



THE RACIAL EQUITY AND JUSTICE INSTITUTE PRACTITIONER HANDBOOK VOLUME 2

Advancing Equity-minded
Systemic Change in Higher Education

Edited By Sabrina Gentlewarrior, Yolany Gonell,
Luis Paredes & Uma Shama

REJI

WHAT RACIAL EQUITY LEADERS ARE SAYING ABOUT THE REJI PRACTITIONER HANDBOOK: VOLUME 2

“One of the most important contributions of *The REJI Practitioner Handbook, Volume 2* is that by insisting on authors who are practitioners, readers benefit directly from their discussions on how they have incorporated equity-mindedness into their practices and values (i.e., on the ground experience rather than theory). Their efforts demonstrate that institutional actors — leaders, faculty, staff, board members — have it within their power to take equity-minded action to eliminate racial inequality. This book provides the inspiration and ideas to help readers achieve it.”

DR. ESTELA BENSIMON, *nationally renowned equity-minded scholar, practitioner, and leader in higher education.*

“This handbook helps Predominantly White Institutions to see a path toward racial justice and truly become a public good, not a “white good.” Using the many frameworks offered from equity-mindedness to shared equity leadership, this comprehensive set of resources guides campus practitioners toward their racial justice goals. This work is more important than ever given the rising tide of political interference in higher education aimed at dismantling diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. Chapter authors offer strategies for navigating this increasingly difficult environment. For more, I encourage you to join the Racial Equity and Justice Institute movement and become part of a community committed to change.”

DR. ADRIANNA KEZAR, *director of the Pullias Center for Higher Education, the world’s leading research center on student access and success in higher education.*

“When the majority of postsecondary students in the United States are Students of Color, efforts to advance racial justice within our education structures and systems should be of the highest priority, especially if we are to realize the full promise of higher education for all students. Volume 2 of the *REJI Practitioner Handbook* not only provides the context for why racial equity and justice should be a shared goal for all educators, but also outlines the process for doing so from those who are doing the work every day. This handbook translates aspirational equity goals into practice — moving the performative to reality.”

DR. TIA MCNAIR, *Partner at Sova and co-author of From Equity Talk to Equity Walk (2020) and Becoming a Student-Ready College (2016).*

“When we envision a higher education system that creates space and success for all students, particularly those historically excluded from that system, we can see what success can look like, but the path to get there isn’t straightforward. *The REJI Practitioner Handbook, Volume 2*, lays out an actionable and achievable path that contributes to systemic change in restoring the promise of higher education.”

DR. YOLANDA WATSON SPIVA, *president of Complete College America (CCA).*

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Mission Statement of the Racial Equity and Justice Institute:

The Racial Equity and Justice Institute (REJI) is a consortium committed to hopeful, research and data-driven strategies to create racially equitable change in higher education. To learn more see: <https://reji-bsu.org/>

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Suggested Citation:

Gentlewarrior, S., Gonell, Y., Paredes, L., & Shama, U. (2024). *The Racial Equity and Justice Institute Practitioner Handbook, Volume 2: Advancing Equity-minded Systemic Change in Higher Education*. The Racial Equity and Justice Institute at Bridgewater State University.

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**FORWARD AND ACTUALIZING THE VISION
OF RACIAL JUSTICE IN HIGHER EDUCATION:
EQUITY-MINDED SYSTEMIC CHANGE**

INTRODUCTION



FOREWORD

By Estela Mara Bensimon

If you are like me, you have likely wondered what the difference is between a foreword, a preface, or an introduction. The job of the foreword author (in this case me) is to persuade readers that this is a book they should read and learn from. So, I will go directly there and explain why you should read this book.

First and foremost, this book is meant to solve a problem. It offers a comprehensive account of a multi-institutional initiative, led by Bridgewater State University in Massachusetts, meant to confront the question, “Why is it that despite our good intentions, our campuses continue to perform poorly for large numbers of racially minoritized students?” This seems like an important question that must get asked all the time, yet it is rarely asked by leaders, campus practitioners, or researchers. Since the 1960s, we in higher education have falsely conceptualized race-based inequality as originating within the students’ deficient educational backgrounds. Thankfully, we now understand that is not the case — this inequity is a problem of institutional failure toward students whose trajectory to college has been a course full of impediments. In trying to examine this issue more deeply,

this book is held together by the concept of equity-mindedness, a concept I invented about 20 years ago and which the REJI’s leaders embraced and made their own. One of the principles of equity-mindedness is that racial inequity is a problem of practice, not a problem of racially minoritized students.

Because we have always framed the question of minoritized academic performance within students’ non-performance, higher education has created “solutions” to remediate students, to make them fit into white conceptions of college readiness. These “solutions” are typically compensatory and more problematic, informed by white logics, which assumes that the way things are done in higher education are universally valuable and magically work for everyone. Low transfer rates, for example, are assumed to be caused by a lack of transfer centers or students’ lack of clarity on what is required to transfer. Campuses are filled with various forms of student support programs, such as transfer centers, with an orientation toward solving problems — real or assumed. But what if the actual problem to be solved is a product of those programs? What if the solution is that existing resources need to be more sensitive to the knowledge and competencies needed by minoritized students to understand the meaning of transfer and how it happens? Yes, a transfer center that provides basic information and guidance on transfer makes sense. But if it is not sensitive to students’ fears and anxieties, it will not actually make transfer any easier.

In the early 2000s the Center for Urban Education, which I founded and directed until 2020, pioneered the methods of practitioner inquiry as a strategy of institutional change.

As educational philosopher John Dewey said, “We encounter problems, but until we investigate, we cannot know why they exist.” You can’t hope to create real solutions without understanding that “why.” This most certainly applies to problems of racial inequity. Historically, the typical analysis of racial inequities is based on the assumption that some students lack the “right stuff.” This very flawed viewpoint ignores the many conditions that create racial inequity, among them institutionalized racism; pedagogical methods that are irrelevant and hostile to minoritized students; hostile classrooms; neglect of how students experience the classroom; and predominantly White faculty and staff.

Over the years, we’ve created various inquiry tools to support teams of faculty and staff by encouraging them to ask “In what ways are our practices failing to achieve success for minoritized students?” Rather than blaming the students, we focus on engaging institutional actors as learners of their practices and their role in reinforcing racialized practices by interrogating artifacts that are meant to support student learning. This approach was quite effective in revealing the shortcomings of everyday artifacts like syllabi. Practitioners learned, for example, how syllabi language created fear and rules took precedence over creating welcoming learning environments.

Dr. Sabrina Gentlewarrior, the REJI’s convener, discovered us early in our journey, and we were fortunate to work with her to teach faculty and others from various REJI campuses how to implement our methods and advance equity-mindedness as the superior model of change.

Our model of institutional change honors the expertise of practitioners — our mantra

has been “best practitioners rather than best practices.” The book you are reading is exemplary because the majority is written by practitioners who gained experience in the inquiry methods we created. Why is this significant? Most books and scholarly articles on institutional change/transformation rely heavily on theories, going back to Taylorism in the early 20th century to more recent theories that draw on culture, constructivism, and critical perspectives. Making these theories actionable is a significant challenge, mainly because they do not provide the architectural plan that is needed to study how things are done on the ground — in classrooms and on campuses. It’s all theoretical, viewing institutions and change through generic universalized models of organizational change that are difficult to implement. Conversely, our inquiry model puts common, ordinary practices under interrogation.

One of the most important contributions of this book is that by insisting on authors who are practitioners, readers benefit directly from their discussions on how they have incorporated equity-mindedness into their practices and values (i.e., on the ground experience rather than theory). Throughout this book, readers will find numerous examples to illustrate the meaning and practice of equity-mindedness. I underscore this quality of the book because leaders, practitioners, and policy-makers will often say the words but rarely specify what equity-mindedness means to them or how “they do it.” The authors of this book explain what works so that readers can learn by their experience and create change themselves.

While a foreword may not be the appropriate place to go into great detail about specific content in a book, I want to spend time doing so for the chapter titled *Institutionalizing Racial Equity on Campuses: The Role of Presidents in Equity-Minded Systemic Change*. The three authors are Presidents Christine Mangino of Queensborough Community College in New York City; Frederick Clark of Bridgewater State University in Massachusetts; and Karen Hynick, Chief Executive Officer, Connecticut State Community College, Quinebaug Valley.

I chose this chapter because it is rare for presidents to engage equity at a practical level. Yet, presidents' and other leaders' understanding of the theory and practices of critical race inquiry is essential to its adoption, so that it becomes the natural way of doing 'leadership.' This is the mission of REJI, to promulgate critical race inquiry as a competency that is aspired to, valued, and expected of leaders. Besides having been written by current presidents, what I like about this chapter is that it does not fall back to leadership platitudes. The presidents share experiences candidly and how they get "it"; they are not parroting equity language as a form of virtuous signaling.

The chapter is informed in part by questions posed by Sheila Edwards Lange (2022), Chancellor of the University of Washington, Tacoma, who says that "presidents must be able to answer key questions about racial equity on their campuses." I like these questions because they reflect the critical inquiry framework that I advocate. They are basic questions that, if taken up by a president's cabinet or other group, can establish a baseline for a racial equity audit.

1. "Who are the leaders for the work?"
2. Does the campus lead with racial equity, and how is that manifested in programs and other activities?
3. Who is being held accountable for advancing the work?
4. What does your governing board expect, and how much are they engaged?
5. Is your campus community more liberal than the town in which you are located, and how will you address that in town-gown relationships?"

For example, President Mangino of Queensborough Community College says the following: "I inherited a cabinet that was 89% White people even though our student population is 11% White students." Noticing the racial composition of one's cabinet is an essential leadership practice to understand in what ways the policies and practices advanced by the cabinet may be racialized and blind to racial inequity. Having a predominantly White cabinet is not surprising, in part because "whiteness" is not a characteristic that is noticed or thought to be a problem. What is uncommon is to notice it and name it, as President Mangino did, using it as a catalyst for transformation. In the chapter, she goes on to say "through staff changes and new hires, [my] executive team is now 78% people of color."

Equity-mindedness consists of principles and practices that are elaborated on in the presidents' chapter. Here are a few I selected to highlight:

Equity-minded leaders understand that they must acquire the funds of knowledge that will enable them to exercise critically race-conscious leadership at all times. Learning was central to the agenda of these three presidents. They started book clubs to jointly read books that address race and racism and demonstrate how to take equity-minded action. Among those books mentioned were *From Equity Walk to Equity Talk* (McNair et al., 2020) and *Caste* (Wilkerson, 2023). Other titles are available at the link provided by President Christine Mangino: [President's Book Club \(cuny.edu\)](https://www.cuny.edu/president-book-club/).

Equity-minded leaders insist that all data be disaggregated by race and ethnicity to identify patterns of racialized outcomes.

Data are often a contentious issue on campuses, rarely made available to faculty members or for the specific purpose of identifying patterns that point to racialization. These presidents were not fearful of data transparency, however, and found ways to engage faculty in purposeful analysis. They also understood that data could prompt defensiveness. At Connecticut State Community College Quinebaug Valley, faculty members who led the data sessions used their own data to put their colleagues at ease and be able to see that they too had racialized outcomes.

