

Foreword

The worst global pandemic in more than a century created unprecedented disruption to every sector of society, including higher education. While colleges and universities around the world demonstrated remarkable resilience in the pivot to remote and online learning, campus closures had a profound effect on nearly all aspects of college operations—from admissions, residential life, financial aid, and work-study programs to staffing, modes of curriculum delivery, teaching, research, and assessment. At the same time, the pandemic unveiled and magnified the expansiveness of the digital divide and the food and shelter insecurities experienced by students across institutional types, alongside the burgeoning mental health needs of students whose anxiety was fueled by financial uncertainty, isolation, escalating racism, xenophobia targeting Asian Americans, and fear that they or their loved ones would contract the deadly virus. The disparately negative toll of the coronavirus on Black, Latinx, and Indigenous communities contributed to increased physical, psychological, and financial burdens for many students of color, who suffered the highest rates of dropout, particularly at community colleges and four-year public institutions (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2022).

After tracking the global impact of COVID-19 in the ensuing two years, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) reported that

the pandemic has exposed multiple levels of inequalities that in higher education include differential treatment of students based on their background, closed access to knowledge and research results, unevenness in global patterns of research collaboration, and lack of access to the basic requirements of digitalized higher education such as devices, internet access, and electricity. (Abdrasheva et al., 2022, p. 54)

In addition to the pandemic's effect on more than 220 million college and university students worldwide, UNESCO now estimates that 24 million learners, from pre-primary to university-level students, are at risk of not returning to school. The prospect of a lost generation of students in the college and university pipeline adds to the urgency of addressing these stark inequities, which UNESCO insists “must be kept at the forefront as higher education begins to think ahead to create a more equitable post-pandemic world” (Abdrasheva et al., 2022, p. 54).

This guidebook is intended as a resource for colleges and universities to reimagine and revolutionize higher education in ways that address the equity imperative before us, serving as change agents by leveraging the power of open educational resources (OER) to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) at each of our institutions. It makes clear that the integration of OER and DEI goals on campuses necessitates colleges and universities moving beyond a focus on expanded learning access and affordability to an emphasis on equitable student outcomes, the retention of underserved students, and an enhanced sense

of belonging among those whose perspectives have been excluded or marginalized within the curriculum. Indeed, by recognizing that students are more engaged in learning when they see themselves reflected in the course materials, the highlighted case studies invite the expansion of the curriculum through the incorporation of diverse voices, local epistemologies, and the inclusion of histories that have been erased from the dominant narrative. In the process, they demonstrate how OER can provide individualized curricula and learning experiences aimed at the democratization of knowledge production.

Among the authors' primary objectives are to enhance faculty awareness of the many curricular innovations taking place at colleges and universities that include OER as a catalyst for DEI and to encourage administrators to invest in the faculty professional development needed to lead similar initiatives. These goals flow from AAC&U's mission of advancing the democratic purposes of higher education by promoting equity, innovation, and excellence in liberal education. They are grounded in the belief that a twenty-first-century liberal education is characterized by educational experiences that empower students to be active participants and partners in their own education and in the education of others—encounters enriched by a diversity of backgrounds, identities, and viewpoints among students, faculty, and community members. Making equity a pervading focus of educational reform and designing and delivering educational experiences that support the success of all students in work, citizenship, and life are essential to realizing the vision of a strong, relevant, and inclusive liberal education. Rather than a return to normal, AAC&U is eager to collaborate with leaders at all levels as we embark on a shared endeavor of shaping a more equitable higher education landscape in a post-pandemic world.

Lynn Pasquerella

President, American Association of Colleges and Universities