survey of Men
An institutional-level needs assessment tool for identifying factors influencing the success of college men of color
"Every system is perfectly designed to achieve the results it gets."

(attributed to W. Edward Deming and Paul Batalden)
Do You Have a Plan?

If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail

– Benjamin Franklin
Is It a Good Plan?

“We have to stop shifting sand and get to the bedrock”

– Eric Bishop
Equity Inquiry, Planning, and Efforts

**Equity Inquiry**
- prioritizes the voices and lived experiences of participants
- examines phenomena in context
- reveals culturally embedded patterns that shape phenomena

**Equity Efforts**
- enacting institutional efforts to close the achievement gap
- identifying outcome disparities
- viewing disparities from an “equity-minded” perspective (Bensimon, 2005)

**Equity Planning**
- A subset of strategic planning focused on establishing directions for enhancing student success outcomes for underserved students
- Establish measureable benchmarks and outcomes
Why Engage in Equity Inquiry?

• To illuminate systemic trends and patterns of disproportionate impact on men of color
• To foster critical conversations on student equity
• To identify areas in need of enhanced attention and intervention
• To test the validity of common assumptions
• To align equity efforts with the institutional strategic plan
GUIDING PRINCIPLES
Equity-Mindedness

Equity minded educators. . . .

• are cognizant of exclusionary practices and systemic inequities that produce outcome disparities in educational contexts

• attribute outcome disparities to breakdowns in institutional performance rather than exclusively to student deficits or behaviors

• continuously reflect upon their roles in and responsibilities for student success

• challenge their colleagues to be equity-minded educators
“What the hell is wrong with these students? Why aren’t they doing what it takes for them to be successful here?”
“What are we doing (or not doing) as a college, campus, or department that results in our students not doing as well as they should?”
“Data” versus “Inquiry”

The Data Paradigm:

Data → Gaps in Educational Outcomes → Solutions (Best Practices)

Bensimon, 2004
“Data” versus “Inquiry”

The Data Paradigm:

Data → Gaps in Educational Outcomes → Solutions (Best Practices) → Anecdote

Bensimon, 2004
“Data” versus “Inquiry”

The Data Paradigm:

1. Data
2. Gaps in Educational Outcomes
3. Solutions (Best Practices)
4. Anecdote

The Inquiry Paradigm:

1. Data
2. Gaps
3. Inquiry into the Causes
4. Informed Solutions
5. Evaluation of Implemented Solutions

Bensimon, 2004
## Taxonomy of Perspectives on *Men of Color* Efforts

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Willing to employ practices (W)</th>
<th>Don’t know what to do (DK)</th>
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LESSONS LEARNED
Equity Inquiry

• Fostering Conditions for Buy-in

– President or another executive should announce
  • Convocation, faculty senate, staff senate, college colloquium
  • Illustrate ‘urgency’ and ‘timeliness’
  • Convey that the effort is a high priority
  • Explain benefits that speak to multiple audiences
  • Invite feedback (that is respectful)
Equity Inquiry

- Inquiry should take place (at minimum) at the beginning (needs assessment) and after implementation (outcomes evaluation)

- Monitor the progress of data collection throughout the data collection period—adjust the sampling strategy as needed

- Distinguish anecdotal knowledge from evidence

- Consider inquiry results with data from other data sources

- Levy experiential knowledge through root-causes analyses (or similar approaches)
Equity Root Cause Analysis

• A process for identifying the cause(s) of a system’s success

• Priorities
  – Distinguishing between root causes, ancillary causes, and outcomes
  – Understanding why
    • Multiple causes (not all causes are equal)
  – Identifying multiple solutions
  – Graphical depiction of cause(s) and outcomes (thought map)
Root Causes Example

Transfer gaps between students of color and their majority peers

- Not taking transfer level course (exiting during basic skills)
- Access to transfer information
Root Causes Example

Transfer gaps between students of color and their majority peers

- Not taking transfer level course (exiting during basic skills)
- Access to transfer information
- Tracked into CTE and other non-transfer programs
- Access to transfer center staff
- Not feeling welcome in the transfer center
- Not making a demonstrated decision to transfer until later on
- Too few appointments available
- Stereotypical assumptions of abilities
- Educational planning requirements forcing decisions ‘too’ early on
Root Causes Example