Equity audits are valuable, revealing activities that benefit institutions. The campuses built on their new sensemaking skills to conduct equity audits and their findings were documented and shared with the campus community. One of the most surprising aspects of the audits was learning that a well-intended scholarship program required students be full-time. In reviewing the data on the program, the participants at Connecticut State Community College Quinebaug Valley learned that White students were twice as likely to receive this scholarship than Latine and Black students. This inequality was corrected in 2023 with a change in policy to allow part-time students to participate. Data analysis enabled the three campuses to ask questions that led them to uncover inequities they did not know existed even as they claimed to be pursuing racial equity.

Learning from students is valuable.

Bridgewater State University formed a Student Advisory Council for Racial Justice and Equity, inviting students to apply to the program. In the program, students receive training in communication, equity practices, and peer leadership. Often the experience of minoritized students is commodified, and their experiences are expected to be shared gratis. At Bridgewater, students' experiences as minoritized in a predominantly white campus are treated as valued assets that merit compensation.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

In highlighting some of the experiences and reflections of three REJI presidents, my intention in this foreword is to show equity-mindedness as a leadership practice that can enhance the experience of students, faculty, and leaders. Higher education overall is a racialized enterprise that we take for granted. The inquiry methods advocated in this book require open-minded approaches and the investment of time and patience. Traditional leadership models do not lend themselves well to these methods, particularly with the pressure to “scale up” and adopt reform efforts quickly and efficiently. The REJI’s work provides a model of change that is not a reaction to this type of pressure but is instead thoughtful and responsive to institutional autonomy. Their efforts demonstrate that institutional actors — leaders, faculty, staff, board members — have it within their power to take equity-minded action to eliminate racial inequality. This book provides the inspiration and ideas to help readers achieve it as well.

ACTUALIZING THE VISION OF RACIAL JUSTICE IN HIGHER EDUCATION: EQUITY-MINDED SYSTEMIC CHANGE

By Sabrina Gentlewarrior

Keywords: *Equity-Mindedness, Systemic Change; Racial Justice; Racial Equity; The Racial Equity and Justice Institute*

Take a few moments and imagine what your campus will be like when it is racially just.

Racial justice “is a vision and transformation of society to eliminate racial hierarchies and advance collective liberation, where Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders, in particular, have the dignity, resources, power, and self-determination to fully thrive” (Race Forward, n.d.). In our current national context, envisioning higher education as racially just is revolutionary and revelatory.

When racial justice characterizes the academy, students of all races and ethnicities will have full access to higher education. Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, and other Students of Color will know they belong on our campuses. Students of all races and ethnicities will benefit from the fact that the curricular and co-curricular learning opportunities, high impact practices, scholarships, and other institutional student success resources were created with their assets, cultural wealth, needs, and lived experiences in mind. Students

of Color will be served in and out of the classroom by those who share their identities – just as their White peers have long enjoyed. Excellence will be available to and achieved by students of all racial and ethnic identities and parity will be present in student outcomes. Post-graduation social mobility will be enjoyed in equal measure by Students of Color, as well as their White peers, allowing students of all races and ethnicities as well as their families and communities, greater opportunities to flourish (Liera & Desir, 2023; Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, 2022; McNair et al., 2020; Yosso, 2005).

Imagining higher education as racially just is both revolutionary and revelatory as doing so gives us hope, helps sustain us, and makes manifest the actions we must take so that higher education is at long last a mechanism for corrective racial justice (Adebisi, 2021). Working towards racial justice in higher education helps the academy ensure it is contributing to the public good (Drezner et al., 2018). In addition, students learning in racially and ethnically diverse classrooms are more likely to gain the competencies needed to succeed in our global and multi-racial world (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2020). Finally, at a time when many campuses are shuttering their doors due to declining enrollments, supporting the success of Students of Color helps to ensure campuses will have the fiscal health from tuition and fees, and alumni giving, that comes only come when our institutions not only admit, but retain and graduate Students of Color (Mullin, 2020).

This vision for transformation and the action it inspires is sorely needed for we know that education in the United States was not created with Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, and other Students of Color in mind (Cabrera et al., 2017; Evatt-Young & Bryson, 2021; Hrabowski et al., 2020; Ramsey, n.d.). The legacy of redlining continues to result in racially marginalized K-12 students being served by underfunded school districts (Lukes & Cleveland, 2021). “Students of Color have long been denied fair school funding because their communities have been long denied fair opportunities to build wealth due to systemic racism” (Morgan, 2022, pp. 1, 5); COVID exacerbated this impact (Fahle et al., 2023). While corporal punishment is decreasing in school districts across America, Black children are still subjected to it at a rate two times higher than their White peers (Startz, 2022). Black, Latinx and Indigenous students continue to graduate from high school at lower rates than do White students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023; U.S. Department of Treasury 2023). Students of Color, who do achieve the milestone of high school graduation, are often tacitly or overtly discouraged from seeking post-secondary education (The Education Trust, 2019). Racially marginalized students with intersectional identities such as queer Students of Color (Conron et al., 2023), Males of Color (The Education Trust West, 2017) and Students of Color living with disabilities (Buckles & Ives-Rublee, 2022) often endure additional systemic barriers as they seek to access higher education.

When Students of Color arrive to our campuses, they typically encounter messages and actions that are explicitly racist and discriminatory (Gallop & Lumina Foundation, 2023; Gentlewarrior & Paredes, 2021; Johnson, 2022; Kolodner, 2020; McNair et al., 2020). At Predominately White Institutions, Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, and other Students of Color are typically not served by faculty, staff, or senior leaders who share their identities (Bensimon & Associates, 2022; Johnson, 2022; McNair et al., 2020; Rall, et al., 2023). Curriculums often fail to reflect their cultural wealth, histories and lived experiences. After experiencing a lifetime of societal messages questioning their intelligence, Students of Color often fail to benefit from counternarratives in the classroom that enhance their academic belonging and celebrate their presence (Artze-Vega et al., 2023; Healey & Stroman, 2021; Johnson, 2022; Yosso, 2005).

The racialized educational history of our nation is so stark that it has been contended that it was never created to be a public good, but rather a “White good” (Justice, 2023). While these failings have been long-standing in higher education, we are acutely aware that an organized counter offensive is underway to dramatically escalate educational racism through acts of condemnation, intimidation (Abrams, 2023; Iftikar et al., 2022) and legislation (Gupton, 2023; Lederman, 2023; Schwartz, 2023; UCLA School of Law, 2023). These efforts imperil student success efforts, the work for racial equity, academic freedom, and the mission of higher education (Abrams, 2023; Briscoe & Jones, 2024; Iftikar et al., 2022).

TRANSFORMING HIGHER EDUCATION THROUGH THE PRACTICE OF EQUITY-MINDEDNESS

Imagining racially just campuses provides the vision for our work; racial equity is the process of achieving the vision (Race Forward, n.d.). Racial equity has been defined as “a process of eliminating racial disparities and improving outcomes for everyone. It is the intentional and continual practice of changing policies, practices, systems, and structures by prioritizing measurable change in the lives” of Students of Color (Race Forward, n.d.).

Dr. Estela Bensimon and her colleagues at the Center for Urban Education have offered the framework of equity-mindedness as a theory and practice for change for advancing racial equity in higher education (Bensimon, 2024; Bensimon et al., 2016; Center for Urban Education, 2020; Dowd & Bensimon, 2015; McNair et al., 2015). Equity-mindedness is comprised of five synergistic practices engaged in by individuals and institutions that advance racial equity on behalf of students. Equity-minded practitioners engage in work that is:

Evidence-Based: Equity-minded practitioners ground their individual, departmental and institutional decision-making in data that is disaggregated by race and ethnicity. They place emphasis on making meaning of that data in order to understand disparate student outcomes by race and ethnicity and use that information to inform racially equitable corrective action (Bensimon, 2024; Bensimon, 2020; Center for Urban Education, n.d.; Center for Urban Education, 2020; Ching, 2023; Dowd et al., 2018; McNair et al., 2020).

Race-Conscious: Equity-minded practitioners name racism when it is present and prioritize inquiry, language, and action intended to eliminate racialized disparate outcomes (Bensimon, 2024; Bensimon, 2020; Center for Urban Education, n.d.; Ching, 2013; McNair et al., 2020). Being race-conscious does not prevent us from doing other types of equity work, but grounding our work in racial equity acknowledges the current and historical legacies of racism and ensures that campuses maintain focus on addressing racialized disparate student outcomes which have largely been ignored by higher education (McNair et al., 2020).

Institutionally Focused: When racialized disparate outcomes are found, equity-minded practitioners put the responsibility for change on the institution rather than blaming racially minoritized students (Bensimon et al., 2016; Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, 2023). As campuses and higher education system-level offices assume responsibility for disparate racialized outcomes in student belonging, retention, participation in programs, service utilization, grades, graduation, and post-graduation social mobility and ask what they can do to enhance their work and thereby create racial equity, we transform “organizational processes and policies that perpetuate structural racism” (Liera & Desir, 2023) and all students succeed at higher rates.

Systemically Aware: Equity-minded practitioners are aware that when racialized disparate outcomes occur, it is not because of deficiencies in the students, but rather due

to the historical and current impacts of racism and the ways in which Students of Color have not been centered in the educational design or delivery processes in America (Bensimon, 2024; Cabrera et al., 2017). In an effort to engage in corrective educational justice, equity-minded practitioners center the assets, needs and perspectives of Students of Color in their efforts knowing that doing so will support the success of all students (McNair et al., 2020; Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, 2022; Yosso, 2005).

Equity-Advancing: Equity-minded practitioners know that it is not enough to have the values of equitable student success. Rather we must engage in measurable goals intended to address disparities in student success outcomes (Bensimon & Malcom, 2012; Dowd & Bensimon, 2015; Kezar et al., 2022; McNair et al., 2020). Equity-minded practitioners prioritize ongoing inquiry (Ching, 2023) and accountability as we engage in the work (Holcombe et al., 2022; Kezar et al., 2022) with the knowledge that the work must be ongoing and institution-wide (Liera & Desir, 2023).

THE RACIAL EQUITY AND JUSTICE INSTITUTE

Building on the foundation of equity-minded theory, research, and practice, the Racial Equity and Justice Institute (REJI) is a learning and action community of practice which as of this writing in fall 2024 is comprised of 40 campuses and four higher education partner organizations serving 166,000 students, nearly 60,000 of whom are Students of Color (see <https://reji-bsu.org/>). Together we work to fulfill our mission statement to engage in “hopeful,

research and data-driven strategies to create racially equitable change in higher education.”

