The Equity Imperative
TABLE OF CONTENTS

3 | From the Editor

The Equity Imperative

4 | The Time Is Now: Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence
   TIA BROWN McNAIR, Association of American Colleges and Universities

8 | Five Principles for Enacting Equity by Design
   ESTELA MARA BENSIMON, University of Southern California; ALICIA C. DOWD, Pennsylvania State University; and KEITH WITHAM, Temple University

12 | The Power of Intentionality: Cal State Fullerton’s Strategic Approach to Ensuring Equity
   JOSÉ L. CRUZ, California State University, Fullerton

15 | Marginalized Majority: Nontraditional Students and the Equity Imperative
   DAVID SCOBAY, University of Michigan

Principles and Frameworks

18 | A Framework for Understanding Latino/a Cultural Wealth
   VIJAY KANAGALA, University of Vermont; and LAURA RENDÓN and AMAURY NORA—both of the University of Texas at San Antonio

20 | Faculty Development for Educational Equity
   ANA M. MARTÍNEZ-ALEMÁN, Boston College

22 | Creating a Welcoming Environment for Veterans in Higher Education
   DAVID VACCHI, University of North Carolina at Charlotte

Campus Practice

24 | Traversing Divides: Service Learning in the Writing Center
   LISA ZIMMERELLI, Loyola University Maryland

26 | Transforming Remediation: An Essential Part of Campus Equity Efforts
   KATIE HERN, California Acceleration Project, and JENNIFER BREZINA, College of the Canyons

28 | Developing an Intersectional Framework for Racially Inclusive LGBTQ Programming
   BOBBIE PORTER, Tennessee Board of Regents

For More…

30 | Resources and Opportunities

31 | From the Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement Action Network

About Diversity & Democracy

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

The Equity Imperative in Higher Education

There is something appealing about the idea that “a rising tide lifts all boats.” Make changes that benefit any one group, the aphorism suggests, and everyone will benefit. But as others have noted elsewhere, in order for everyone’s boat to be lifted, everyone has to have a boat—and that is simply not the case. On a global scale, for every person whose boat is buoyed by rising sea levels, there will be disproportionately more people, frequently the most vulnerable, who are adversely affected.

In some ways, addressing the fallacy of the “rising tide” metaphor is central to the challenge that AAC&U and its members are taking up in our work to advance equity and inclusive excellence in higher education. As Estela Mara Bensimon, Alicia C. Dowd, and Keith Witham note in this issue of Diversity & Democracy, “equality is defined as treating everyone the same or giving everyone the same opportunities regardless of their individual attributes. Equity, in contrast, means accounting for differences in individual attributes and experiences for the purposes of achieving equal outcomes.” As in the case of the rising tide, equal treatment doesn’t necessarily result in equal outcomes.

This issue of Diversity & Democracy, as a part of AAC&U’s investment in student success during its 2015 centennial celebration and beyond (described in this issue by Tia Brown McNair), calls readers to discern the difference between equality and equity, and to act to instantiate the latter—across higher education, for every student, and particularly for those who are and have been underserved and underrepresented. That means attending to real differences in students’ learning experiences and outcomes—which requires measuring, tracking, and acting in response to those differences.

While such practices cannot be represented by a rising tide, they do align with another metaphor. In her closing plenary address at AAC&U’s 2005 Annual Meeting, Lani Guinier, referring to work she conducted with Gerald Torres, spoke of the “miner’s canary”: the most “vulnerable” individual in an environment, whose “gasp for breath” indicates “a problem with the atmosphere in the mine.” In higher education, according to Guinier’s analogy, “the experience of people of color … is the experience of the canary” (2005, 26). What affects the canary, she contends, affects everyone.

Guinier called listeners to learn from the experiences of people of color (and, as she extended the analogy, from those of women, people with disabilities, and gays and lesbians) about what practices would benefit all. In effect, she called listeners to begin with particularities, not with generalizations; to derive principles from specifics; to recognize what is shared across difference without assuming sameness; to “transform democracy” not by following the rising tide, but by changing the environment’s most insidious characteristics.

More than a decade later, the authors of this issue of Diversity & Democracy invite us to do the same. Lifting up in particular disparities by race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status—but also those experienced by nontraditional students, by student veterans, and by LGBTQ students, for example—this issue’s authors challenge us to seek equal outcomes for all. Like any issue of Diversity & Democracy, this issue is not comprehensive. It leaves much unsaid about disparities that exist across salient categories of identity such as gender, ability and disability, and national origin or immigration status, for example, and about many important ways in which all aspects of identity intersect. These are all topics that Diversity & Democracy has visited in previous issues and will surely visit again. As Tia Brown McNair notes in her article, we have much work left to do.

Nonetheless, readers should find in these pages much to guide them, as McNair writes, in seeking a “paradigm shift”: from “the old paradigm, which depends on the assumption that student achievement gaps are rooted in students’ deficits,” to a new paradigm in which “educators understand and value the assets that students bring to educational experiences.” In other words, instead of building systems where only those with boats can succeed, higher education should create contexts in which all students can rise on the strength of their wings—their assets, whatever form they take.

—Kathryn Peltier Campbell
Editor, Diversity & Democracy

REFERENCES

The equity imperative in higher education is, and will continue to be, central to AAC&U’s work to improve the quality of undergraduate education. As stated in our 2013–17 strategic plan, AAC&U aims to “accelerate broad-scale systemic innovation to advance educational practices that engage diversity and challenge inequities in order to make excellence inclusive … [by] work[ing] vigorously to develop and apply twenty-first-century markers for high-quality and public-spirited liberal education on behalf of all students … [and by] proactively challeng[ing] ‘innovations’ that provide narrow, incoherent, and/or routinized learning to underserved students who need and deserve a horizon-expanding liberal education” (AAC&U 2013, 9).

A Paradigm Shift

AAC&U is calling for a paradigm shift in thinking about equity, diversity, and student learning. This paradigm shift requires the identification, examination, and dismantling of existing mindsets in higher education that serve as catalysts for marginalization, inequity, and intolerance. These mindsets impede the exploration and acceptance of difference as a core value in our democratic society and in effective educational environments.

In contrast to the old paradigm, which depends on the assumption that...
student achievement gaps are rooted in students’ deficits, the new paradigm must focus on institutional assessment, action, and accountability, with individual and shared responsibility deeply embedded as priorities. In the new paradigm, campus educators understand and value the assets that students bring to educational experiences, as well as the importance of institutional change and continuous improvement to better meet the needs of students, whatever they may be.

What will it take to accomplish such a paradigm shift? The answer begins with education. In 1995, AAC&U released American Pluralism and the College Curriculum: Higher Education in a Diverse Democracy. This report from AAC&U’s national initiative American Commitments: Diversity, Democracy, and Liberal Learning outlines four key curricular recommendations that are still relevant today, not only for every postsecondary student but also for every person who seeks to educate students. The authors of that report contended that “each student’s education should include explorations of the following”:

1. **Experience, identity, and aspiration:** The study of one’s own particular inherited and constructed traditions, identity communities, and significant questions, in their complexity.
2. **United States pluralism and the pursuits of justice:** An extended and comparative exploration of diverse peoples in this society, with significant attention to their differing experiences of United States democracy and the pursuits—sometimes successful, sometimes frustrated—of equal opportunity.
3. **Experiences in justice seeking:** Encounters with systemic constraints on the development of human potential in the United States and experiences in community-based efforts to articulate principles of justice, expand opportunity, and redress inequities.
4. **Multiplicity and relational pluralism in majors, concentrations, and programs:** Extensive participation in forms of learning that foster sustained exploration of deliberation about contested issues important in particular communities of inquiry and practice. (AAC&U 1995, 25)

These recommendations are designed to help students acknowledge and explore their entrenched attitudes and assumptions about diversity in the context of US democracy. But they also suggest important points of inquiry for educators, who themselves need to similarly acknowledge and explore their own attitudes and assumptions about equity, diversity, student learning, and student success, as well as the institutional and public policies that rest on these assumptions.

Unfortunately, not every student (or every educator) has access to opportunities for deep engagement with diversity like those described above. According to AAC&U’s 2015 survey of its members, only 34 percent of responding institutions require all students to participate in diversity studies and experiences (Hart Research Associates 2015, 3). How can we expect to challenge old mindsets and deconstruct implicit biases to reach new horizons for students’ success in college and beyond when only a portion of students and educators are engaging in the conversations necessary to do so?

**Step Up and Lead**
In its centennial year, AAC&U has focused its energies on creating spaces where conversation and inquiry about diversity, democracy, and student success, framed in the context of higher

---

**FIGURE 2. Participation in High-Impact Practices by Race and Ethnicity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High-Impact Practice</th>
<th>Participation Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate Research</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internship or Field Experience</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Learning</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capstone Experience</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate Research</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internship or Field Experience</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Learning</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capstone Experience</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

education, can occur among educators. In early 2015, we released Step Up and Lead for Equity: What Higher Education Can Do to Reverse the Deepening Divides with the goal of making the case that inequities in higher education not only persist, but are worsening—and that it will take collective action to eliminate the disparities. We then organized a series of national forums and meetings where participants could discuss the findings summarized in that report.

The data described in Step Up and Lead show stark disparities. For example, while postsecondary institutions are becoming more diverse, the degree attainment gap for low-income students (see figure 1 on page 4) and students of color is widening or persisting (AAC&U 2015c, 15–16). Students of color are more likely to take three or more developmental education courses at two-year colleges than are white students (AAC&U 2015c, 17). Further, students of color experience fewer high-impact educational practices overall than do white students (see figure 2 on page 5). All of these disparities contribute to deepening economic divides.

While the data send a clear message, data alone cannot catalyze change. Most educators already are acutely aware of the growing disparities in educational opportunity and achievement. The question that repeatedly echoed throughout AAC&U’s centennial forums was, How do we address the inequities? Closely following that question was, How do we motivate or create incentives for all educators (not just the champions) to address equity?

### Committing to Change

To help educators explore questions like these within their own institutional contexts, AAC&U released Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence: A Campus Guide for Self-Study and Planning (2015). This guide suggests specific action steps and prompts to help campus educators engage in dialogue and institutional assessment to advance equity and inclusive excellence. The guide prompts educators to evaluate their institutions’ current status in relation to the following:

1. Knowing who [their] students are and will be
2. Committing to frank, hard dialogues about the climate for underserved students … with the goal of effecting a paradigm shift in language and actions
3. Investing in culturally competent practices that lead to success of underserved students—and of all students
4. Setting and monitoring equity-minded goals—and devoting aligned resources to achieve them
5. Developing and actively pursuing a clear vision and goals for achieving the high-quality learning necessary [for] careers and [for] citizenship, and therefore essential [for a bachelor’s] degree
6. Expecting and preparing all students to produce culminating or Signature Work at the associate (or sophomore) and baccalaureate levels to show their achievement of Essential Learning Outcomes,² and monitoring data to ensure equitable participation and achievement among underserved students
7. Providing support to help students develop guided plans to achieve Essential Learning Outcomes, prepare for and complete Signature Work, and connect college with careers
8. Identifying high-impact practices (HIPs)³ best suited to your students and your institution’s quality framework of Essential Learning Outcomes, and working proactively to ensure equitable student participation in HIPs
9. Ensuring that Essential Learning Outcomes are addressed and high-impact practices are incorporated across all programs, including general education, the majors, digital learning platforms, and cocurricular or community-based programs
10. Making student achievement—including underserved student achievement—visible and valued (2015a, 5–10)

For some, this list may seem overwhelming. Achievement of each step requires high levels of commitment; access to data, time, and resources; and, most importantly, full inclusion of the campus community. So, how should campuses engage with assessing and implementing the action steps?