- Transfer gaps between students of color and their majority peers
  - Not taking transfer level course (exiting during basic skills)
  - Tracked into CTE and other non-transfer programs
  - Counseling staff are not inadequately trained
    - Stereotypical assumptions of abilities
    - Educational planning requirements forcing decisions ‘too’ early on
  - Not making a demonstrated decision to transfer until later on

- Access to transfer information
  - Access to transfer center staff
    - Not feeling welcome in the transfer center
    - No staff with whom they identify
    - Too few appointments available
  - Too few personnel
  - Transfer center staff lack cultural competency
  - Not on campus during service times
Equity Inquiry - Questions

- What do we hope to learn by engaging in this process?
- What is going on within our college that enables the trends and challenges to persist?
- What is the timeline for collection, analysis, and reporting? (What data will be collected first? Second?)
- How do we ensure that the samples will be reflective of the student population?
- How will we ensure that all students have an opportunity to have their voices heard?
- What are our assumptions about historically underrepresented students
- What tools will likely provide the information we need to achieve the goals of the assessment?
- What trends and challenges appear to be consistent across the data? Where are the areas of divergence across the data?
- What do we know now that we did not know prior to the assessment?
Equity Planning

• Characteristics of Planning Groups

  – Should be small (7 to 15 individuals)
    • Should include campus personnel, students, and external partners
    • Members should have organizational pull
    • Facilitator(s) should be trusted
    • Engage common definitions, avoid generalist speak
    • People who are willing to ‘read’ and ‘digest’ the information as well as to engage in inquiry
Equity Planning

– Allow *short time* for individuals to express their concerns about barriers

– Agree to ground rules - Examples: avoid being overly-focused on ‘the problem;’ mutual respect; institutional responsibility, anti-deficit perspective

– Identify areas in need of the most immediate attention (‘‘triage’’)

– Tackle a few systemic challenges well, rather than trying to do everything
  - Address root causes (primarily) and ancillary causes (secondarily)

– Alignment with strategic plan (a section of the strategic plan)
Equity Planning - Questions

• How will this process enable us to do our work better?

• How can we align immediate actions with current institutional priorities?

• What strategic process or frameworks will guide the work?

• What actions can we implement over the next 6-12 months to address pressing issues and concerns that negatively impact the experiences and success of students?

• What actions can we implement over the next 18 months to address pressing issues and concerns that negatively impact the experiences and success of students?

• How can we ensure that our long-term strategies are scalable, sustainable, cost-effective, and institutionalized?
Equity Efforts

• Professional Development
  – Underprepared educators vs. Underprepared students
    • Engage actions informed by inquiry
    • Robust assessment that includes non-cognitive, academic, and learning outcomes
    • Intensive, long-term development (no one-shot efforts)
    • Include part-time faculty
    • Incorporate voices of underserved students
Equity Efforts

– Disseminate the equity plan to the campus community
  • “Town-hall” meetings, website, abbreviated reports

– Create systems, policies, and processes to embed long-term equity inquiry, planning, and efforts
  • Catalyst for institutional transformation rather than ‘doing the plan’ - Bensimon

– Assess all equity efforts - Remember the purpose is to improve, not to prove

– Do **PRIORITIZE**
  • Professional development for faculty and staff
  • Redesign of curricular pathways
  • Reform of developmental education
  • Critical examinations and actions around hiring

– Do **NOT PRIORITIZE**
  • Interventions that focus exclusively on student deficits
  • Mentoring programs
  • Unscalable learning community designs
  • Programs in general, achievement programs in particular (e.g., academically prepared, full-time enrollees, selective criteria)
Equity Efforts - Questions

– What institutional policies need to be reconsidered?

– How should institutional practices be reshaped in ways that help us reach our equity goals?

– To which educators should targeted interventions be directed? Systemic or one-shot?

– What (if any) program should be established or enhanced to better serve students?

– How will we continue to use inquiry to guide our work and actions?
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