The institute began in 2014 under the name The Leading for Change Higher Education Diversity Consortium and focused on data-driven strategies to eliminate all equity gaps. In 2018, in recognition of the persistent racialized inequities in higher education, the group sharpened its focus and changed its name to the Racial Equity and Justice Institute to make explicit our commitment to make race-conscious and equity-minded transformation of higher education our primary objective (Gentlewarrior & Paredes, 2021). The REJI provides a range of resources to aid member campuses and organizations in setting context-specific racial equity goals and support as they advance them in an effort to eliminate disparate racialized student outcomes.

Since its inception, the REJI has provided a core of resources to member campuses and organizations including:

- A yearly curriculum that provides resources and a structure to aid campus and organizational teams in building their capacity to engage in racially equitable change strategies.
- The provision of video and print resources on racially equitable practices.
- Convenings with national equity-minded scholars and racial equity practitioners intended to enhance the equity-minded competencies of our members.
- A racial equity action planning process model (adapted from Curran et al., 2016) that aids members in identifying institutional performance gaps (Bensimon & Spiva, 2022) across the institution, setting racially equitable goals, and implementing and assessing the goals.
- Suggested accountability structures that include the expectation that REJI teams report out on the progress on their racial equity action plans to their presidents at the end of each semester; there is also the expectation that the REJI team on each campus or organization meet with their senior leadership teams at the end of every academic year to share on progress made for racial equity goal advancement and obstacles to the work so these can be transparently addressed.
- Work is currently underway to work with nationally renowned racial equity scholars to create equity-minded competency development materials for key functional areas in higher education; this information will be made available to REJI member campuses and organizations.
- For information on how to join the REJI, please contact us: <https://reji-bsu.org/contact/>

When member campuses/organizations identify emerging practices that show promise in advancing racial equity, they share these strategies freely. This led to the publication of the first *Racial Equity and Justice Practitioner Handbook* (Gentlewarrior & Paredes, 2021), a free access peer-reviewed book offering a compilation of data-informed racially equitable practices from our members. Readers will find emerging practices focused on engaging in leadership practices intended to advance racial equity on our campuses; campus professional development opportunities intended to build members' racial equity competencies; how to obtain and make equity-minded sense of data; how to create academic excellence through racially equitable practices; how to center racial equity in student service provision outside of the classroom; and how to engage in racially just campus policing practices. The practices shared in the first REJI handbook focus on racially equitable practice at the departmental or programmatic levels. Please see the first REJI handbook at the link: <https://reji-bsu.org/handbook/>.

ADVANCING EQUITY-MINDED SYSTEMIC CHANGE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

In order to “take equity-mindedness to the next level” (Liera & Desir, 2023), campuses must engage in equity-minded actions campus-wide. Liera & Desir (2023) remind us that “equity-mindedness has the potential to structure organizational behavior, shape policy development, and frame practitioner and leader understandings of organizational equity”. As we enter our 11th year, members of the REJI have begun work in identifying and implementing research and data-informed

strategies to help create racially equitable systemic change in higher education.

Building on the work of Elrod et al. (2023), equity-minded systemic change is defined as efforts that advance equity-minded practice in order to affect “multiple courses, programs, colleges (or beyond) and results in changes to policies, procedures, norms, cultures and/or structures (organizational, curricular, fiscal)” (p. 5.) In early 2023 a call was issued to members of the REJI and national equity-minded scholars who have served as workshop facilitators for our membership in the past, inviting submissions for the REJI’s second handbook focused on equity-minded systemic change strategies in higher education. All submissions received peer review from the REJI’s advisory group (<https://reji-bsu.org/leadership/>) resulting in 17 chapters being selected that are organized in three sections of the handbook.

FACILITATING EQUITY-MINDED SYSTEMIC CHANGE THROUGH LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

The handbook begins by offering readers five chapters focused on leadership practices intended to advance equity-minded systemic change in higher education. The first chapter provides an overview of Shared Equity Leadership (Kezar et al., 2021) and the ways in which the practices in this model can be used to advance racial equity work institution wide. The next chapter offers a case study of equity-minded leadership being engaged in by a Board of Trustees at one of our member campuses. The third chapter was authored by three presidents who reflect on their leadership and offer recommendations for advancing equity-minded systemic change to other senior

campus leaders. In the fourth chapter in this section, a provost with experience as the chief academic officer at three campuses shares recommendations for advancing equity-minded institutional change within that role. The section concludes with a chapter written by faculty members who offer recommendations for faculty and administrators seeking to advance faculty-led equity-minded systemic change efforts.

CATALYZING EQUITY-MINDED SYSTEMIC CHANGE THROUGH TEACHING AND LEARNING PRACTICES

The next section is comprised of seven chapters written by faculty and academic affairs administrators sharing strategies intended to advance equity-minded systemic change in the “most radical space of possibility in the academy” — the classroom (hooks, 1994, p. 21). The first two chapters in this section focus on equity-minded strategies to support multilingual learners by building on the linguistic and cultural wealth of the learners; one of these chapters accomplishes this by focusing directly on multilingual students, the other describes an intensive project to prepare teacher candidates to equitably serve diverse and multilingual learners. The next chapter in this section shares how to utilize “real talks” in the classroom (Hernandez, 2021) in order to advance equity-minded student success campus-wide. A description of advancing student success through the use of linked course communities for students in a college of math and science is the focus of the next chapter; the authors’ impressive results in closing institutional performance gaps are shared. Two chapters focus on infusing racial equity into high impact practices at two- and-four-year campus settings. The section

concludes with a chapter about efforts underway to advance equity-minded systemic change in a college of graduate studies.

FOSTERING EQUITY-MINDED SYSTEMIC CHANGE THROUGH INSTITUTIONAL OPERATIONAL PRACTICES

The final section of the handbook is comprised of chapters focused on operational practices (AACRAO, n.d.) campuses are using to advance equity-minded systemic change. The section begins by offering readers an overview of a curriculum for justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion core competencies being utilized campus-wide at a graduate college for health professionals; this curriculum is key to advancing this institution's commitment to anti-racism and equity-mindedness.

In recognition that equity-mindedness is evidence-based (Bensimon, 2020; Center for Urban Education, n.d.), the second chapter in this section describes efforts underway at a four-year regional public campus to routinize the use of the Center for Urban Education's (2020) equity-minded data tools by interested faculty members. The next chapter shares with readers the work being done by a community college campus utilizing equity-minded data and inquiry to inform a campus-wide equity-minded operational plan. Readers are offered detailed information about efforts to infuse equity-mindedness into the academic program review process at a community college in the fourth chapter in this section. The final chapter in the handbook utilizes Bensimon and colleagues' article "Five Principles for Enacting Equity by Design" (2016) and applies its core tenets to campus space design and utilization.

CONCLUSION

The work for racial equity in higher education is only possible through committed individuals and institutions working to end racialized disparate outcomes in the academy. The Racial Equity and Justice Institute celebrates Dr. Estela Bensimon whose work in equity-mindedness is foundational to our efforts; we are deeply grateful to Dr. Bensimon for her support of the REJI over the years and for the forward she has written for this handbook. Most of the chapters in the handbook are authored by members of the REJI who are practitioners and leaders for racial equity on their campuses; the work being done by REJI members is transforming their institutions. Three of the chapters have been authored or co-authored by national equity leaders who are friends of the REJI; see the chapters in this handbook by Kezar and Holcombe; Rall; and Villarreal, Liera and Desir. Information about the editors and authors can be found at the end of the handbook.

The REJI recognizes that the context this work occurs in matters. What will advance racial equity on one campus will need to be modified at another institution. This is especially true in view of the legislative prohibitions severely curtailing the explicit work for racial equity in many states in America (Gupton, 2023; Lederman, 2023; Schwartz, 2023; UCLA School of Law, 2023). We look forward to hearing and learning from readers as you adapt these practices to your settings.

At the beginning of this chapter, you were asked to create a vision of your campus when it is racially just. The Racial Equity and Justice

Institute members share this handbook with the hope that the practices within it deepen your vision for racial justice in the academy, offer you actionable equity-minded systemic change strategies to use in your work, and inform our collective efforts to move from the vision to the reality of racially just campuses as we create institutions worthy of the students we serve.

KEY RESOURCES

The first *Racial Equity and Justice Institute Practitioner Handbook* (Gentlewarrior & Paredes, 2021) can be accessed free at the link: <https://reji-bsu.org/handbook/>

To learn more about the Racial Equity and Justice Institute, including information on membership: <https://reji-bsu.org/>

To view Dr. Estela Bensimon's (2020) overview of equity-mindedness provided to the REJI, see Paying of Higher Education's Racial Debt: Infusing Racial Equity across the Academy: <https://reji-bsu.org/video-library/> (see first video in the video library). To contact Dr. Bensimon to explore how she might be able to support the work for equity-mindedness at your campus: Bensimon@usc.edu

The Change Leadership Toolkit 2.0: A Guide for Advancing Systemic Change in Higher Education (Elrod et al., 2024) can be found at the Pullias Center's website: <https://pullias.usc.edu/download/change-leadership-toolkit-a-guide-for-advancing-systemic-change-in-higher-education/>

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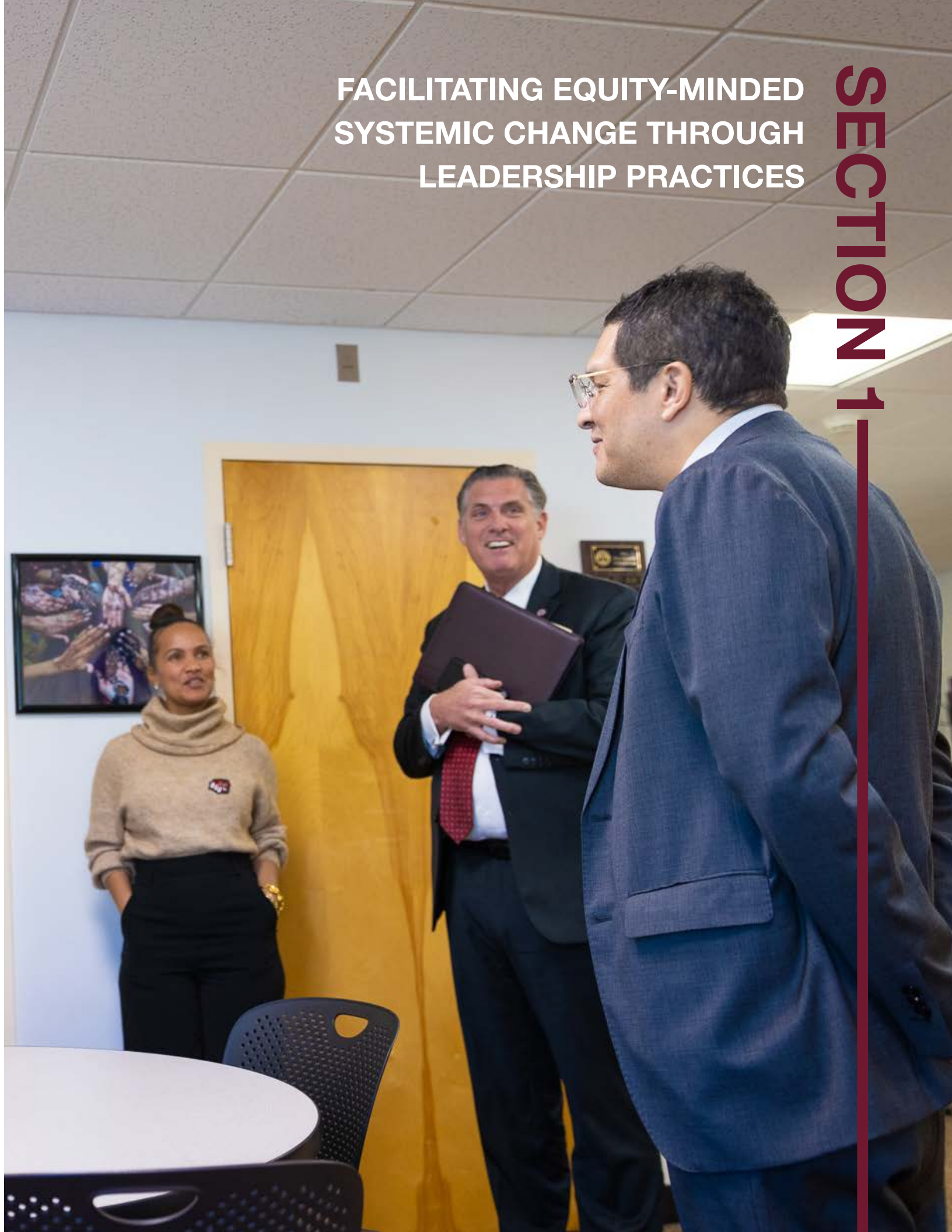
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FACILITATING EQUITY-MINDED
SYSTEMIC CHANGE THROUGH
LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