AAC&U’s efforts over the past year, including our work with campus-based educators, have suggested several recommendations for how to best use the guide. First, the action steps should not be considered the sole responsibility of a single designated committee. Success

---

1. For an explanation of the term “equity-minded,” see Bensimon 2007.
2. AAC&U defines Signature Work as occurring when “a student uses his or her cumulative learning to pursue a significant project related to a problem she or he defines. In the project[,] conducted throughout at least one semester, the student takes the lead and produces work that expresses insights and learning gained from the inquiry and demonstrates the skills and knowledge she or he has acquired. Faculty and mentors provide support and guidance” (AAC&U 2015b, 2). For more information about Signature Work or about the Essential Learning Outcomes identified through AAC&U’s Liberal Education and America’s Promise initiative, see http://www.aacu.org/leap/.
3. For more information about high-impact practices and their effects on student learning, see http://www.aacu.org/resources/high-impact-practices.
greatly depends on the engagement of all campus educators. Conversations should involve stakeholders at all levels, and campus leaders should offer and invite ideas and reflections in settings that are inclusive, not exclusive. In addition, each institution’s action steps should be tied to the campus’s strategic plan and vision for student learning and success, with all stakeholders held accountable for specific implementation responsibilities. Further, using the guide should not constitute an additional initiative. Instead, the action steps should be embedded into the institution’s current and future work and goals.

Institutional context matters, and each campus will enter the conversation at the point that best suits its institutional culture. Where an institution begins depends on where the institution is in terms of its development of a student success framework. However, regardless of institutional context, the common starting point involves knowing who your students are and will be. This means much more than knowing student demographics. It means understanding students’ “cultural wealth” (see Kanagala, Rendon, and Nora’s article beginning on page 18 of this issue). It means valuing their individual identities in and out of the classroom. It means understanding the various ways students learn and express knowledge. It means appreciating the sacrifices and challenges that many students encounter as they pursue an education. A clear understanding of these aspects of students’ lived experiences will shape how an institution designs, implements, and analyzes its action steps.

Finally, institutions need to build their capacity to collect and analyze the data required to set equity goals. Findings from AAC&U’s 2015 member survey indicate, for example, that more than 70 percent of respondents are tracking students’ participation in high-impact practices, their completion of specific credit/course milestones, and their achievement of learning outcomes, but very few are disaggregating these data by race/ethnicity, income, or parents’ level of education (Hart Research Associates 2015, 5). It’s not surprising, then, that only about one-third of respondents have specific goals “aimed at building new opportunities for high-impact learning for first-generation students, low-income students, and/or students of color” (although another 37 percent “are planning to develop” these goals) (11), or that few institutions are “setting explicit goals for closing achievement gaps in student learning outcomes or participation in high-impact educational practices” (2).

A Call to Action
To return to the original question: through AAC&U’s work over the past year, “what progress has been made to advance conversations and action on equity, diversity, and learning in higher education?” While we have raised awareness and helped advance our member institutions’ efforts to identify promising strategies and critical questions and name institutional capacity needs, there is still much to be done if our continued, collective efforts to eliminate inequities in higher education are to be successful.

As part of a project launched in 2015 and titled Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence: Campus-Based Strategies for Student Success (funded by USA Funds and Great Lakes Higher Education Corporation & Affiliates), AAC&U and the Center for Urban Education at the University of Southern California are working with thirteen institutions to develop campus action plans that address a series of equity goals. These goals include increasing access to and participation in HIPs for underserved students; increasing course completion, retention, and graduation rates for low-income, first-generation, adult, and/or minority students; increasing achievement of learning outcomes for underserved students as measured using tools, including AAC&U’s VALUE Rubrics (see www.acu.org/VALUE), that directly assess students’ actual work; and increasing student awareness and understanding of the value of guided learning pathways that incorporate HIPs and that lead to students’ success both as workers and as engaged citizens. We hope that this project will produce strategies that can further advance the work of institutions across higher education as they commit to advancing equity and inclusive excellence.

The time for change is now. That is why AAC&U’s call to action, to ourselves and to our members, remains: “step up and lead.”

REFERENCES
In *America’s Unmet Promise: The Imperative for Equity in Higher Education* (Witham et al. 2015b), we affirmed that effective higher education reform efforts must be infused with an awareness of the ways in which many groups within US society have been historically excluded from educational opportunities, or marginalized within the structures and institutions that house those opportunities. We have characterized this awareness as *equity-mindedness*—a way of approaching educational reform that foregrounds the policies and practices contributing to disparities in educational achievement and abstains from blaming students for those accumulated disparities (Bensimon 2007; Dowd and Bensimon 2015). In this article, we elaborate on the five principles for achieving equity by design that we first introduced in *America’s Unmet Promise*, with examples drawn from campuses that have used the Center for Urban Education’s Equity Scorecard.

The Equity Scorecard catalyzes a process of sustained change by engaging practitioners in equity-focused inquiry, using tools designed to yield more just, equitable, and effective learning environments for African Americans, Latinos/as, American Indians, and subordinated Asian and Pacific Islander populations. These tools prompt practitioners to integrate equity as a criterion for assessment across all core institutional practices. The scorecard is grounded in a theory of change that relies on the power of practitioner engagement in inquiry. Through a process of discovery that makes inequities visible, practitioners gain motivation to make changes in their own practices and in their institutions.

We believe that every campus has many practitioners with the potential to become “first-generation equity workers,” as James Gray of the Community College of Aurora (Colorado) calls himself (Felix et al., forthcoming). These change agents cultivate the ability to see, communicate about, and address inequities through their daily work. As an administrator at the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) stated, “[Using the Equity Scorecard] has changed my world view... it has made me really reflective about the perceptions of the world by others. It’s been my experience that it’s at the individual level where you suddenly realize that your world view has changed, that you really see the change happen.... I don’t think it happens as a group; I think it happens as people.”

The five principles discussed below provide the architecture that leaders and practitioners need to build equity by design.

**Principle 1: Clarity in language, goals, and measures is vital to effective equitable practices.**

**Clarity in language.** Inequality in higher education is a structural problem that is hidden or revealed through the use of language imbued with political and social meaning. Language conveys how individuals, alone and in the company of others, give meaning to numeric patterns; how they talk about race without talking about it (Pollock 2004); how they shape the reality of racial inequity. Language reflects culturally acquired knowledge that forms the schemas of practitioners, leaders, policymakers, and others whose actions can make—or unmake—the antiracism project in higher education (Bensimon, forthcoming).

Clarity of language is especially important because equity is so often confounded with equality. As one practitioner at the University of Wisconsin commented, “I used to think that equity means you treat everyone equally, but now I see it more in terms of outcomes. Are people able to achieve similar results at the end of their education regardless of where they started?” As described by this practitioner, equality is defined as treating everyone the same or giving everyone the same opportunities regardless of their individual attributes. Equity, in contrast, means accounting for differences in individual attributes and experiences for the purposes of achieving equal outcomes.

Clarity is also important when identifying racial and ethnic groups. Shorthand terms such as “URM” and “at risk” are problematic on many levels (Bensimon, forthcoming). Aggregating all groups into single color-blind categories erases the monumental differences in circumstances experienced by black, Hispanic, Asian American, and American Indian populations. Additionally, such aggregation...
contravenes equity-mindedness as described in Principle 2.

**Clarity in goals and measures.** Quantitative data are typically not available in user-friendly formats, and individuals who do not routinely work with data may struggle to use them. This can pose an obstacle to the goal of developing clear goals and measures. Practitioners who are unaccustomed to using data—the majority of faculty, staff, and administrators—often feel overwhelmed by long data reports. Worse, they may be too embarrassed to admit that they can’t see a “story” in the percentages and numbers.

To make data more comprehensible, the Center for Urban Education designed the Benchmarking Equity and Student Success Tool (BESST). This interactive tool makes the story behind the data visible, understandable, and actionable for practitioners. Using the BESST, practitioners can understand equity gaps longitudinally and by race and ethnicity, and can manipulate the data to determine how many more students of a particular group need to reach particular milestones in order for an institution to achieve its overall goal. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate BESST data for a four-year college examining credit accumulation for a cohort of students who entered college in 2009. Figure 1 shows that 37.8 percent of Hispanic students accumulated thirty credits in the first year of college, 8.1 percentage points lower than the credit accumulation rate for all students. Figure 2 shows that in order for Hispanic students’ credit accumulation to equal the current rate for all students, the college needs thirty-nine more Hispanic students to earn thirty credits within the first year.

Data that are disaggregated in this manner can be very effective in increasing practitioners’ awareness and their desire to know why equity gaps exist. Seeing data displayed in the format presented in Figures 1 and 2 prompted James Gray, chair of the mathematics department at the Community College of Aurora, to launch several equity-focused reforms, including changing the hiring process to ensure a diverse candidate pool; using data more purposefully to assess success patterns by race, ethnicity, and course section; and offering more intentional coaching for faculty with large equity gaps in outcomes. (For more on data disaggregation, see Witham et al. 2015a; for a detailed description of the changes at the Community College of Aurora, see Felix et al., forthcoming.)

**Principle 2: “Equity-mindedness” should be the guiding paradigm for language and action.**

The term *equity* “has been more or less universally embraced by policy centers/institutes, major Foundations interested in reform and the higher education field itself” (Anderson 2012, 134). But the term is not always used in a manner that engages critically with race. An equity-minded approach raises consciousness of the need to consider equity in connection with historical and political understandings of stratification.

Equity-minded individuals are aware of the sociohistorical context of exclusionary practices and racism in higher education and the impact of power asymmetries on opportunities and outcomes, particularly for African Americans and Latinas/os. Equity-minded individuals are

- **Color-conscious (as opposed to color-blind) in a critical sense.** Being color-conscious means noticing and questioning patterns of educational outcomes that reveal unexplainable differences in outcomes for minoritized students (Gillborn 2005); it means viewing inequalities in the context of a history of exclusion,
Principle 3: Equitable practice and policies are designed to accommodate differences in the contexts of students’ learning—not to treat all students the same.

As we stated in America’s Unmet Promise,

Simply put, achieving equality in outcomes does not mean—in fact cannot mean—treating all students as though they are the same. Rather, [equity-focused] policies and practices in higher education recognize and accommodate differences in students’ aspirations, life circumstances, ways of engaging in learning and participating in college, and identities as learners and students. (Witham et al. 2015b, 31)

For example, when the director of the honors program at a University of Wisconsin campus was confronted with data showing that the program had no students of color, rather than assuming these students just did not meet eligibility criteria, he asked a few simple questions: What are the criteria for acceptance to the honors program? In what ways might the criteria have disadvantaged students of color? When were the criteria established, and are they still relevant? He found that the criteria had been in existence for more than thirty years and depended on a single factor: ACT scores. In response to this new information, he said, “It was clear that there was a problem and it was also a very concrete thing.”

With the appropriate tools, the director was able to see that the program’s entry requirements systematically excluded students of color. The concreteness of the problem, along with the authority of his position, empowered him to develop a holistic admissions process. In one year, the all-white honors program became more inclusive with the addition of African American, Latino/a, and Hmong students. The program also began including courses on critical race theory and ethnic studies (Bishop 2014).

Principle 4: Enacting equity requires a continual process of learning, disaggregating data, and questioning assumptions about relevance and effectiveness.

While disaggregated data are necessary to identify and prioritize problems, disaggregated data alone are insufficient to attain equity-focused change. What matters is how practitioners interpret the data. Do they interpret racialized inequities as a symptom of student deficiencies or as an indication of failed practices? The interpretive lenses through which practitioners make sense of data are far more consequential than the collection of the data itself.

Both James Gray at the Community College of Aurora and the director of the honors program at the Wisconsin campus could have looked at their data and concluded that racial differences were attributable to characteristics over which they had no control. But institutional change requires the opportunity and capacity to learn from failure; it means digging into data deeply, purposefully, and systematically. Even though colleges and universities are organizations dedicated to creating and communicating knowledge, most lack the tools needed to support a continual process of learning among practitioners.

To address these limitations, the Center for Urban Education has drawn on the methodology of participatory critical action research, where professionals conduct inquiry into their own practices to learn how those practices work and why they may not be working as intended. According to Kemmis and McTaggart, “change cannot be secured if participants do not change themselves, their understandings, their practices, or their constitution of the setting” (2000, 590). For this reason, “participatory
action research is the preferred approach to social and educational change” (590). Through inquiry, practitioners are able to question routines and develop the habits of equity-minded practice.

As an administrator at PASSHE observed, “It’s like strategic planning of all types. Strategic planning doesn’t have a beginning or an end; it’s a continuous improvement process….You circle back. You’re continuously looking at data.”

**Principle 5: Equity must be enacted as a pervasive institution- and system-wide principle.**

Instead of thinking about equity as a “targeted strategy” that can be achieved through one particular office or program, institutions should approach equity as a normative standard for all aspects of the institution, from resource allocation to assessment to strategic planning.

Solutions are shaped by the way problems are defined. Embedding equity into the core of institutional work means reframing inequity as a problem created by color-blind practices and procedures and the lack of spaces to talk about race. Enacting equity as a pervasive institution- and system-wide principle requires practitioners to engage in the following:

- **Let go of traditional schemata** that paint student success as a matter of effort, motivation, self-regulation, goal commitment, or other student characteristics. These qualities are important, but focusing on them draws attention away from practices—influen-tial factors that are within practitioners’ control. Put simply, practitioners taking the traditional approach to student success may ask: *What does this student lack and how can he/she be remediated?*

  From an equity-minded standpoint, the primary question is: *Why are our practices failing to produce success for students of color?*

- **Understand the difference between horizontal and vertical equity.** The standard of horizontal equity asserts that those with equal needs deserve equal educational resources. Vertical equity, which is more often contested, states that those with greater needs should receive greater resources (Dowd and Bensimon 2015, 10–11).

- **Learn to make the pursuit of equity a normal practice** that is evident in how problems and solutions are defined, implemented, and evaluated. Leaders, administrators, staff, and trustees must demonstrate equity-mindedness through language, reasoning, and action.

  Making equity pervasive will require sustained buy-in and ownership across an institution or system. To institutionalize equity as a priority, equity-minded leaders should call practitioners to inquiry and action repeatedly. An administrator at PASSHE summed up the need for sustained commitment: “I think that buy-in around the idea of equity is gained by staying the course and sticking with it for long term. If you can successfully do that, I think that you will get buy-in.”

**Conclusion**

More than fifty years have passed since the adoption of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. But its promise of a more equal, just, and great society is belied by the evidence, according to every metric of social justice. Inequality, segregation, and racism—both overt and implicit—are intense and continue to grow. In 1903, W. E. B. Du Bois declared the color line the problem of the twentieth century. It is alarming that Du Bois’s observation is an apt description of our society and educational system more than one hundred years later. As a society, we are a long way from accepting equity as a goal worthy of investment. As a system of higher education, we are a long way from moving equity from rhetoric to action.

The five principles outlined here provide a place to start.
In recent years, calls for disruption in higher education have orbited around the seductive nucleus of technology—particularly massive open online courses (MOOCs) and other “unbundled” online learning systems—drawn to the promise of expanded access, reduced costs, and increased completion rates. While online education, when deployed responsibly, has great potential to drive change and improve learning, much of the rhetoric surrounding it is aimed not at elite schools, but rather at large, public universities, which disproportionately serve underrepresented students. In this light, the passionate cry to “disrupt higher ed” can be interpreted more bluntly: leave liberal education to the elites, and give a virtual, vocational education to poor people and people of color.

The moral implications of this de facto segregation are, of course, profound and dangerous. Yet the imperative for equity is not only a moral one. In California, where approximately half of children under age eighteen are Latino (Campaign for College Opportunity 2015, 3) and more than half of those in K–12 public schools are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (National Center for Education Statistics 2013), equity is an economic imperative as well. As the gap between rich and poor in America continues to widen (Fitz 2015), and the demographics of our nation continue to diversify (Taylor 2014), the same holds true for states across the country.

California State University, Fullerton (CSUF) is already a leader in expanding access to quality education. We rank first in California and fifth in the nation among colleges and universities awarding bachelor’s degrees to Hispanics (Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education 2015), and fifth in the nation for baccalaureate degrees awarded to underrepresented students (CSUF News Service 2015). But we recognize, too, that access alone is not enough. With approximately thirty-nine thousand students, more than half of whom are first-generation college students, we take seriously the moral mandate not only to strengthen educational opportunities for traditionally underserved students, but also to ensure that those opportunities lead to high-quality academic experiences with a strong liberal education component.

Our approach? Mobilize the campus by instilling a sense of urgency; leverage the power of liberal education; identify and scale true high-impact practices; and accelerate progress through coherent action.

Urgency through Strategic Planning
In October 2012, facing the potential of devastating budget cuts and responding to concerns raised by regional accreditors, Cal State Fullerton launched a university-wide effort to develop a five-year, mission-driven strategic plan. The 2013–18 Strategic Plan supports the university’s vision to “become a model public comprehensive university, nationally recognized for exceptional programs that prepare our diverse student body for academic and professional success” through four overarching, interlinked goals:

- **Goal 1**: Develop and maintain a curricular and cocurricular environment that prepares students for participation in a global society and is responsive to workforce needs.
- **Goal 2**: Improve student persistence, increase graduation rates university-wide, and narrow the achievement gap for underrepresented students.
- **Goal 3**: Recruit and retain a high-quality and diverse faculty and staff.
- **Goal 4**: Increase revenue through fundraising, entrepreneurial activities, grants, and contracts. (CSUF n.d.)

Of course, lofty strategic plans do not guarantee that goals will be achieved. Successful change depends on intentionality and quality execution by people on the ground. Acknowledging this, Cal State Fullerton established eleven task forces—composed of faculty, staff, administrators, and students—to drive progress on strategic priorities while harnessing the time, talent, and energy of existing committees and administrative groups. Here, I share three of our most promising areas of focus: general education pathways and outcomes, high-impact practices, and Student Success Teams.

**General Education Pathways and Outcomes**

We recognize that it doesn’t matter how many students graduate if they are not getting a high-quality education. Therefore, we have formalized our commitment, articulated in the first goal of our strategic plan, to providing “innovative, high-quality programs and services that offer students broad educational experiences, facilitate lifelong habits of intellectual inquiry, and prepare them for successful careers” (CSUF n.d., 5). A key element of this aim is the revitalization of our general education (GE) program.

In February 2014, we held an Academic Senate–Academic Affairs Retreat to advance the conversation
about how we could leverage our GE curriculum to drive student learning and success. As I stated in my opening remarks at that retreat, contrary to conventional wisdom, improving student success does not require us to lower standards nor forgo our belief in the virtues of a liberal education. In fact, those of us in higher education know from experience that student learning is central to student success, and that the GE curriculum can ignite and sustain student learning.

The discussions begun at that retreat were carried forth by the Academic Senate’s General Education Committee in collaboration with the Office of Undergraduate Studies and General Education as well as the Office of Assessment and Educational Effectiveness. The result was the establishment of a University Policy Statement (approved by the Academic Senate in spring 2015) identifying student learning goals and learning outcomes that can be used to assess GE as an integral program as opposed to assessing individual courses (CSUF 2015). For example, one of the student learning goals states that “students will develop self-awareness, knowledge, intercultural skills, and critical reflection to participate ethically and effectively in local communities and global contexts” (2). Among four learning outcomes for that goal is the intention that, upon completion of GE, “students will describe and understand how to enact ethical and transformative frameworks and modes of exchange and communication that promote rights, social justice, equity, and inclusiveness” (2).

By codifying our GE outcomes into policy, we have institutionalized our commitment to providing an equitable, inclusive, lasting liberal education for all students who call Cal State Fullerton home. But aligning our policies and practices takes time, and each year in which a gap remains means thousands of students do not benefit. Thus while pursuing our long-term plans, we have enacted a short-term pilot program to provide both immediate opportunities for students and invaluable feedback for us as we continue to strengthen the GE program.

In fall 2014, nearly five hundred incoming first-year students participated in the Pathways to Success GE pilot program. Participating students could complete their GE requirements by choosing one of four “pathways” during the first two years of study: Global Studies; Sustainability; Power and Politics; or Food, Health, and Well-Being. In fall 2015, the pilot was expanded to include approximately two thousand students and two additional pathways: Ethics and Leadership; and Science, Technology, and Society. Ninety-three faculty members have taught or will teach GE Pathways courses between fall 2014 and spring 2016. Students now have a clear way to complete GE requirements while also receiving a certificate in an area of particular interest and cultivating a more intentional engagement with their educational journeys.

**High-Impact Practices (HIPs)**

Research suggests that practices understood to be “high-impact” are particularly beneficial for under-represented minority student groups (Finley and McNair 2013). Our strategic plan recognizes this in the objective to “ensure that 75% of Cal State Fullerton students participate in at least two HIPs by graduation” (CSUF n.d., 7). All institutions engage in HIPs; but how do we know which practices are truly powerful? And given limitations on resources, how do we know which investments will offer real benefits to the most students? Cal State Fullerton’s approach to HIPs is driven not by a desire to be perceived as using HIPs, but by a commitment to intellectual honesty: that is, rather than simply labeling the practices we already have as HIPs, we have engaged in comprehensive analysis to identify and strengthen our endeavors to offer high-impact, high-quality, and inclusive education.