SECTION 1



SECTION 1: LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

FACILITATING EQUITY-MINDED SYSTEMIC CHANGE THROUGH LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

By Luis Paredes and Sabrina Gentlewarrior

Equity-minded institutional leaders campus-wide are key to the transformation of American higher education (Carducci et al., 2024; Holcombe et al., 2022; Johnson McPhail & Beatty, 2021; Kezar et al., 2021). The leaders who have authored the chapters in this section of the handbook share recommendations to support racial equity efforts in the academy in order to eliminate long standing racialized institutional performance gaps (Bensimon & Spiva, 2022), support student success, and meet our educational mandate. Aspirational and pragmatic wisdom is woven throughout these chapters offering readers a range of strategies to advance equity-minded systemic change on their campuses through leadership practices.

The first chapter in this section *Shared Equity Leadership: Supporting Racially Equitable Culture Change* by noted equity scholars Kezar and Holcombe provides an overview of the Shared Equity Leadership (SEL) model as a comprehensive approach to embedding racial equity within higher education institutions. SEL fosters collective commitment to racial equity across all campus roles, including faculty, staff, and administrators, ensuring that racial equity becomes part of the daily practice and culture of the institution rather than being relegated to a specific office or position (Holcombe et al., 2022; Kezar et al., 2021). The chapter highlights the necessity of personal and organizational transformation to achieve lasting culture change, advocating for personal journeys toward critical consciousness and establishing

new institutional norms and structures prioritizing racial equity.

From Intentions to Impact: Practical Lessons for Boards of Trustees in Shaping and Advancing Equity in Higher Education by Rall, MacCormack, and Gentlewarrior focuses on the crucial role of boards of trustees in promoting racial equity within higher education institutions. Rall et al., state: “At present, equity is not a core tenet or focus of higher education governing boards but the realities and demands of higher education require that it should be.” Readers of this chapter are introduced to the Equitable Student Success Model, which aligns board policies and practices with racial equity (Rall et al., 2022). Through an in-depth case study of a four-year public institution that is working to embed racial equity into trustees’ core functions, the authors provide actionable recommendations for racially equitable trustee leadership. The chapter concludes with equity-minded inquiry questions trustees can pose as they work to catalyze racially equitable student success and campus transformation.

Clark, Hynick and Mangino emphasize the critical role of campus presidents/chief executive officers in leading equity-minded changes within higher education institutions. The chapter *Institutionalizing Racial Equity on Campuses: The Role of Presidents in Equity-minded Systemic Change* provides 14 recommendations for senior leaders intended to ensure that campus change efforts emphasize the elimination of institutional performance gaps (Bensimon & Spiva, 2022), rather than blaming marginalized students for racialized disparate outcomes. The authors underscore that while campus transformation requires shared equity leadership, presidents have a unique role and responsibility to use their positional power to drive systemic

changes and address racial inequities affecting students, faculty, and staff.

The chapter *Embracing Equity, Leading Equity: The Role of the Provost in Higher Education Equity Practices* by Rodríguez provides equity-minded strategies drawn from in-depth experience in the role. Rodríguez emphasizes that “an equity-minded provost operates from a framework that prioritizes racial equity, diversity, and social justice, seeking to create an environment where every individual has the resources and support needed to thrive.” As such, provosts must lead with an equity-centered approach to ensure institutions can effectively serve diverse student populations and address historical inequities. Through detailed case studies, Rodríguez demonstrates how equity-minded provosts can navigate challenges, advocate for resources, and foster a campus-wide commitment to racial equity, ensuring that higher education remains a pathway to economic and social mobility for all students.

The central role of faculty in advancing equity-minded systemic change in higher education is focused on in the chapter by Villarreal, Liera, and Desir titled *Equity-Minded Organizations and Faculty-Led Coalitional Change*. The authors remind readers that “Administrative and faculty leaders who are interested in transforming their universities into equity-minded organizations must work to center racial equity in the design of programs, policies, and practices if they intend to create the enduring structural change necessary to advance racial equity in higher education (Liera & Desir, 2023).” Through a case study of a faculty learning and action community, the Better Together Learning Community (BTLC), Villarreal, Liera, and Desir illustrate how faculty-led initiatives can drive racially equitable systemic change. The chapter

ends by providing readers with questions to help inform in their daily practice as they seek to advance equity-minded organizational change campus-wide.

CONCLUSION

Leading for racial equity in American higher education has always required courage and fortitude (Anderson, 2019; Hill, 2023); this is even more true in the face of the cultural and legislative countervailing prohibitions to this work (Charles, 2024; Harper, 2024). While it is a challenging time, leadership approaches exist to advance equity-minded systemic change in higher education (Nellums, 2023; Seiki & Strong, 2024).

The chapters in this section of the handbook highlight strategies being engaged in by leaders who reside in states where racial equity work is not legislatively curtailed. It is acknowledged that equity leaders in states with anti-DEI legislation may need to adapt some of practices as they advance racial equity.

Dowd and Bensimon (2015) discuss the necessity of institutional leaders routinizing equity-mindedness into their speech and actions in order to advance racially equitable systemic change. “Institutional leaders must be in the forefront of these changes” (p. 167). The chapters that follow provide readers with practical and actionable equity-minded strategies to aid them in leading for racial equity.

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SHARED EQUITY LEADERSHIP SUPPORTING RACIALLY EQUITABLE CULTURE CHANGE

By Adrianna Kezar and Elizabeth Holcombe

Keywords: *Shared Equity Leadership; Personal and Organizational Transformation*

INTRODUCTION

Shared Equity Leadership (SEL) is an approach to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) work that creates collective commitment across faculty, staff, and administrators for DEI work. Rather than being siloed into an office of DEI or a Chief Diversity Office, this approach embeds equity-minded practice across all higher education roles. It emerged from research on a diverse set of campuses of all institutional types that had made progress in ameliorating equity gaps for students as well as meeting other key DEI goals such as more diverse hiring of faculty or improved campus climate.

The research project itself was inspired by earlier studies that identified shared leadership as an essential component to transformational or culture change on campuses (Kezar, 2018). Furthermore, SEL builds on work within the student success movement demonstrating that siloed programs and services to support racially minoritized, low-income, and first-generation students have not been successful in supporting students' success (Kezar, 2019). Leaders in the work of equity-minded student success describe how campuses have focused on providing services or programs "on the side" to support students from marginalized backgrounds rather than changing the culture of campus to better support students (Kezar, 2019; McNair et al., 2020). As a result, after

four decades of DEI efforts, there has been minimal progress to improve retention and graduation rates and close institutional performance gaps (Bensimon & Spiva, 2022) experienced by Students of Color and other students from historically marginalized groups (Kezar, 2019; Renn & Reason, 2021). Existing approaches have been labeled "programitis" and performatively make campuses look as though they are undergoing change without changing the day-to-day operations, policies, and practices that make up the system (Kezar, 2019). Instead, campuses need to participate in efforts to engage in campus-wide, culture change approaches, which in turn require shared leadership for execution.

McNair and colleagues argue that challenges to equitable student success are an organizational and leadership issue. They call on campus leaders to stop offering programs to fix students, which adopts a deficit view of students, and instead examine the broken and problematic campus organizational structures that impede student success (McNair et al., 2016). Bensimon and her colleagues argue that campuses need approaches to disrupt their routines and existing daily practices and policies in order to move toward culture change (Bensimon et al., 2005; Bensimon, Dowd, & Witham, 2016). Dowd & Bensimon, 2015; McNair et al., 2020). Furthermore, Bensimon et al. (2005) and others (Gentlewarrior & Paredes, 2021; Johnson-McPhail & Beatty, 2021; Liera & Desir, 2023) argue that we need a new practice model premised in equity-advancing action that creates culture change, not simply new programs and services that maintain the status quo of inequitable student outcomes. Projects like the Equity Scorecard (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015), Campus Diversity Initiative

(2020), or Achieving the Dream (<https://achievingthedream.org/>) provide tools for campuses to undergo an inquiry and learning process to redesign their policies and practices and move toward culture change to better support students from historically marginalized groups. However, until the SEL project, there has not been research about the type of leadership that is necessary to address these organizational and culture challenges and to successfully engage in learning processes that can lead to new cultures.

SHARED EQUITY LEADERSHIP AS A SOLUTION FOR TODAY'S ENVIRONMENT

At the time of this writing, in the early to mid-2020s, DEI efforts in higher education are under sustained attack from conservative intellectuals and political leaders in conservative states. More than 80 legislative actions prohibiting various aspects of DEI work, from trainings to DEI offices to diversity hiring statements and practices, have been introduced or passed in more than half of U.S. states (Chronicle Staff, 2024).

One of the main reasons why DEI efforts are particularly vulnerable on campuses across the country right now is that they have not become a normative practice ingrained within campus culture (McNair et al., 2020). That is, like many student success efforts, they remain siloed and off to the side of regular campus operations, whether through a Chief Diversity Officer or DEI office. DEI efforts are more vulnerable to attacks when they remain outside our normal ways of conducting business. Separate DEI positions or offices are easy to identify and have become easy targets for political attacks from conservative politicians.