In 2013 we established a Strategic Task Force for HIPs, whose members participated in the Association of American Colleges and Universities’ Institute on High-Impact Practices.
excellent work of engaging students in experiential educational opportunities that expand and enrich students’ personal, academic, and professional development. Recent examples include a faculty mentorship that resulted in a business administration major becoming a finalist in an international business analytics competition; a simulation exercise that exposed Community Health Nursing students to the daily realities of poverty and increased their awareness and sensitivity toward their patients; and a joint faculty-student research project that resulted in an undergraduate student’s first peer-reviewed publication, exploring the medieval origins of the mathematical concept of curvitas. These are the types of practices and results we seek to build upon as we move forward with HIPs on our campus.

**Student Success Teams**

Finally, Cal State Fullerton has engaged in proactive student advising with a specific focus on narrowing equity gaps and improving the success of all students. Since the launch of the strategic plan, the Division of Academic Affairs and the Office of Academic Programs have collaborated with all eight colleges, the Irvine campus, the Office of Graduate Studies, the Division of Student Affairs, and the Division of Information Technology to expand the number of professional advisors, establish several college-based student success centers, institute mandatory academic advising, strengthen degree audits, and develop assessment procedures for advising efforts.

These activities go above and beyond traditional advising systems and services. But we didn’t stop there. We recognized an opportunity to create a wholly new, innovative structure that could be more flexible, dynamic, and outcomes-oriented than traditional university systems. During the 2014–15 academic year, we gathered the brightest, most experienced advising minds from across the university and assembled them into college-based Student Success Teams (SSTs). Though the exact composition of the SSTs varies from college to college, they are generally chaired by the college’s associate dean (or, in the case of special populations, the director of the Office of Graduate Studies) and include the assistant dean and a career specialist from student affairs, retention specialists and graduation specialists from the Academic Advisement Center, and faculty advisors and college staff.

Each SST operates as an innovative “advising laboratory” within its unit’s unique context. Nimble and responsive, proactive and technologically savvy, these ten SSTs collectively present a vision for intelligent, data-driven student advising that fuses the deep institutional knowledge of faculty and staff with a clear mandate to improve persistence and narrow achievement gaps.

The SST Steering Committee—composed of the chairs of each SST, the provost, the vice president for student affairs, the associate vice president for academic programs, and the associate vice president for student affairs—meets monthly to exchange best practices. The goal of the steering committee is to empower the “front lines” by giving the SSTs the autonomy to implement advising campaigns tailored to their students’ needs, while also allowing them to draw on the robust technological and strategic resources of the university as a whole.

**Building Momentum**

While much work remains, our progress to date is impressive—and our momentum is building. In just three years since the launch of our strategic plan, we have exceeded our six-year graduation rate goal (moving from 51 to 62.3 percent, when our original goal for 2018 was 61 percent) and have made significant progress in narrowing our achievement gap between underrepresented and non-underrepresented students (from 12 to 8.7 percentage points, when our goal for 2018 is 6 percentage points). We have achieved these results through the tireless work of our campus community as we operate within a framework that emphasizes coherence of action and intentionality of purpose.

By fulfilling our vision, we hope to model to other institutions across the nation how they too can deliver on our country’s twin promises of opportunity and social mobility for the diverse students who are coming of age in America today.

**REFERENCES**


[THE EQUITY IMPERATIVE]

Marginalized Majority: Nontraditional Students and the Equity Imperative

DAVID SCOBEY, visiting scholar at the University of Michigan

What we need is an undergraduate program that gives us the tools and the space to connect our studies, work lives, aspirations, communities, and public values, a program that provides us with emotional support, assistance in academic navigation, healthier relationships between the student body and the administration, and builds student community.

—Garnetta Gonzalez

For more than a century and a half, the struggle for equity has been central to the history of US higher education. Its leaders have asserted the importance—and the social benefit—of making the academy more inclusive, focusing especially on the imperative to admit those from marginalized groups into the power, privileges, and pleasures of academic life. The founding of women’s and coeducational colleges, the proliferation of public universities and community colleges, the growth of minority-serving institutions and of affirmative-action policies in majority institutions—these are all milestones in that struggle. Its success has been both remarkable and radically incomplete.

All the more fitting, then, that the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) has focused in its centennial year on the imperative to admit those from marginalized groups into the power, privileges, and pleasures of academic life. The founding of women’s and coeducational colleges, the proliferation of public universities and community colleges, the growth of minority-serving institutions and of affirmative-action policies in majority institutions—these are all milestones in that struggle. Its success has been both remarkable and radically incomplete.

The founding of women’s and coeducational colleges, the proliferation of public universities and community colleges, the growth of minority-serving institutions and affirmative-action policies in majority institutions—these are all milestones in that struggle. Its success has been both remarkable and radically incomplete.

All the more fitting, then, that the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) has focused in its centennial year on the imperative for equity in higher education. At a time of global integration, economic restructuring, educational turmoil, and civic exhaustion, nothing could be more urgent. As argued in the AAC&U publication America’s Unmet Promise (Witham et al. 2015), the growth of ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic inequality—occurring just as nonwhite, nonaffluent youth are emerging as the majority of high school graduates—compels us to expand access not merely to college credentials, but to great, engaged, transformative learning.

For just the same reasons, and with the same sense of urgency, I want to argue that our vision of equity needs to expand as well: to engage another group of students whose lives and needs too often go unrecognized. Indeed, being unrecognized is at the heart of their struggle. I’m referring to nontraditional college students.

The Nontraditional Majority

Census and survey data make it clear: nontraditional undergraduates have since the 1990s constituted the majority of American college students. Half of US undergraduates are financially independent of their parental households (NCES 2015, 6). Some two-fifths are older than twenty-four (NCES 2013). A majority of college students are employed at least twenty hours a week, and more than a third work full time (Baum 2010, 5). Nearly half are enrolled part time. Indeed, demographers estimate that only some 26 percent of college students fit the conventional profile of a recent high school graduate who is financially dependent and enrolled full time in a two- or four-year institution. That is almost exactly the same proportion as undergraduates who are parents (NCES 2015, 6).

As such data suggest, “nontraditional” is an omnibus label that blends a range of different markers: age, employment, educational status, family responsibilities. More importantly, it comprises an extraordinary diversity of personal stories and educational pathways. The Iraq War veteran, the displaced factory worker, the former prisoner, the office administrator who needs her degree to break a glass ceiling, the thirty-something parent with a part-time job, the twenty-three-year-old food server who was unready for college at age eighteen—such students do not share some core experience or unitary identity. They come to college with widely divergent levels of preparation. What they do tend to share, and what differentiates them from the diversity of traditional college students, is the challenge of fitting their studies within a complex ecology of family responsibilities, community roles, and employment and economic pressures.

To be sure, most traditional undergraduates also work for pay, and their families face enormous fiscal pressure to pay for college (Baum 2010, 5; Perna 2010). These stressors are especially corrosive for nonwhite and nonaffluent students, which is why changes in academic policy and institutional culture that nurture their full inclusion are so essential to the equity agenda. Yet in the main, traditional undergraduates of all

1. The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) disaggregates “nontraditional” status into seven factors: (1) financial independence, (2) having one or more dependents, (3) being a single caregiver, (4) lacking a traditional high school diploma, (5) delaying college enrollment at least a year after high school, (6) part-time enrollment, and (7) full-time employment. Each factor has specific criteria; full-time employment, for instance, is defined as at least thirty-five hours a week. Different students evidence varying factors and varying numbers of factors; NCES surveys measure both. Interestingly, the NCES does not use age as a nontraditional marker; other research treats students who are twenty-four or older as nontraditional. In this essay, I use both NCES factors and student age as criteria of nontraditional status.
classes and ethno-racial backgrounds organize their social life, their financial calculus, and their paid employment around a central role as students. For nontraditional students, that ecology is reversed: they must sustain their education in the face of a nexus of job, income, family, community, and (therefore) spatial and temporal constraints. They do so with the added emotional burden, shared almost universally across their differences, of having failed to follow the normative script of high-school-to-college that defines American notions of success. And they do so in an academy still largely designed for others. They are marginalized and often invisible.

(Matus-Grossman and Gooden 2002). And although much evidence shows that nontraditional students benefit from high-impact practices (CCCSE 2014), these generally require commitments of continuity and time that are difficult for them to sustain.

Expanding Equity

All of which is reason enough to foreground these students in our national equity agenda. But there is more. For in recent years, educational and thought leaders have begun to focus on the nontraditional majority for quite different reasons. To tuition-driven institutions, they offer an untapped market. To employers and policymakers focused on workforce training, they represent a labor pool with which to close the “skills gap” in a dynamic economy (Kazis et al. 2007). And to national policymakers and funders, rightly concerned with languishing US graduation rates, nontraditional undergraduates are crucial to the completion agenda. To be sure, some completion advocates focus as much on the empowerment of nontraditional students as on metrics of degree attainment (Lumina Foundation 2013, 3–5). Yet others too often advance an overly instrumental understanding of these students’ needs and aspirations and an overly instrumental policy of placing them in narrow, accelerated programs (CCA 2011). Rarely do such initiatives emphasize the ethical and civic imperative of providing full participation and great learning for all.

What would it look like, then, to make equity and inclusive excellence core values in designing college opportunities for nontraditional students? Or conversely, what would the equity agenda look like if it foregrounded a focus on the nontraditional majority?

To a great extent, such an agenda would advance the values, strategies, and practices (grounded especially in a commitment to racial and class inclusion) that already characterize our equity work. This is not surprising: there is, after all, a higher proportion of students of color and working-class students among the nontraditional majority than among undergraduates as a whole (NCES 2015). As the AAC&U guide Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence details, many of the same questions and benchmarks that measure full participation for underserved but traditional undergraduates offer a roadmap for the support of nontraditional students (AAC&U 2015). And many practices that have enhanced the success of nonwhite and working-class “traditionals”—strong cohort communities, for instance, or project-based “signature work” (Finley and McNair 2013)—are also hallmarks of exemplary programs for nontraditional learners such as College Unbound and the Tacoma Program of The Evergreen State College.

AAC&U’s framing of inclusive excellence, in short, provides a rich starting point for an equity agenda for the nontraditional majority; indeed it is heartening that current AAC&U projects point toward a growing attention on such students. Yet much remains to be done. For members of this new majority have their own distinctive needs, constraints, and assets. The social complexity of their lives and the emotional complexity that so often attends

The rise of the nontraditional majority calls us both to build on and to revise our notions of inclusive excellence.

So it should come as no surprise that they are much less likely to persist in and complete their studies. We are rightly concerned about the achievement gap for underserved traditional students, about their unequal access to high-impact practices that support success. The achievement gap for nontraditional students is equally if not more discouraging. One study found that baccalaureate students with at least two nontraditional demographic markers had a 15 percent graduation rate over six years—in contrast to 57 percent for traditional undergraduates (Kazis et al. 2007, 9). Facing job, family, housing, health care, transportation, or debt pressures, they run a high risk of falling behind academically, missing tuition payments, or stopping out. Any missed bus, child’s illness, or change in work schedule can precipitate a crisis.

Yet much remains to be done. For members of this new majority have their own distinctive needs, constraints, and assets. The social complexity of their lives and the emotional complexity that so often attends

2. One exciting example: AAC&U is working with the University of Wisconsin on a Lumina Foundation–funded project to integrate the values and learning outcomes expressed through AAC&U’s Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) initiative into the UW Flexible Option, a set of competency-based degrees targeting adult nontraditional students.
their return to school set them apart from traditional undergraduates of all classes and races. Thus some practices that build inclusive excellence for underrepresented traditional students (such as identity-based cocurricular programs on residential campuses) will not be effective for them. Other practices may be effective but insufficient by themselves: alongside strong mentoring and advising, for instance, nontraditional students need supports like on-campus childcare, transportation aid, and alternative scheduling of classes and office hours (Matus-Grossman and Gooden 2002). And still other high-impact practices will be effective only if they are recast with the lives and needs of nontraditional students in mind. Rather than being placed in internships and community partnerships, for example, many will need experiential learning grounded in their existing work and community settings.

The rise of the nontraditional majority calls us both to build on and to revise our notions of inclusive excellence. Indeed “inclusion”—a value forged in the struggle to open the gates of the traditional academy to underrepresented groups—may not be the fullest way to name the equity needs of such students. In the most literal sense, they are included: already present but often invisible in public universities, already visible but often underresourced in community colleges, foregrounded but exploited in for-profit institutions. They are included in ways that set them aside or set them up for failure.

A Design Imperative
In short, the equity imperative has to comprise a design imperative as well. This will mean expanding and reshaping not only student services, but also the underlying infrastructures of academic institutions: offering alternatives to the conventional work week and the conventional semester, for instance, or opening community-based learning centers that supplement the set-apart geography of the traditional campus. It will mean creating degree programs and curricula that are both practical and reflective, streamlined and exploratory, avoiding both the narrow reductionism of targeted job training and the formless sprawl of the current cafeteria model. We will need new models of engaged pedagogy as well, expanding on the creativity that led to the development of high-impact practices on traditional campuses. Indeed we will need new research on precisely what high-impact practices and signature work should look like for nontraditional students.

Civic and community engagement represents a particularly important instance of this redesign work. In my experience, nontraditional undergraduates are just as hungry as their traditional peers to integrate their studies with social and community needs; their education benefits every bit as much from such integration. Yet they often lack the time and opportunity for the sort of sustained, unpaid community work that currently defines best practice in the civic engagement movement. At the same time, they often bring to their studies a depth of community, work, and political experience that may go unrecognized. We need to recast our models of public engagement to make community-based learning available to the nontraditional majority—and to make their own social capital available to both community partners and fellow students.

Finally, we will need to revise the accreditation and assessment practices that define and measure academic success, as well as the public policies that aim to foster it. Both nationally and within academic institutions, such practices and policies persistently marginalize nontraditional students. Graduation rates that count only first-time, full-time students; financial-aid policies that fail to support year-round study or nontuition expenses; accreditation rules that equate academic quality with seat time in the fifteen-week semester—all of these presume the norm of the traditional undergraduate and penalize those whose lives do not conform to it.

Yet, even before we design new services, new high-impact practices, and new policies, we need to do something more basic: see and listen. An equity agenda for nontraditional students must start by recognizing their lives and making audible their voices. The epigraph to this essay quotes one such voice: Garnetta Gonzalez, a former dancer and bartender (and student of mine), now with a baccalaureate in clinical psychology, who testifies eloquently to her educational needs, challenges, and aspirations. Too often the voices of students like Garnetta go unheard, their lives ignored or instrumentalized. It’s time to end that: to begin the work of developing policies, institutions, and cultures that—as with our commitment to underserved traditional students—offer great, engaged, transformative learning to all.

REFERENCES
A Framework for Understanding Latino/a Cultural Wealth

VIJAY KANAGALA, assistant professor and program coordinator in the College of Education at the University of Vermont
LAURA RENDÓN, professor of educational leadership and policy studies at the University of Texas at San Antonio
AMAURY NORA, professor of educational leadership and policy studies at the University of Texas at San Antonio

For decades, higher education’s work to support student success has been built on a grand narrative in which underserved and underrepresented students from low-income backgrounds are portrayed as “high risk,” “high maintenance,” “underprepared,” or “culturally deprived” (see, for example, Delgado Bernal 2010; Moll et al. 2001; Yosso 2005). Absent from this deficit-based narrative are asset-based views about the cultural wealth that students employ to transcend their socioeconomic circumstances and to excel in education.

To learn more about students’ assets, we conducted a qualitative research study supported by TG Philanthropy to examine the experiences of Latino/a students at one Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI), the University of Texas at San Antonio. We held focus groups with forty-seven students, six of whom also participated in one- to two-hour videotaped interviews. Guided primarily by asset-based theoretical frameworks developed by Latino/a scholars (see, for example, Anzaldúa 1999; Delgado Bernal 2010; Moll et al. 2001; Yosso 2005), we analyzed transcripts to identify common themes. Here, we summarize findings related to the upsides and downsides of a Latino/a college experience. We also identify Latino/a cultural wealth expressed as ventajas y conocimientos (assets and knowledge) that students employ to their advantage. Our goal is for practitioners to leverage these cultural assets to foster student success. (For a complete discussion of our findings, see Rendón, Nora, and Kanagala 2014.)

The Upsides and Downsides of College

Every life transition carries upsides and downsides. For many students in our study, attending college represented a time of great excitement. They appreciated making new friends, learning new perspectives, gaining new experiences, and interacting with diverse peers. They benefited from faculty support and validation, active and applied learning strategies, advising and mentoring, peer support networks, financial aid, a welcoming campus climate, and interactions across diverse cultures. When asked how attending college had changed them, students said, among other things, that college had made them more mature, confident, inquisitive, and independent.

At the same time, students faced formidable challenges associated with transitioning and adapting to college, a dynamic that has been discussed in the research literature (Delgado Bernal 2010; Nora 2001; Rendón, Jalomo, and Nora 2000). Their transitions were not linear as students found themselves operating entre mundos—moving back and forth among multiple contexts such as the family, barrio/community, native country, work, peers, and spiritual worlds. They also encountered what Anzaldúa calls “un choque” (1999, 78), or cultural collision as they transitioned from their familiar worlds to the unfamiliar world of college. The choque was marked by experiencing liminality; experiencing separation anxiety; negotiating dislocation and relocation; and dealing with racial and gender microaggressions. Additionally, students described burdens related to paying for college, a lack of college readiness, and inadequate advising.

Latino/a Cultural Wealth

Our study confirmed that Latino/a students have formidable cultural wealth, both ventajas (assets or personal resources) and what Gloria Anzaldúa calls “conocimientos” (knowledge or awareness that evolves through specific life experiences) (Lara 2005). We employed Yosso’s (2005) Community Cultural Wealth model as a starting point to identify specific ventajas/assets that students possessed and used to their advantage. Yosso’s framework includes six forms of cultural wealth: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant. Our study uncovered four additional forms of ventajas y conocimientos: ganas/perseverance, ethnic consciousness, spirituality/faith, and pluriversal cultural wealth.

Aspirational Wealth: Students were hopeful about their futures, aspiring to complete college and enter professions such as engineering, science, or politics. Their aspirations were often shaped by validating agents (e.g., parents, siblings, grandparents) who shared testimonios/life stories about overcoming adversity and who provided support and consejos/sage advice. Community role models also fostered aspirations and hope for the future.

Linguistic Wealth: Students recognized that being bilingual in Spanish and English helped them communicate and form relationships with others. They
also demonstrated communication skills as they operated in multiple contexts requiring different forms of language expression.

**Familial Wealth:** The family provided critical support, with mothers playing an especially central role. Students accumulated familial capital through validation, consejos/sage advice, and role modeling; they were determined to complete life goals not only for themselves but also for their families.

**Social Wealth:** To develop social capital, students capitalized on their friendships, their social networks, and the lessons they learned from interacting with peers. While students expressed the value of diversity and of learning from different cultures, they relied especially on networks formed with other Latino/a students.

**Navigational Wealth:** Navigating within multiple, distinct worlds (barrio, peers, native country, family, spirituality, college) was a key strategy. Each new context required its own mental script and language code, as well as its own intellectual and behavioral conventions.

**Resistant Wealth:** Students experienced racial and gender microaggressions, as well as culture shock, in college. Through those experiences, they acquired resistant capital, which they came to depend on when facing academic and social obstacles.

**Ganas/Perseverant Wealth:** Determination, self-reliance, and inner confidence underlie this ventaja. Students refused to quit, and they also recognized and embraced the sacrifices they made in going to college. Admirably, students were able to overcome difficult challenges such as being undocumented, lacking role models and mentors in their communities, experiencing poverty, and attending poorly resourced schools.

**Ethnic Consciousness Wealth:** Shared experiences of social and educational inequity may foster solidarity among Latino/a students, resulting in what Padilla called "ethnic consciousness" (1985, 61). This ethnic consciousness manifested in students’ deep commitment to give back to their families and communities and in their sense that personal accomplishment could benefit the Latino/a collective whole. Students were overwhelmingly proud of their heritage and proud to attend an HSI.

**Spiritual/Faith-Based Wealth:** Students often relied on their faith in God for strength in difficult situations. They also were guided by a broader sense of spirituality that included gratitude, compassion, and a sense of purpose in life, as well as a positive view of the world and a deep sense of humanitarianism.

**Pluriversal Wealth:** Students were able to function with pluriversality similar to what Anzaldúa terms “mestiza consciousness” (1999, 77), a state of perpetual transition where concepts and behaviors cannot be held within rigid boundaries. This ability to make identity, language, and behavioral shifts while moving successfully in and out of multiple social and intellectual spaces likely gave students a tolerance for ambiguities and contradictions.

**Leveraging Students’ Ventajas y Conocimientos**

Our findings clearly substantiate that deficit-based assumptions about low-income, first-generation Latino/a students are erroneous. Students have extraordinary strengths, the drive to succeed, and the ability to be transformed by their college experiences. College faculty and staff need to learn more about Latino/a students’ college experiences, reframe their assumptions about these students, and develop asset-based frameworks to foster student success. Equipped with their own toolboxes of ventajas y conocimientos and with support and validation from college faculty and staff, Latino/a students can definitely complete a college education.

**REFERENCES**


This article was adapted from Ventajas/Assets y Conocimientos/Knowledge: Leveraging Latin@ Strengths to Foster Student Success (Rendon, Nora, and Kanagala 2014) and is published here with permission. To download the full report, visit http://education.utsa.edu/center_research_policy_education/.
Why is it imperative that institutions invest in faculty development programs (FDPs) with an equity focus? 