In SEL environments, by contrast, equity becomes everyone's work and not only the work of a Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) or DEI office. By becoming embedded in faculty, administrative, and staff roles across campus, the work is less of a target for cuts. Not only does this approach shield DEI from cuts but also ensures the work has the critical mass of human resources necessary to truly transform institutions into the equitable and inclusive spaces we hope they can be. SEL offers the organizational structures to broadly distribute work and provides the planning and accountability apparatus so that the work is sustained over time, even as it is distributed among many more people. In this way, equity becomes embedded in day-to-day practice and leads to culture change. Equity-oriented work that is routinized as a best practice, such as disaggregating data to look for equity gaps, is much harder to label as problematic given it is hard to grab headlines for following sound administrative practice.

WHAT IS THE SHARED EQUITY LEADERSHIP MODEL AND WHY DOES IT WORK?

SEL emerged from our recent research of leaders at eight colleges and universities in the United States who were successfully advancing their DEI goals. Conducted by the American Council on Education (ACE) and USC's Pullias Center, the idea for the study originated from the broader question of why campuses have generally made so little progress on DEI goals in the past 40 years, as reflected in ACE's 2019 analysis of racial equity outcomes across students, staff, and faculty (Espinosa et al., 2019). The research team wanted to identify campuses that were bucking this trend and actually making progress on closing equity gaps and other DEI goals. We wondered, were there common characteristics of leadership and organization at such institutions that we could identify to help other

campuses advance equity? What types of approaches would allow leaders to truly make progress toward culture change that embeds DEI goals within the fabric of the institution? Our study found that campuses that *had* made substantial progress on their DEI goals — no matter their institutional type and context differences — shared a collaborative approach that we refer to as Shared Equity Leadership (SEL).

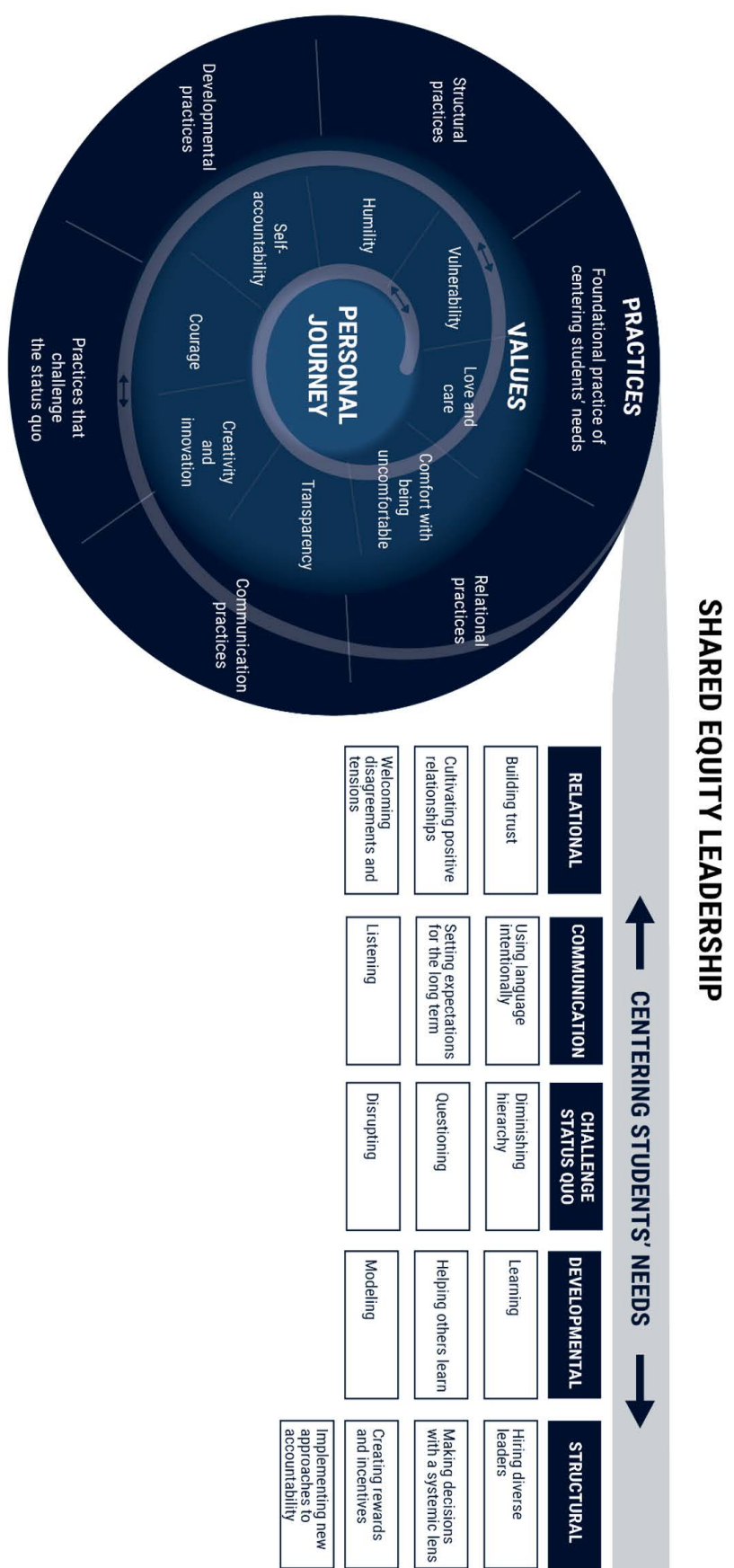
Shared Equity Leadership is a leadership approach that scales DEI work and creates culture change by connecting personal and organizational transformation. We define “leadership” in a non-positional way that includes faculty, staff, students, and community members, in addition to senior administrators. SEL creates a critical mass of faculty, staff and administrators who are all committed to the work, capable of leading the work, and supported through institutional processes, policies and structures. The goal of SEL is to create culture change that embeds shared values and practices around DEI into the core of an organization. SEL is a collaborative process where leaders across campus work together, contributing to a change in organizational culture in which equity becomes everyone’s work.

As noted above, SEL involves personal and organizational transformation, which are both essential for promoting lasting cultural change. Personal transformation involves the process of individuals understanding the structural nature of inequity, deepening their own personal commitment to equity, and taking actions to create changes. By organizational transformation, we mean that an organization transforms its long-existing norms, structures, processes, practices, and policies that privilege certain groups over others and maintain the inequitable status quo. New structures that center equity help

instantiate new norms and values across the organization. Personal and organizational transformation reinforce each other. As more leaders grow to be equity-minded and learn to work collectively, the force for change toward equity increases, which drives organizational transformation. As organizations transform to establish new policies and practices that support equity work, individuals gain more resources and opportunities to increase understanding of systemic inequity, develop capacity to create change, and feel supported to do equity work.

The SEL model (**Figure 1**) entails three main elements: (1) *a personal journey toward critical consciousness* in which leaders solidify their commitment to equity; (2) a set of values that center equity and guide the work; and (3) a set of *practices* that leaders enact collectively to change inequitable structures (Kezar et al., 2021). There are nine values and 17 practices. However, every individual does not have to actualize every value and practice. In fact, among the leaders we interviewed, almost none possessed skills in all areas. Rather, groups of leaders together embodied all of the values and enacted all of the practices. By distributing leadership more broadly throughout an organization, we can harness a wider range of expertise or skills from diverse individuals. With a wider range of skills, experiences, knowledge, and perspectives, we can enact more of the SEL values and practices, which can create a broader and deeper organizational change. In the following sections, we briefly explore each element of the SEL model. For more information, please see Kezar et al. (2021).

Figure 1: Shared Equity Leadership Model



PERSONAL JOURNEY TOWARD CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

At the heart of SEL is the notion that leaders must first turn inwards and do their own personal work in order to then turn outwards to transform their institutions — this is what we call the *personal journey towards critical consciousness*. In this process, leaders reflect on their own identities and experiences, as well as the broader structural and systemic nature of inequities and how they fit within those systems and structures. Personal work means examining one's understanding of white supremacy, privilege, oppression, and systemic racism and other forms of systemic oppression that contribute to disparate outcomes and experiences on our campuses. Engaging in the personal journey helps make the work authentic due to one's growing compassion and empathy related to these issues. With that realization, diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) efforts become personal, and leaders develop a greater sense of responsibility and commitment to creating a new and equitable structure.

In many DEI efforts to date, it has been left up to individual discretion whether to opt into personal development work. In SEL environments, a network of leaders collaborate to foster individual growth and development, eliminating the need for individuals to opt in and bear sole responsibility for their learning. This personal journey development equips leaders in acting authentically and promotes equity without necessarily being labeled as DEI training. For example, without doing this personal journey work, leaders are often not able to truly listen or interrogate data for racial bias as they are not able to perceive systemic inequity. Leaders who have not progressed on their personal journey may not be able to (or struggle) to sit with discomfort that comes with hearing others trauma or support those who are vulnerable as they engage in the work for equity.

Our research points to several different avenues to aid leaders in their personal journey. Individual modeling and mentoring is one strategy, wherein a leader takes another person under their wing, posing questions and recounting their own journey. Another approach to personal journey work is forming collective groups such as book clubs or learning communities that are ongoing in order to support personal journey work.

VALUES

The second element of the SEL model is values, which are the beliefs and ideals shared among leaders across campus. The values represent a way of being, showing up, and relating to others as a leader. Individual leaders learn to embody the values of SEL through their personal journey work as well as through working with others who model the values. Some of the SEL values may look familiar from other approaches to leadership such as courage or creativity. However, many SEL values differ and emphasize collaborative and relational processes, such as transparency and comfort with discomfort. They also delve into personal or emotional aspects of leadership such as love and care, humility, and vulnerability. **Table 1** provides detailed descriptions of all nine SEL values. These values are essential to creating culture change as they establish an environment in which people develop trust and safety to transform their daily practice. SEL values are not something that political leaders advancing the counteroffensive to diversity, equity and inclusion in higher education can easily attack — they are not tangible like budgets, trainings, or programs. Further, the values themselves are hard to make an argument against in terms of being important for fostering a supportive campus environment.

Table 1: Descriptions of SEL Values.

SEL VALUES	DESCRIPTIONS
Love and care	Leaders feel and display love and care for those with and for whom they are working. They approach any relationship with a deep sense of caring and compassion, even if they disagree or have had contrasting experiences.
Comfort with being uncomfortable	Equity work sometimes requires leaders to sit with the emotions and pains of others – even when uncomfortable – rather than immediately jumping to finding solutions. It is important for leaders to be comfortable with such feelings of discomfort.
Transparency	Transparency means that leaders are honest, clear, and open about decision-making, successes, failures, and challenges of their work.
Creativity and imagination	Creativity and imagination are necessary because there are no universally agreed-upon ways of doing equity work and leaders must imagine new possibilities.
Courage	Courage means standing up for equity even when it's not popular or easy and remaining dedicated in the face of resistance or skepticism.
Accountability to Self and Others	Leaders must hold themselves accountable for doing the work, getting results, learning about equity, challenging their preconceived notions, and being willing to change their beliefs and practices as they continue to learn and grow. Leaders must also be accountable to one another and the community for doing the work.
Humility	Humility means admitting when one has done something wrong or when something has not worked well. Leaders understand that they do not have all the answers or solutions, their experience isn't everyone's experience, and they have things to learn from other people.
Vulnerability	Vulnerability means being able to open about difficult personal experiences or being willing to risk exposing one's true self, even without knowing exactly how that will be received. Being vulnerable helps leaders build connections, trust one another, and better understand others' perspectives and experiences.
Mutuality	Mutuality underpins all the other SEL values, emphasizing a shift away from traditional egoistic notions of leadership focused on the individual leader and instead embracing notions of leadership as a reciprocal and collective process.