Quite simply, the essential mission of American higher education is to serve democracy and to actuate its values. Higher education carries out this obligation through faculty professional development. Colleges and universities underwrite democracy through two primary functions, knowledge production and knowledge reproduction, and faculty are responsible for these key functions. By liberally and critically engaging in the production of knowledge through free inquiry and discovery, faculty provide an ever-expanding range of knowledge that will advance democratic living. By reproducing that knowledge through instruction, faculty provide opportunities for students to engage in uninhibited discussion and expression and to exercise the critical scrutiny that leads to self-realization. Thus through research and teaching, faculty supply society with means for progress and growth that are imperative to democracy.

Faculty supply society with means for progress and growth that are imperative to democracy.

However, not everyone who holds this view concedes that a healthy democracy is inherently an equitable social arrangement. To truly serve democracy, higher education must facilitate and expand opportunities for all individuals to develop their talents, potentialities, and capacities, and must ensure the free pursuit and production of knowledge. To achieve this, institutions must prepare faculty to meet these commitments across their primary functions—academic research and scholarship, and teaching and learning.

Knowledge Production and Reproduction

Many institutions have lost sight of how scholarship and research serve the greater democratic agenda. A cursory review of FDPs nationwide reveals not an emphasis on intellectual integrity and scholarly autonomy, but rather a focus on successful grant writing and external research funding. Institutions offer workshops, seminars, webinars, new technologies, and collaboration and mentorship opportunities to improve their faculty’s grant revenue generation. Many have also created high-level academic administrative positions to help faculty produce external funding. These positions focus little (if at all) on developing the wide-ranging knowledge valued in a democracy. Symbolically and factually, they encourage academic professionals to understand research and scholarship as marketable exercises and not as the pursuit of unregulated knowledge.

This state of affairs has implications for equity for two reasons. First, it reduces knowledge production to a normative enterprise, allowing the desires of private funders to constrain the pursuit of knowledge. Paradigm-challenging epistemologies often championed by marginalized scholars are unlikely to fare well in such an environment, and the scholars who champion these epistemologies will find their chances of tenure and promotion endangered and their academic careers disadvantaged. For example, many faculty of color whose research and scholarly foci are race, ethnicity, and/or gender may feel pressure to turn their attention to more “fundable” topics. The more the privatized marketplace tapers the parameters for research and scholarship, the more improbable equity in knowledge production—and, consequently, for historically underrepresented scholars—becomes.

Our current commitment to marketplace values in knowledge production has diminished faculty’s professional promise to serve democracy through knowledge reproduction. To enact equity, we need to reorient FDPs to focus on developing faculty members’ identities as teachers and building faculty capacity to implement equity through instruction.

Equity-Minded Instruction

In the realm of teaching and learning, most FDPs provide faculty with services and resources intended to improve their instructional skills. As a whole, these programs are not what Dowd and Bensimon (2015) would characterize as “equity-minded”: teaching guided by an awareness of how instructional practices can reinforce structural inequity. Most FDPs offer recommendations for
improving class discussions or lectures, training on new technologies to augment or enhance content delivery and learning outcomes, toolkits to improve student participation, guidelines for assessment and grading, instructional design tute- lage, and faculty learning communities for semester- or year-long training. However, most do not adopt equity as a guiding principle.

What should a faculty development program focused on equity look like? If the FDP’s goal is to develop equitable instruction and student learning, it should promote teaching as an integral component of academic identity. For most faculty members, scholarly training emphasizes and privileges research, not teaching; thus for many, their worth as researchers and not their identity as teachers regulates their academic identity. Yet studies have demonstrated that faculty who identify as teachers are motivated to improve their instructional skills and gain professional satisfaction from student learning (see, e.g., Lief et al. 2012). Thus, an equity-focused FDP should cultivate an academic identity in which teaching is professionally satisfying and rewarding.

An academic identity in which teaching and student learning are integral enables faculty to advance what Dowd and Bensimon (2015) have called equity-minded instruction. Equity-minded instruction engages all learners, but provides equitable access to knowledge especially to those students who have been historically marginalized by the cultural and academic norms of the college classroom. For example, FDPs can enlist faculty in syllabi reviews that expose the cultural norms embedded in the syllabi’s language, lexical terms, and discourse. Bringing these norms to light can empower faculty to better communicate learning objectives to all students.

Three Key Components
To help faculty develop academic identities anchored to the principles of equity-mindedness, an FDP should involve three components: (1) release time for faculty, (2) monetary rewards for equity-minded teaching, and (3) recognition of equity-minded teaching in promotion and tenure appraisals. Clearly, provosts and deans will need to modify faculty reward and promotion metrics in order for equity-minded FDPs to succeed. The incentive for doing so seems obvious: the better faculty are able to teach all students, the more likely that the institution will satisfy accountability mandates, accreditation requirements, and the demands of the “consumer” public.

Faculty release time serves two functions: it is an incentive for faculty to participate in an equity-focused FDP and a necessary condition of that FDP’s success. Forming an identity as a teacher requires time dedicated to professional self-assessment and training. Becoming conscious of how, why, and in what ways students’ sociocultural positions affect their learning, and how instructional decisions either eliminate or enhance students’ opportunities to learn, requires reflective, protracted attention. One cannot become aware of the many ways in which curricula and pedagogy can preserve and renew racial or gender biases, for example, in lunchtime seminars or sporadic workshops. Debunking assumptions about instruction, reassessing content, and identifying habits that limit opportunity for student learning is hard work that demands time.

Although awards like Stanford University’s President’s Award for Excellence through Diversity certainly validate faculty members’ efforts to make their instructional materials and delivery more inclusive, institutions should also present faculty with monetary incentives to develop equity-minded pedagogy. These incentives must be part of an existing professional framework that is familiar to faculty, central to academic culture, and suitable for both tenure-track and contract faculty. Faculty merit pay formulae can be recalibrated to honor faculty’s participation in equity-minded FDPs and to recognize their implementation of equity-minded pedagogy. Few faculty will invest time and energy in these activities until faculty reward systems assign capital value to developing and executing instructional equity.

In addition to sanctioning the time necessary for thoughtful engagement and rewarding faculty for their commitment to instructional equity, administrators must assure faculty that these commitments will be valued in their appraisals. For tenure-track faculty, appraisals for promotion and tenure—the ultimate professional reward—must encourage faculty to nurture academic identities that depend on equity-minded teaching in addition to research productivity. For contractual faculty, recontracting and merit raise reviews should also value efforts to employ equity-minded approaches in teaching.

Conclusion
In sum, if colleges and universities are to fulfill their democratic responsibilities, they must alter the current calculus for knowledge production and reproduction. By reconceiving faculty development programs so they emphasize the advancement of equity-minded pedagogy and not the entrepreneurial pursuit of research, institutions can reshape the faculty’s academic identity and in doing so, serve democracy well.

REFERENCES
Roughly one million veterans and military-affiliated students are attending colleges and universities to advance their educations and find high-quality jobs after completing their military service (US Department of Veterans Affairs 2013). But what are the experiences of these students, who are typically called student veterans? How are institutions helping to ensure their success on twenty-first-century campuses? How are these students included as members of our campus communities?

Defining the Veteran Population

First, let’s be clear about whom we are talking. The most widely accepted definition of student veterans refers to a population that includes students who currently serve, or have ever served, in the military (Vacchi and Berger 2014). This population includes graduate and undergraduate students who are on active duty, those who are serving in the National Guard or Reserves, and those who are separated from the military, such as retirees or service members who left the military after an enlistment tour or two.

Student veterans may share some common experiences, such as being subject to a chain of command. The near-absolute authority of military commanders is something few non-military-affiliated Americans can fully grasp or appreciate, but obeying orders is an important aspect of military discipline. In addition, whether they served in large or small units, all veterans have experienced what it means to be a member of a team. Maximizing teamwork is a component of the military experience. But despite these and other commonalities, the experiences of student veterans may vary in important ways. For example, all students who have served in the military have experienced initial entry training, and basic training is the most common experience. But most officers do not attend basic training, and instead experience initial training at an officer’s school. Additionally, while many recent veterans have deployed for combat, not all veterans or currently serving military members have served in combat, and the number of those serving in combat is expected to decrease for the foreseeable future (Vacchi and Berger 2014).

Student veterans can feel uncomfortable on college campuses, and the culture shock of joining a campus community is part of every veteran’s college experience. Research and anecdotal observation suggest that a clash of cultures occurs when veterans come to campus (Vacchi and Berger 2014). Many veterans enter college as returning adult students, and their discipline, focus, and commitment to the college process may be different from that of traditional students. Many veterans also experience stereotyping and fear stigmatization in relation to disabilities or academic readiness (although most are academically ready). It is important for both veteran and nonveteran campus members to develop an awareness that military culture may clash with civilian culture on college campuses.

Opening Campus Dialogue

Veterans do not occupy a generic subculture, and there is no way to describe “typical” military service. Therefore, it is important to avoid making assumptions about military service and what students’ military experiences may mean for them. The idea of avoiding assumptions is not new to those doing diversity work in higher education, but how do staff, faculty, and students identify student veterans and determine the best ways of supporting them?

Engaging in campus dialogue and including veterans in these discussions can be critical to creating an open and welcoming environment for student veterans. One approach is to create a veterans task force or committee, including faculty, student affairs professionals, and administrators as well as some student veterans, to help provide oversight and advocacy for veterans as a student population. Campuses can also improve dialogue by hosting appropriate Veterans Day Week activities and events, which can include dialogue about military and veterans’ issues. Campuses might create a speaker’s bureau of individuals who are willing to visit classrooms and talk about their experiences as student veterans. Finally, institutions might offer professional development training to
educate faculty and staff about the needs of veterans.

**Providing Academic and Social Supports**

The stigma associated with receiving special treatment can discourage veterans from self-identifying, making it difficult for institutions to match veterans with legitimate needs to relevant services. For example, higher education professionals want veterans to identify themselves and connect with the Disabilities Services Office (DSO) as necessary; but veterans, even those with severe physical disabilities, rarely see themselves as disabled and often do not want to be viewed as less than fully able. Veterans may not connect with the DSO due to expectations of a stigma associated with self-identifying as a disabled veteran. The problem of destigmatizing disability has no easy solution, and seeking ways to match disabled veterans to services is a critical challenge for higher education professionals.

To address this challenge, some institutions offer an array of basic academic accommodation services to all veterans who register with the DSO, without requiring veterans to disclose specific disabilities. To qualify for these services, the veteran can present a generic letter from the US Department of Veterans Affairs (the VA) disclosing only that the VA has identified the veteran as disabled. This typically encourages veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury to register with the DSO without feeling stigmatized by identification with either of these invisible injuries, which are unfortunately viewed negatively by the public. Campuses that seek ways to reduce stigma and connect veterans with services are going a long way toward creating an inclusive and equitable environment for veterans.