PRACTICES

SEL practices represent new ways of acting that are oriented toward challenging inequities and creating new structures and policies. We define practices as the ongoing, regular activities that leaders perform both individually and collectively to advance a DEI agenda. We identified 16 practices and categorized them into six domains: the fundamental practice of centering the needs of systematically marginalized communities, relational practices, communication practices, developmental practices, practices challenging the status quo, and structural practices. Relational and communication practices suggest effective ways of working with others and across differences. Developmental practices build knowledge and skills, fostering individuals’ ability to engage in equity work. Practices that challenge the status quo encourage leaders to call out the entrenched policies and practices that reproduce inequities, while actively working to dismantle them. Structural practices support leaders to implement concrete changes to organizational structures and culture. **Table 2** presents all of the SEL practices. For full definitions and more detail on these practices, please see Kezar et al. (2021).

Table 2: SEL Practices

Foundational Practice	Relational Practices	Communication Practices	Developmental Practices	Practices that Challenge the Status Quo	Structural Practices
Understanding and centering students’ needs	Building trust	Using language intentionally	Learning	Diminishing hierarchy	Hiring diverse leaders (or composing diverse teams)
	Cultivating positive relationships	Setting expectations	Helping others learn	Questioning	Systemic decision-making
	Welcoming disagreements and tensions	Listening	Modeling	Disrupting	Creating rewards and incentives
					Welcoming disagreements and tensions

Next, we put these pieces of Shared Equity Leadership together to show how a team or leadership group collectively enacts them. The composite case described next is drawn from all the campuses in our study. Composite cases, sometimes also known as composite narratives, “combine events to make an exemplar case” (Edwards, 2021, p. 2) and use data from several examples “to tell a single story” (Willis, 2019, p. 471). We signal

specific elements of the SEL model in the following example (personal journey, values, and practices) by using parentheses and italicizing the name of the particular element of the model described. While we only provide one example of a leader’s personal journey toward critical consciousness for the sake of space, it is important to note that all leaders were engaged in this personal journey work in different ways.

SHARED EQUITY LEADERSHIP IN ACTION: CASE EXAMPLE

Palms University has made significant progress on their equity goals since they began experimenting with a more shared approach to equity leadership eight years ago. Demographics of their faculty and staff now more closely match those of their student body, racial gaps in promotion and tenure rates have been eliminated, student attainment gaps by race and income status have narrowed significantly, and campus racial climate indicators have improved markedly. Further, equity work has become embedded in campus processes, procedures, and policies and equity has become an accepted norm or value on campus. Leaders at Palms University attribute their success to their Shared Equity Leadership approach.

The primary team leading around campus equity goals at Palms is a group of senior leaders informally known as the Action Team. Convened by the university's president, Bianca, the Action Team is composed of the eight members of the president's cabinet, as well as deans of the university's six colleges, the head of institutional research, and the president of the faculty senate. An engineer by training, Bianca held two prior presidencies before landing at Palms. Bianca has a strong commitment to equity and a passion for transforming institutions to more effectively serve racially minoritized students and those from low-income backgrounds. She is a White woman from a rural area of Kansas and was the first in her family to attend college. Her experiences as a first-generation college student and as a female engineer strongly shaped her commitment to equity, and nearly all her public statements, speeches, and letters reference diversity, equity, or inclusion in some way (*personal journey*).

When Bianca started her presidency at Palms in 2014, nearly all of the senior leaders were White and about three-quarters of them were male. Over her first three years Bianca was able to make several new cabinet-level hires, as well as replace half of the university's deans. She was able to fill nearly all of those positions with People of Color to come closer to racial parity, and she increased the proportion of female leaders so there is now gender parity among campus leadership (*structural practice: hiring diverse leaders*).

The intentional and meaningful diversity of the senior team has also influenced decisions about structuring and organizing equity leadership work at Palms University. The team does not believe that hiring a chief diversity officer or creating an Office of DEI is the right way to execute the university's equity goals, as DEI and issues of social justice are deeply ingrained in the ethos of the leadership team. The team also wants everyone to feel like they have an important and meaningful stake in accomplishing the university's equity goals rather than siloing the work in one position or office. Though their shared leadership model is not the typical approach to DEI work, the team feels that their approach is helping them achieve their goals in a deeper and more meaningful way (*value: creativity and innovation*).

Bianca felt strongly that up-front work to build trust among members of the Action Team was critical for the team's future success (*relational practice: building trust*). She worked to build that trust by first noting that she needed the expertise of everyone in the room because her perspective as president of the university limited her from seeing all the issues and barriers that students may face and all parts of the operations in play (*value: humility*). She also opened up and shared her own experiences with equity work and as a woman in leadership

positions and in predominantly male fields, while also acknowledging the racial privileges she has benefited from as a White woman (*value: vulnerability; developmental practice: modeling*). The entire group also attended a two-day retreat during which they got to know each other better and had formal professional development sessions on how to share leadership and what it means to be an equity leader. Additionally, the Action Team brought the Courageous Conversations About Race training (<https://courageousconversation.com/about/>) to campus for their own team-building and also made it available to any other faculty and staff who were interested (*developmental practices: learning and helping others learn*).

As a result of the strong relationships the team members have built, trust is high, and members are willing to speak their minds and challenge one another when they disagree about something. For example, the provost proposed a policy that would prevent students from retaking a course that they had already failed three times, noting that there was a small group of students getting stuck trying to pass the same courses and not being successful. She brought data indicating that about 50 percent of students who fail a course the first time pass it the second time, and another 30 percent pass after taking it the third time. But almost no students passed after taking a course and failing it three times. The provost argued that it wasn't right for the institution to keep taking students' money and letting them continue to take the course with a very limited chance of success. While most of the team members agreed with the policy, the vice president for student affairs (VPSA) advocated strongly for not adopting the policy unless it had a provision for providing academic support after a first failure. The VPSA is often the member of the team who challenges the team to think about students who are being negatively impacted by various policies and

problematizes existing ways of thinking and operating (*practices that challenge the status quo: questioning, disrupting*). Another member of the team (the chief of staff) is more of a consensus-builder and tried to get the VPSA to change his mind and vote for the policy's adoption. The VPSA responded with, "I'm going to vote against this policy and that's going to be okay. If one of us votes against this policy that's okay because we need this kind of disagreement among ourselves to hash out what is best for students" (*relational practice: welcoming disagreements and tensions*). Ultimately, while the policy at issue was adopted, the VPSA and provost worked together to expand their existing tutoring and supplemental instruction programs to specifically support students who had failed and were retaking a course.

Various members of the Action Team are officially responsible for different equity goals laid out in the university's strategic plan, and the group works together to monitor progress, hold each other accountable, and make progress on the goals that cut across divisions and departments (*structural practice: implementing new approaches to accountability*). In addition to the Action Team, Palms has a variety of other cross-cutting and collaborative structures to support their DEI work. For example, the provost and vice president for student affairs co-chair the Council on Transformation, which provides a monthly 2-hour space for campus stakeholders to bring emergent equity issues for discussion, processing, and problem-solving. For example, this group raised the issue of Black faculty attrition on campus. Palms had been successful in hiring many Black faculty on the tenure track with the use of generous research start-up funding packages. However, once this funding ran out after the first year or two, these faculty struggled to continue to meet their research obligations and often left for

other institutions with more sustained financial support for research. The Council worked with the university's advancement office to put together a proposal that would better support Black faculty members' research programs so they could earn tenure at Palms rather than leaving for other campuses. Palms also has other groups that work specifically on issues related to community engagement and pedagogy and teaching – all with an equity lens front and center. In addition, there are ad hoc or temporary groups that form as problems or new projects arise and disband when goals are accomplished, such as smaller groups of leaders working to establish a new social justice certificate program or figuring out how to rework admissions policies to be test-optional.

BUILDING INFRASTRUCTURE FOR SHARED EQUITY LEADERSHIP

To help enact SEL, a few key aspects of infrastructure help support its implementation. We highlight the three most essential areas in the second half of this chapter – organizing the work, building capacity for the work, and setting up an accountability system. If responsibility for this work is to be distributed among a much larger set of people, it needs to be intentionally built into people's roles and responsibilities, shared goals must be set, the work must be delegated and coordinated appropriately, and structures must be put in place to organize the work. First, we describe different approaches for structuring the work that we identified on campuses. These are not the only ways to organize the work and some campuses evolved from one structure to another, so a campus does not need to stay with a particular structure to be successful. Second, campuses need to build capacity for people to authentically engage in the work. This capacity entails helping people on their personal journeys, learning the new values, practices and skillsets of shared leadership

and DEI. It also entails organizational capacity building to support people as they learn and grow by hiring in diverse leaders who may already have ready skills, setting up new structures to help people learn from each other, or developing new communications vehicles. Third, as the work is distributed and many more people are responsible for the work, new accountability systems need to be established to ensure progress.

ORGANIZING THE WORK

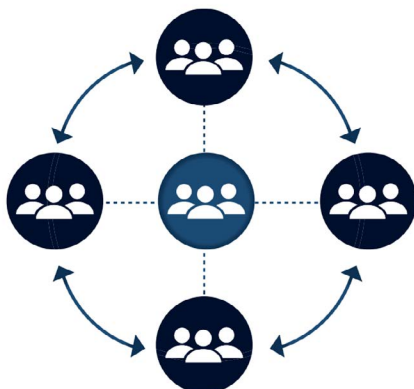
In terms of organizing the work, we found four structures that campuses used to distribute leadership for DEI. These structures provide an alternative to what have been the two typical ways to organize this work: a Chief Diversity Officer/DEI office or a DEI committee. The Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) attempts to incorporate DEI from the top-down, or vertically (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013). The trend in higher education to hire CDOs took off in the early 2000s and has since continued (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007). The other typical approach to organizing DEI work has been creating structures that work horizontally to promote the work, such as diversity committees, commissions, and task forces (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013). These popular practices bring together staff, faculty, administrators, and students to generally advise on DEI-related issues. These entities may be located within a particular division or department, the student government, faculty senate, or appointed by the president. Both traditional approaches to structuring DEI work tend to silo the work, however, and often lack the power and scope of influence to enact meaningful change. Shared Equity Leadership, by contrast, incorporates elements of both vertical and horizontal organization to distribute responsibility more fully across the organization. We briefly describe each of the four models for structuring SEL that we found in our research. For more information on these

structures, please see the report by Holcombe et al. (2021) *Organizing Shared Equity Leadership*. The report also provides a toolkit with reflective questions for campus leaders to consider as they develop new structures for distributing the work.

HUB AND SPOKE MODEL

The first new way to organize the work we term the *Hub and Spoke Model* (see **Figure 2**). In this model, DEI work is led by a CDO or equivalent executive-level position that reports to the president, as well as staff in a DEI office or division. This office serves also as a “hub” for DEI work, connected to various “spokes” of equity work across campus. The hub acts as a centralized resource for practitioners across campus and can include positions dedicated full-time to professional development, project or program management, data and analysis, and more. These positions are formal, DEI-specific roles. The hub also serves a connecting function, identifying opportunities for collaboration among practitioners doing DEI work and facilitating those connections. In this way, the Hub and Spoke Model helps instantiate values around connection and coordination rather than siloing and independent pockets of DEI work. The resources dedicated to the hub (both human and financial) also emphasize the value the institution places on enhancing and supporting equity work.

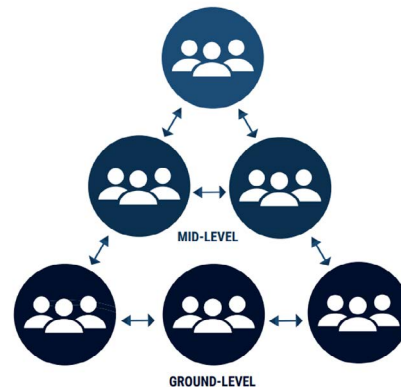
Figure 2: Hub and Spoke Model



HIGHLY STRUCTURED MODEL

The *Highly Structured Model* is the most formally structured of the four we identified, with a CDO who reports to the president, an extensive staff and multiple reporting units within the DEI division, and many layers of DEI representatives throughout the divisions and units of the university. The dense, complex web of structures emanating from the DEI division helps embed equity work throughout the institution, while also leaving discretion and autonomy to individual offices, departments, or academic units for how they plan to achieve equity goals.

Figure 3: Highly Structured Model

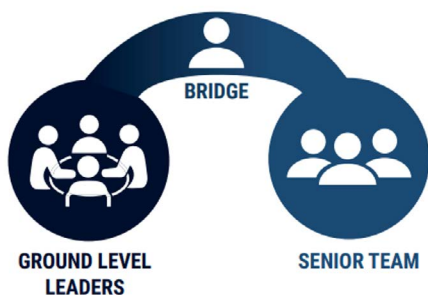


In the *Highly Structured Model*, the central DEI office is composed of several full-time staff members who guide various aspects of the work. There are also several units or departments that report up into the CDO. The Highly Structured Model also features a formal horizontal DEI structure, with representatives from each unit or division (“leads”) who are responsible for leading DEI work within their sphere of influence. This work is formally coordinated by staff in the DEI office and supported with resources (financial, time, human). In addition to one-on-one meetings with DEI office staff, DEI leads meet regularly as a group to discuss challenges and successes and build community around equity work.

BRIDGING MODEL

The *Bridging Model* represents a novel form of structuring equity leadership that is not built around the vertical structure of a CDO, unlike the Hub and Spoke and Highly Structured Models. Intentionally designed as a distributed approach to equity work, this model is led jointly by the university's most senior leaders (including the president); a permanent council of ground-level faculty, staff, and students responsible for helping the institution meet its long-term equity goals; and a person in a "bridge" or translator role who connects the senior leadership and ground-level leaders. This model promotes values of coordination and communication across levels of the organizational hierarchy as well as the importance of collective responsibility at both the senior and ground levels. The Bridging Model also has some similarities to the Hub and Spoke Model in that the bridge works to map and connect existing work on campus; however, the Bridging Model is distinct in that there are additionally and intentionally two groups of leaders at the top and the ground level (the cabinet and the council) who are formally tasked with equity responsibilities.

Figure 4: Bridging Model



WOVEN MODEL

The last approach we labeled the *Woven Model* – a fully embedded structure to organize DEI work. While the Hub and Spoke, Highly Structured, and Bridging Models all create new offices, positions, or groups to structure their DEI work, the Woven Model instead structures DEI work into people's existing roles and processes. Rather than having a formalized position such as a CDO or a dedicated office responsible for DEI work, this model embeds DEI into everyone's work, weaving it into the fabric of the institution as part of institutional strategic plans and goals and into individuals' roles. Leaders at campuses with a woven structure described how the diversity of their student body and their leadership, as well as the strong commitment of campus leadership to promoting equity and justice, meant that the designation of a particular leader in charge of DEI just would not make sense on their campus. Instead, everyone in a leadership role – ground-level, mid-level, and senior leaders – is expected to pursue campus equity goals as a part of their regular work. Leaders all have DEI-specific responsibilities that vary based on their position or role. This approach does not mean that the work gets overlooked, marginalized, or ignored. Rather, prioritization of DEI is the normal, accepted way of operating on campus and is enabled by policies and practices that facilitate collaboration and mission-focused work.

Figure 5: Woven Model



CAPACITY BUILDING

In addition to structuring or organizing the work, campuses also need to build capacity for faculty, administrators and staff to engage in the work. The SEL project also has a report dedicated to capacity building called “Capacity Building for Shared Equity Leadership” (Holcombe et al., 2023). Capacity building involves activities that strengthen the knowledge, abilities, skills and behavior of individuals, and improve institutional structure and processes so that the organization can efficiently meet its DEI goals in a sustainable way. Capacity building is an ongoing investment at multiple levels that is meant to support and develop a repertoire of knowledge, skills, and dispositions to collectively lead equity-minded change efforts. Capacity building is iterative and can build on what already exists instead of starting from the ground up.

Capacity building for SEL needs to happen at the personal, collective and organizational levels. Personal capacity building involves individuals building the knowledge, skills, and capabilities to do DEI work and to share leadership. Strategies for building personal capacity include professional development, trainings, and workshops; as well as coaching, mentoring, and peer feedback. Collective capacity building helps groups of leaders learn how to work together effectively across differences and in solidarity. Collective capacity-building strategies include professional learning communities and communities of practices, affinity groups (i.e. like-minded groups often by identity or role that can maximize learning based on their shared characteristics), and healing circles (i.e. groups based on a shared trauma due to race, gender, sexual orientation or social class that allow for people to obtain support and share their stories and experiences).

Organizational capacity-building approaches focus on changes to structures and processes that support the goal of promoting equity by making it everyone’s work. Campuses build organizational capacity by creating cross-cutting groups and structures (e.g., a group of liaisons across every unit or college that meets regularly dedicated to promoting equity); hiring, onboarding, and promoting diverse leaders; and incentivizing and rewarding the work. Some capacity-building strategies bridge multiple levels – for example, storytelling and story circles can build both personal and collective capacity as leaders gather to share their personal experiences.

Organizational capacity building differs from personal and collective capacity building in that the focus is on developing new systems, structures, and processes within which shared equity leadership (SEL) work can occur, rather than on the knowledge, skills, behaviors, and dispositions of individuals and groups. Because campuses have traditionally been organized to support hierarchical leadership – and in ways that decenter or even actively undermine equity – changes to systems, structures, and processes are necessary to begin to dismantle these existing ways of operating (Kezar et al., 2021). Campuses need to create new structures both within and across units to coordinate planning activities and share information; hire, onboard, and promote diverse leaders; and create new incentives and rewards for equity work and for shared leadership. These new structures all build capacity for both DEI work and shared leadership work.

Our research identified that campuses spend more time focused on individual capacity building, rather than on organizational and collective approaches, and more time on DEI capacity building than on capacity building for shared leadership. We strongly encourage more planning and thought to capacity building around shared leadership as well as at the collective and organizational levels to extend opportunity and promote more inclusive processes and outcomes.

In addition to building capacity at different levels of the organization, capacity must be built in two different areas – DEI and shared leadership – which are related but distinctive skillsets. DEI skillsets are typically more familiar to campuses but the work to build shared leadership skills is often not well understood. This distinction is important because shared leadership capacity building is concerned with working and leading collaboratively, whereas capacity building for DEI is more focused on the knowledge, skills, and critical consciousness necessary to fully understand DEI, and to then make progress toward DEI-related goals. Building capacity for DEI means ensuring that leaders across the organization are familiar and comfortable with DEI principles and engaged on their personal journey toward critical consciousness, and it requires that equity-mindedness is embedded in organizational processes and policies. Building capacity for shared leadership means ensuring that individuals have the skills to navigate working collaboratively, that experimentation with collective processes is nurtured, and that organizational structures support collaborative ways of working.

ACCOUNTABILITY

As campuses move towards more SEL approaches, leaders need to rethink accountability systems that can better support these new and more collaborative forms

of work. Our report, *Shared Responsibility Means Shared Accountability*, illustrates the systemic changes campuses made in their accountability systems as a result of engaging in SEL (Kezar et al., 2022). The report also contains reflective questions and worksheets to guide leaders through this rethinking process.

Key changes to accountability systems include expanding the notion of who they were accountable to, who was accountable, what they were accountable for, and how they were holding themselves accountable. SEL also brings important nuance and tensions to the work of accountability. Issues that leaders will encounter along the way include: figuring out how to share work and allow people space to learn; ensuring the work is authentic; deciding whether work should be mandated so that all are formally accountable for DEI; and being accountable for the right measures so that progress is real and not performative. In this section, we review a few key ways to be rethinking accountability as you develop a new system.

Culture of accountability: It is important to understand that the SEL model itself creates a new culture around accountability that helps support your new accountability system. Campuses in our study emphasized accountability as a formal process but spoke almost as often about accountability as needing to be part of their culture. They leaned on the values and practices in the SEL model as a way to activate this new culture that supported accountability. The values emphasized in SEL around transparency, for example, helped to support data sharing, a focus on results, and holding each other accountable for progress. The importance of communication and setting expectations was called upon to ensure ongoing conversations about equitable outcomes and processes. It

took courage and humility to acknowledge and own institutional flaws, institutional performance equity gaps, and mistakes in the process of equity work. It also took honesty, vulnerability, and comfort with being uncomfortable to have the conversations with campus leaders' teams and community about what did not go well, what role individual leaders may have played in it, and what the team should have done differently to reset the approaches and goals.

Who is accountable: The first major change to accountability systems is the idea of who is accountable. Instead of a chief diversity officer being the primary person who is accountable, under SEL boards, senior leadership, mid-level leaders such as deans, department chairs, and unit/division heads, and even ground-level leaders such as faculty and staff are held accountable for equity goals. Campuses underscored the importance of involving boards; boards have not traditionally prioritized equity nor had the skillsets to guide or lead in this area, as they often ascribe to a narrow, (primarily fiduciary) definition of their responsibility and oversight (Rall, 2021). Thus, one of the main changes we saw at campuses engaged in SEL was boards extending and including equity as a key accountability metric. Boards may even establish a subcommittee that explores equity measures and regularly reviews campus work on equity. The act of making boards a part of a DEI accountability system itself was a pivotal change. See the chapter by Rall, MacCormack and Gentlewarrrior (2024) in this handbook for further exploration of the role of the board in campus' racial equity efforts.