A safe space such as a veterans lounge can also help establish a welcoming environment. While not essential on all campuses, in such spaces, a segment of veterans may experience the greatest sense of inclusion they will feel, or even need to feel, on campus. When considering the creation of a veterans lounge, it is important to keep in mind that on most campuses, about 10 to 15 percent of the student veteran population uses the lounge in a given semester (SVA 2011). Institutions should not expect the majority of student veterans to use services or dedicated spaces, as many veterans do not need services and almost all are commuter students who have lives, and jobs, away from campus.

Ensuring that faculty members have a basic awareness of how to work with current and former military students is critical to making student veterans feel welcome. (Radford 2011). It is also important to remember that creating a veterans lounge in an undesirable building, location on campus, or space can have a negative impact on the veteran population by discouraging veterans from using the space.

Perhaps the most important place to make student veterans feel included is the classroom. The challenge of creating inclusive classroom spaces represents one of the most important reasons to build professional development relationships between student affairs and academic affairs professionals. The typical campus will have an office or advocate for veterans within student affairs, but the most common interaction between campus representatives and student veterans will occur in the classroom. Ensuring that faculty members have a basic awareness of how to work with current and former military students is critical to making student veterans feel welcome. In addition, it is important to include meaningful language on syllabi that invites veterans to connect with faculty members at the beginning of the semester to disclose their veteran identity and to ensure that faculty members know of any accommodations or special circumstances, like medical appointments with the VA or training with the National Guard, that may interfere with normal coursework.

**Simple Yet Transformative Changes**

All too often, campuses focus on offering one-time events as symbols of support for the veteran community. But this approach rarely translates into meaningful change. Rather than organizing stand-alone events, a campus may provide simple, yet transformative, accommodations, extend basic services, and improve experiences in the classroom to create an inclusive and equitable environment for veterans on campus.

**REFERENCES**


Traversing Divides: Service Learning in the Writing Center

LISA ZIMMERELLI, assistant professor of writing and writing center director at Loyola University Maryland

Every Wednesday evening for the past five years, students enrolled in Writing Center Practice and Theory at Loyola University Maryland have tutored Baltimore City public high school students at the university’s writing center. The Loyola students are fulfilling the course’s mandatory service-learning hours, while the Baltimore students are participating in an educational support program called Bridges, sponsored by St. Paul’s School, a local private school. Loyola’s modest role in the comprehensive Bridges program is to provide tutoring to students whose academic, behavioral, and personal challenges impede their chances of college acceptance and readiness. Bridges students and Loyola students pair up for the semester for subject-based tutoring and workshops on SAT prep and the college application process. To date, fifty-seven Loyola students have tutored forty-three Bridges students.

Service learning connects course content to the community in tangible, experiential ways. When college students apply and reflect on their course content in community-based contexts, they become more deeply engaged, and their academic, social, and emotional growth is significant. Indeed, empirical research published over the past decade strongly supports the range of benefits that students derive from high-impact practices like service learning (Kuh and O’Donnell 2013). One of those benefits is increased facility with multicultural competence, leading—at least for some students—to civic engagement and social responsibility (Einfeld and Collins 2008).

In a qualitative study of the Loyola/Bridges program (Zimmerelli 2015), I share assessment results that highlight the program’s promotion of cross-racial and cross-class affiliations, leading to more inclusive attitudes among college students. In another publication on service learning as a model for tutor education (Zimmerelli and Brown, forthcoming), my coauthor and I detail specific strategies for sustainability. This work is reflective of most service-learning scholarship, where the college student acquires “real-world” skills and greater perspective and the community partner acquires the ends of service—the built home, the improved résumé, the better grade. In the discussion below, I highlight how both Loyola and Bridges students benefit in tandem, arriving through collective efforts at shared benefits and thus taking a step toward greater educational equity.

To do so, I use Richard Kiely’s Transformative Learning Model for Service Learning (Kiely 2005). Adapting sociologist Jack Mezirow’s Transformative Learning Theory, Kiely proffers five conceptual categories for exploring “the contextual, visceral, emotive, and affective aspects that enhance transformational learning in service-learning” (18): contextual border crossing, dissonance, personalizing, processing, and connecting.

Dissonance in Border Crossing
According to Kiely, “crossing contextual borders initiates a complex transformational learning process whereby students … increasingly realize how their identity and position in the world are not only defined by nationality and physical boundaries, but also shaped by socially, culturally, politically, economically, and historically constructed borders” (2005, 10). Kiely explains how dissonance or incongruity between students’ prior frame of reference and their service experience catalyzes students’ learning; he describes how students work through a myriad of powerful emotional reactions (personalize), dialogically and discursively reflect (process), and develop deeper relationships with members of the community (connect).

Traditionally, college students go into a community to complete service-learning requirements. In the Loyola/Bridges program, the Bridges students weekly cross what is euphemistically known as the “Loyola Bubble” to be tutored in the writing center, arriving on a bus driven by an Americorps intern. The literal border crossing from a disadvantaged, disenfranchised environment to a well-resourced one creates more dissonance for the Bridges students than it does for Loyola students.

The dissonance for Loyola students comes secondhand and accumulatively, as the Bridges students share assignments and stories from their classes and neighborhoods. Loyola students do not process the Baltimore community through their own lens—a lens often distorted by stereotypes and misconceptions. Rather, their border crossing is controlled by the Bridges students, who decide what is shared and what is held back, both in terms of actual information and in divulging their feelings. In short, the Bridges students—not the perception of a “damaged” or “deficient” community—are positioned as the agents of dissonance for the Loyola students.

Transformation in Connecting
To help reconcile dissonance for both groups of students, and thus catalyze
transformational learning, the Loyola/ Bridges program primarily relies on connecting: “learning to affectively understand and empathize through relationships with community members” (Kiely 2005, 8). Connecting is also central to writing center praxis, which emphasizes peer collaboration. In addition to the sustained tutoring partnership, the writing center provides opportunities for informal interaction. The little things—sharing pizza each week, doing icebreakers, attending sports games on campus—pave the way for deeper moments of connection over shared fears about a parent’s job or roommate problems. Conversations become confidences, jokes become inside jokes, and the students comment—sometimes with surprise, always with relief—that the other student “is so much like me.”

For Bridges students, the Loyola students help demythologize the liberal arts college experience, demystify the college application process, and desegregate the need to use services and resources (like tutoring and counseling). Because the Loyola students represent our student body, they are racially, socioeconomically, and sexually diverse. To date, all Bridges students have been African American and from lower- to middle-income families. Bridges students are shocked to learn that many tutors are on financial aid, or that some students are shocked to learn that many students are on financial aid, or that some teachers to blame systemic problems like poverty and a defunded educational system (Zimmerelli 2015).

**Opportunities for Growth**

Opportunities for personalizing and processing are uneven in the program. Loyola students’ course-based mechanisms—supplementary readings, class discussion, research and reflection assignments, chance meetings in the halls with me or other tutors—help them process their service learning. Kiely’s research indicates that processing is a critical category in terms of “problematizing, questioning, analyzing, and searching for causes and solutions to problems and issues” (2005, 8); in short, processing enables the thoughtful critique of systemic injustice. Starting in fall 2015, Bridges students also have had experience in an economically disadvantaged black urban community. Loyola students are just beginning their tutor education, and their journal entries reflect anxiety over their lack of experience. They worry that they will “fail” the Bridges students as tutors. The Bridges students, however, have been tutored for years and thus serve as experts of a kind. As one Loyola student put it, “She became more confident in her writing abilities … and I became more confident in my tutoring abilities.” Moreover, early class discussions reveal that few Loyola students

Both Loyola and Bridges students benefit in tandem, arriving through collective efforts at shared benefits and thus taking a step toward greater educational equity.

**REFERENCES**


During faculty workshops, we often ask people to raise their hands if their institutions are taking certain steps to address equity. Their responses follow a predictable pattern. Are they examining data on student outcomes, disaggregated by race and ethnicity, and offering support for students in underrepresented groups? A lot of hands go up. Providing faculty development opportunities in culturally responsive pedagogy and shifting from deficit- to asset-based approaches? Still several hands, but fewer. Prioritizing diversity in hiring? Fewer still. And how many institutions are working to identify how their own structures are producing inequities, and then changing those structures? Very few hands, and uncertain expressions around the room.

In the California Acceleration Project (CAP), we help faculty understand that the policies and curricula that higher education has developed to help students grapple with open-ended, relevant issues and faculty support their momentum toward longer-term goals.

Rethinking Placement

Three-quarters of California community college students are placed in remedial courses in English, reading, math, and/or English as a Second Language, and their long-term outcomes are bleak. Statewide, just 40 percent of students placed in remediation go on to complete a degree, certificate, or transfer within six years, compared to 70 percent of those classified as “college ready” (California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office 2015).

How can we increase completion among students placed in remediation? One approach is simple: let more of them enroll in college-level courses.

Consider the experience of Butte College. In 2011, when Butte switched from one placement test to another, faculty were surprised to find that twice as many students were suddenly “college ready.” Placement into college English rose from 23 percent to 48 percent of incoming students, and some feared that the change would result in large-scale student failure. But completion increased for all students, with students of color seeing the biggest gains.

At Butte, three times as many African American students completed college English in one year under the new policy, and twice as many Hispanic and Asian students. The completion gap between African American and white students was cut nearly in half. Further, among students who previously would have placed into remediation, 40 percent earned As and Bs in the college-level course, attesting to how much their capacity had been underestimated (Henson and Hern 2014).

Redesigning Curricula

In addition to helping educators rethink placement, CAP supports college faculty in redesigning their curricula. Sixty-one community colleges are now offering accelerated pathways that reduce students’ time in remediation and offer high-challenge, high-support instruction.

Following CAP design principles, students grapple with open-ended, relevant issues and faculty support their success with collaborative pedagogy and strategies for addressing the affective dimensions of learning, providing just-in-time remediation as needed. In math, remediation aligns with the college-level courses students take for their programs of study—algebra pathways for students heading into calculus (STEM and business majors), statistics pathways for most other students (Hern and Snell 2013).

The pre-statistics course at College of the Canyons (COC) is a good example. In traditional remediation, students review the standard list of Algebra I
topics; here, they work in teams to conduct exploratory analysis with real-world data sets. In one project, students analyze auto safety ratings to create policy recommendations for an insurance company, applying statistical tools and creating posters that support their recommendations with text and graphs. To help students persist with this high level of challenge, faculty assign regular activities on the affective domain, such as writing self-reflections after watching a TED talk on grit or discussing an article about letting learners struggle.

One of the first colleges to implement accelerated curricula with CAP, COC now offers the largest statistics pathway in California, serving thirteen hundred students a year. In addition to sending faculty to the CAP professional development program, the college has trained more than forty math faculty through its own local program. The results have been amazing, especially for students of color. Students in the statistics pathway are nearly three times as likely to complete a college-level math course within two years as students in traditional remediation. For African American students, completion of college math is more than six times higher (Brezina et al., forthcoming).

Acceleration is now a way of life in both English and math at COC. The college has eliminated the lowest remedial levels of both subjects and changed placement policies so that students start higher in the sequences. As positive results come in, faculty and administrators are inspired to seek additional ways to accelerate students.

### Accelerating Results

The gains described above are typical of CAP pathways statewide. The Research and Planning Group studied the first sixteen community colleges offering accelerated pathways with CAP, controlling for thirteen variables that influence completion (e.g., race, income, GPA, placement level). They found that students’ odds of completing college English were 2.3 times higher in effective accelerated pathways than in traditional remediation, and 4.5 times higher in accelerated statistics pathways. Further, every subgroup they examined had better results in the redesigned pathways (Hayward and Willett 2014). In a follow-up analysis of disaggregated descriptive data, the researchers found that achievement gaps for African American students were eliminated in CAP statistics pathways at eight colleges (Hayward and Willett 2015).

These examples from California make clear that increasing equity requires colleges to change placement and remediation structures for incoming students. Under traditional approaches, students of color start college at a structural disadvantage, disproportionately placed into multiple remedial courses. Acceleration strategies flatten these structures, enabling all students to progress more rapidly into meaningful college-level coursework, narrowing achievement gaps, and revealing the deep student capacity that had been there all along.  

For more information, visit http://cap.3csn.org.

### REFERENCES


The authors retain copyright to this article, which is published here with permission.
When I began developing inclusive programming for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, and queer/questioning (LGBTQ) students at the historically black university where I worked at the time, I had two goals: to improve the campus climate for LGBTQ students, and to bring students into allyship. Like many other resource-strapped campus educators, I approached my task by adapting other campuses’ program models and customizing them to our campus culture. This commonly meant taking an intersectional approach in which I infused existing content on sexuality and gender identity with content that accounted for the racial experiences of students of color. While I focus here on inclusivity for black student populations, I believe that campuses can adapt these lessons to improve participation from other students of color.

**Barriers and Avenues to Inclusion**

In a higher education climate driven by student success and retention, institutions are attending to students’ cocurricular needs by focusing on students’ sense of belonging or connectedness (Strayhorn 2012, 16–17). In an effort to help subpopulations of students of color who are LGBTQ achieve a sense of belonging while also engaging racial minority students as allies, I have identified several factors that campus educators should consider when attempting to improve the racial inclusivity of their LGBTQ programming.

Racial and socioeconomic divides within the LGBTQ rights movement have manifested in many ways in LGBTQ resources in higher education (Marine and Nicolazzo 2014), and these divides may contribute to the lack of racial and ethnic diversity in LGBTQ programming on some campuses. I have found that student engagement programming developed for predominantly white student populations without intentional efforts to include those with other cultural experiences is not likely to be optimally effective in reaching students of color. At Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), for example, students often come from diverse communities of origin and expect similar diversity in their collegiate experiences (Morris 2014).

A few factors that can have an immediate impact on the engagement of students of color are the imagery, language, and cultural norms reflected in program content. In working with racially diverse student groups in the TBR system, I commonly find that the use of culturally relevant topics and figures from entertainment and social media allow students to better relate to the subject matter. For instance, at an HBCU in our system, students and diversity practitioners organizing events for an inaugural Pride Week created an informational display that they placed in the student center to draw attention to the week’s activities. The provocative display featured famous black individuals, both historical and from contemporary popular culture, who were not well known as identifying as members of the LGBTQ community. Presenting these popular black figures in a new light allowed for fresh dialogue with a previously disengaged student group, and gave some LGBTQ and ally students their first experience of campus-initiated programming designed to reflect their interests.

**Integrating Intersecting Identities**

Intersectionality—the notion of considering social identities in relation to each other and in the context of the world around them (Abes, Jones, and McEwen 2007)—is a common concept in LGBTQ programming. It is important for practitioners to leverage intersectionality in a substantive way that fully engages students of color.
should avoid overemphasizing the experiences of the majority group and rather focus on integrating the experiences of students of color (Dooley and LePeau n.d.). In my experience, framing LGBTQ program content in relation to issues that are significant to marginalized student groups and being attentive to the influence of students’ cultural norms can improve the racial diversity of participating students.

For example, in developing racially inclusive LGBTQ programs for black students, I take into account students’ deeply rooted cultural norms related to religion and homophobia along with their growing commitment to social justice issues. I find that the students I seek to engage as LGBTQ allies are involved in social justice in robust, meaningful ways. Specifically, following recent events in Ferguson, Missouri, and Baltimore, Maryland, some students have organized and led area Black Lives Matter protests. While factoring in the country’s racial climate and appreciating how these incidents of violence against black people influence students’ perceptions of injustice in society, I am able to draw on the students’ burgeoning passion for social justice when facilitating discussions about the necessity of inclusivity for LGBTQ students of all races in society and on campus.

In working with practitioners to develop racially inclusive LGBTQ programming, I have found that the most difficult lesson learned involves discussions of privilege. When practitioners encourage students to see the oppression of the LGBTQ community but fail to acknowledge students’ experiences as members of other marginalized groups, they risk jeopardizing their ability to engage and support all students. It is particularly important for practitioners who are not members of marginalized groups to remain conscious of their own privileged identities and consider how each of those identities factors into discussion. When setting the tone for discussions of privilege, practitioners who appreciate the dynamic that their own racial privilege and/or sexual privilege add to the discussion are likely to better cultivate conversations with students about the intersectional nature of privilege.

Community Engagement
Practitioners working to offer racially inclusive LGBTQ programs in the TBR system face some common challenges, including lack of funding, understaffing, and the absence of staff who personally identify with specific subpopulations of students of color. To address these challenges, it can be helpful to enter into collaborative relationships with community partners. By leveraging the knowledge and resources of community partners who share an interest in supporting LGBTQ students, practitioners can advance their efforts to be more inclusive of racial minority students. Community partners can fill knowledge gaps and provide support for underresourced campus programs, including by offering services for specific groups.

Area nonprofit organizations have been eager to assist in efforts to work with black student populations in our system. One community group that has significantly assisted our efforts has a program with the designated purpose of engaging the black MSM (men who sleep with men) population. Several institutions in our system were able to collaborate with a seasoned community educator from this nonprofit organization. This educator assisted in developing programs that addressed the unique needs of black males and ultimately engaged and supported these students in a manner that the institutions had been unable to achieve on their own.

Conclusion
With student success hinging on the whole collegiate experience, both in and out of the classroom, culturally effective engagement programs are fundamental to retention and completion. There is a pressing need to provide support and resources for LGBTQ students, including LGBTQ students of color. In serving this diverse population, it is necessary to attend to students’ myriad intersecting social identities. Diversity practitioners should review their practices to ensure that their programs support the whole student, serving students’ numerous social identities in unison.

REFERENCES


SAVE THE DATES: Diversity, Learning, and Student Success

AAC&U’s 2016 Diversity, Learning, and Student Success conference, “Shifting Paradigms and Challenging Mindsets,” will take place from March 17 to 19, 2016, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. AAC&U invites attendees to explore how to move to asset-based models for more effectively advancing diversity, student learning, and success; engage in courageous conversations that are problem-oriented and solution-driven; and expand capacity to fully serve and prepare all students for lifelong success and engaged citizenship. For more information or to register, visit http://www.aacu.org/meetings/dlss/2016.

Continued from page 17


AAC&U Centennial Resources on Equity and Inclusive Excellence

The following resources are designed to be used in conjunction to advance campus and community conversations about educational equity and inclusive excellence.

America’s Unmet Promise: The Imperative for Equity in Higher Education

In this report from AAC&U, authors Keith Witham, Lindsey E. Malcom-Piqueux, Alicia C. Dowd, and Estela Mara Bensimon make the case for the urgent need to expand access to and success in high-quality educational programs for students traditionally underserved in higher education. The publication addresses students’ access and success in terms of traditional measures like college completion as well as important indicators of educational opportunity like participation in high-impact educational practices. The authors present an equity-minded guiding framework that can be used throughout higher education. To purchase copies, visit http://www.aacu.org/publications/unmet-promise.

Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence: A Campus Guide for Self-Study and Planning

This guide for self-study provides a framework for needed dialogue, assessment, and action to address inequities in higher education institutions. Focusing on issues of access and success particularly for students from groups traditionally underserved in higher education, it can be used as a tool for bringing together campus leaders and practitioners—across divisions and departments—to engage in internal assessment and chart a path forward to improve all students’ success and achievement of key learning outcomes. To download or order print copies, visit http://www.aacu.org/publications/committing-to-equity.

Step Up & Lead for Equity: What Higher Education Can Do to Reverse Our Deepening Divides

This brochure makes the case that America’s persistent gaps in education, income, and wealth are widening, with the fastest growing segments of our population the least likely to have the opportunities they need to succeed. It argues that, to effectively educate today’s students, higher education must focus more urgently on equity—and on bringing together what we know about closing achievement gaps and advancing high-quality learning outcomes for all students. Ideal for advancing dialogue on campus and in the community, this brochure is a call to action supported by clear and convincing data. To download or order print copies, visit http://www.aacu.org/publications/step-up-and-lead.
Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement Calendar

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MONTH</th>
<th>DATES</th>
<th>CLDE EVENT</th>
<th>LOCATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FEBRUARY 2016</td>
<td>18–20</td>
<td>AAC&amp;U Network for Academic Renewal—General Education and Assessment</td>
<td>New Orleans, Louisiana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MARCH</td>
<td>12–16</td>
<td>NASPA Annual Conference—Common Purpose: Shaping a Vision for Higher Education</td>
<td>Indianapolis, Indiana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21–23</td>
<td>Campus Compact—Thirtieth Anniversary Conference</td>
<td>Boston, Massachusetts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAY</td>
<td>9–11</td>
<td>Connecting Campuses with Communities Conference (Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis and Campus Compact)</td>
<td>Indianapolis, Indiana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29–June 3</td>
<td>NAFSA 2016 Annual Conference and Expo</td>
<td>Denver, Colorado</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>31–June 4</td>
<td>National Conference on Race and Ethnicity in American Higher Education</td>
<td>San Francisco, California</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JUNE</td>
<td>2–4</td>
<td>Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement 2016</td>
<td>Indianapolis, Indiana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JULY</td>
<td>28–August 1</td>
<td>SENCER (Science Education for New Civic Engagements and Responsibilities) Summer Institute</td>
<td>Chicago, Illinois</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

AAC&U and the Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement (CLDE) Action Network

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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MEETING</th>
<th>LOCATION</th>
<th>DATES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Network for Academic Renewal  
| Network for Academic Renewal  

About Diversity & Democracy

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

About AAC&U
AAC&U is the leading national association concerned with the quality, vitality, and public standing of undergraduate liberal education. Its members are committed to extending the advantages of a liberal education to all students, regardless of academic specialization or intended career. Founded in 1915, AAC&U now comprises more than 1,300 member institutions—including accredited public and private colleges, community colleges, and universities of every type and size. AAC&U functions as a catalyst and facilitator, forging links among presidents, administrators, and faculty members who are engaged in institutional and curricular planning. Information about AAC&U membership, programs, and publications can be found at www.aacu.org.

AAC&U Membership 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baccalaureate</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associates</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other*</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Res &amp; Doc</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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