What equity goals people are held accountable for: In order to activate culture change and hold each individual leader accountable for that change, the areas for which people will be held accountable expanded. Two key

areas emerged in rethinking accountability metrics. First, culture change is a key goal of SEL. Working toward culture change moved campuses away from only thinking about outcomes to also understanding the importance of the environment in which those outcomes occur – specifically the experience of students and being held accountable for the environment in which students are educated. Therefore, simple retention and graduation metrics were no longer acceptable, and measures of students' experience were being assessed in multiple ways.

Second, campuses expressed a need for more than institution-level metrics, moving to include multi-level metrics at unit and individual levels so accountability could be tracked further down into the organization. When accountability is primarily held by a president at the institutional level, then a set of institution-wide outcomes might be sufficient. However, as responsibility is distributed across more stakeholders, different forms of accountability become necessary to capture the work happening across the institution. Behavioral and process measures are notable examples of unit or individual-level accountability. In terms of behavioral metrics, leaders described behavioral expectations (e.g. teamwork, facilitation, cross-functional work, conflict management) that they had of colleagues, which were reinforced in hiring processes and orientation and then included as an accountability measure in performance evaluations. These expectations and associated review processes establish a set of norms that guide the type of culture and environment campuses are trying to create. Campuses are also holding themselves accountable for equity-related results in a range of operational processes ranging from planning to hiring to professional development to evaluation. Leaders describe the importance of measuring the climate on campus as well

as within different units/departments. Solely looking at outcomes without any concern for the quality of the experience was considered to be inadequate.

Systems of accountability: Campuses are establishing sophisticated systems to hold leaders accountable (individually and collectively), creating complex, iterative, and multi-level plans and implementation aimed at building a more robust system of accountability to the multiple stakeholders they currently report to. The means for accountability were now valued as much as the ends. Accountability systems became a way to ensure that responsibility for the work was truly embraced by leaders across campus at all levels and across all units and that campus constituents were making progress on this work. Because SEL meant broader distribution of responsibility for DEI, strategic planning processes differed in that they often listed specific offices and individuals as being designated accountable for goals, and units were often encouraged to develop their own plans. Increasingly we saw a movement away from a single strategic plan for the overall institution to multiple plans with more detail and specific accountability pieces assigned to many different leaders.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE BASED ON THE SHARED EQUITY LEADERSHIP MODEL

As your campus moves forward to implement SEL, we offer the following summary of recommendations gleaned from this chapter and our overall work on SEL.

Organizing the work – SEL will begin with a team that can be expanded over time as the team identifies who is conducting this work formally and informally in various units and as new people are recruited thereby expanding the network. As a critical mass is identified,

then the group can begin to explore ways to organize the work. This chapter offers up multiple options for organizing the work so that it can best support the campus' DEI goals, work and outcomes.

Building capacity for the work – As more people are involved in DEI work, then people need to be trained in order to support this work authentically. This is most effectively achieved by supporting personal, group and organizational capacity building. We underscore how important it is for the campus to take responsibility to provide opportunities for people to progress on their personal journeys and to make this an organizational commitment. Being able to learn and grow with others is also instrumental to building a culture that supports SEL. We saw that campuses undervalue the organizational capacity building of hiring new people, rewarding and awarding people, ensuring access to data and training in how to use it, messaging and communications plans around SEL values and practices, and building supportive infrastructure so we also highlight the need for organizational capacity building.

Creating an accountability system – After the work has been expanded and organized and capacity built, then the campus needs to create an accountability system so that the work progresses over time. Ideally this is a system to monitor this as well as to support and motivate people to be invested in the work. Our reports provide all the details about building a new accountability system that can capture the work as it is conducted across so many more people. The multilevel plans, the distributed goals, and the broader use of data are all in service of helping everyone to see how they are contributing to the broader institutional goals.

KEY QUESTIONS IN SUPPORT OF SHARED EQUITY LEADERSHIP

All of our SEL reports offer in-depth reflective questions to guide this work; see the link to these reports in the key resources section below. Here we offer a few questions to prompt your thinking and SEL action:

- How can we map who is conducting the work of DEI as well as who should be conducting the work of DEI as we move forward?
- How can we connect the work to bridge gaps and create synergies?
- What will our capacity building plan look like?
- Who should be accountable? How will we hold ourselves accountable? Who should we be accountable to?

CONCLUSION

Campuses across the country are working to implement shared equity leadership and it is important to reach out to other campuses to garner their experiences/lessons learned. Once you start the journey it is critical that you share your experience as well to help broaden the collective effort of helping build campuses that better support students, and faculty and staff as well. Campuses find that the benefits go beyond the improved environment for student success as the values of SEL also improve working relationships among groups that are quite tenuous on many campuses. Faculty and staff report so many benefits to this approach that as a leader introducing this model you can feel confident that you are supporting a direction that will be positive and worth the time and investment on behalf of equitable systemic change on your campus.

KEY RESOURCES

Website for the Shared Equity Leadership Project includes all reports and toolkits – <https://pullias.usc.edu/project/shared-equity-leadership/>

Website for SEL Partner, American Council on Education, includes same resources plus webinars – <https://www.acenet.edu/Research-Insights/Pages/Diversity-Inclusion/Shared-Equity-Leadership.aspx>

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FROM INTENTIONS TO IMPACT: PRACTICAL LESSONS FOR BOARDS OF TRUSTEES IN SHAPING AND ADVANCING EQUITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

By Raquel M. Rall, Jean MacCormack, Sabrina Gentlewarrior

Keywords: *Equitable Student Success, Boards of Trustees, Trustee Governance Roles*

INTRODUCTION

Institutions in higher education are not racially just. Racial inequity is embedded in the academy's policies, practices, structures, and values (Bensimon, 2018). Thus, working to ensure equitable opportunities and outcomes will not passively occur. Creating systemic change toward racially equitable campuses requires that stakeholders institution-wide intentionally and continuously collaborate to acknowledge, deliberate, and address historical and ongoing sources of inequity. Among these stakeholders is one group that is often left out of consideration but is of the utmost importance for leading the strategic direction of the campus. Boards of trustees play a pivotal role in shaping the mission, policies, and practices of colleges and universities. However, too often institutional goals related to diversity, equity, and inclusion are not well aligned with the core work of these boards (Morphew & Hartley, 2006).

Research that connects the role of governing boards to racial equity is limited (Rall et al., 2018). To address some of the most pressing issues facing higher education, more work focused on boards and equity in higher education is needed (Morgan et al., 2022; Rall et al., 2022a). While "...understanding governance and researching governance

is essential to how we understand higher education and so many of the issues that we care about..." a focus on governance without an equity lens is incomplete (Rall et al., 2021, p. 406). For example, racial equity and equitable student success are topics of growing interest as racist actions are on the rise in higher education (Ching et al., 2020; Garces & Gordon da Cruz, 2017; Museus et al., 2015). At present, equity is not a core tenet or focus of higher education governing boards but the realities and demands of higher education require that it should be. Further, we note that while many boards may indeed support and desire equity-centered policies, practices, and procedures, many do not know how to initiate and integrate this critical work in their governing (Rall, 2020). This uncertainty is not foreign to educational leaders who wrestle with how to best exercise the influence of their leadership (Bess & Goldman, 2001).

We aim to ground readers in a clear understanding of trustee governance roles and responsibilities and to provide actionable insights and strategies for engaging boards of trustees in the pursuit of equity-minded systemic change. By focusing on the unique position and influence of trustees, we seek to empower these individuals to play an active role in dismantling systems of oppression and fostering inclusive environments within institutions. Through this chapter, we invite readers to consider and embrace the transformative potential of trustees' engagement in advancing racial equity and to welcome their role as catalysts for change within higher education institutions.

We begin the chapter by discussing the perspectives that guide our writing. We then transition to a discussion of critical research on board roles and responsibilities, racial equity, governance, and systemic change. We provide examples from one public institution,

Bridgewater State University in southeastern Massachusetts, to elucidate not simply the imperative for racial equity in higher education governance, but tangible approaches to model “how” it can be done. This board’s efforts offer an inside look into the strategies and conditions that can foster a more routine and constructive focus on equity in board advocacy and accountability responsibilities in terms of academic, policy, and fiduciary duties. In concluding, we remind ourselves and our readers that while this work is challenging, we all have a key role to play in moving it forward.

POSITIONALITIES OF AUTHORS

In crafting this chapter, we combine a unique blend of research expertise and practical experience. As women committed to advancing equity, we leverage our distinct perspectives to provide readers with a comprehensive exploration of this critical topic.

Dr. Rall is a Black tenured professor and associate dean at a research-intensive university. She is one of the preeminent higher education scholars at the intersection of trusteeship and equity. Dr. Rall’s perspective is that of a scholar-practitioner who studies governance and has helped create a model for the board’s role in equitable student success. She brings extensive research and expertise on boards of trustees’ role in promoting equity in higher education, as well as her lived experience as a Black woman in higher education. With a deep understanding of the complexities and dynamics within these governing bodies, Dr. Rall has conducted in-depth studies, delving into the intricacies of board governance and its impact on equity initiatives. Through a rigorous analysis of policies, practices, and structural barriers, Dr. Rall has established a rich understanding of the challenges and opportunities boards face in shaping equitable outcomes. The combination of perspective, expertise, and

experiences Dr. Rall brings to this article is that of a field-defining scholar in the need for practices associated with centering racial equity into the decision making of trustees in higher education.

Dr. MacCormack is a White higher education leader who has served as a chancellor, vice chancellor for administration and finance, dean, faculty member, and board member and chair, at top institutions in the nation. She has firsthand experience implementing equity-focused strategies and initiatives. She writes through the lens of a practitioner-scholar with extensive expertise in leading institutional and board-wide equity-minded transformation. The combination of perspective, expertise, and experiences Dr. MacCormack brings to this article is that of an experienced senior higher education administrator and board chair.

Dr. Gentlewarrior is a White, lesbian equity educator, administrator, and practitioner-scholar. She serves as the vice president of student success, equity and diversity at Bridgewater State University. She also convenes and leads the Racial Equity and Justice Institute (<https://reji-bsu.org/>) a higher education consortium committed to data-informed strategies intended to centralize racial equity into the work of higher education, thereby supporting the success of all students. She has served as a principal investigator or co-principal investigator on multiple externally funded higher education equity projects intended to advance the knowledge and practice of equity-minded student success. The combination of perspective, expertise, and experiences Dr. Gentlewarrior brings to this article is that of an equity-minded change agent supporting and facilitating the work of equity leaders on her campus and across higher education as they advance equitable practice.

Drs. MacCormack and Gentlewarrior reside and work in Massachusetts and Dr. Rall is in California. Both Dr. Gentlewarrior and Dr. MacCormack endeavor to leverage their White privilege to eliminate racial injustice (Reason et al., 2005). Dr. Rall draws on not only her scholarly knowledge, but experiences as a Black woman in the academy as she does this work. We have all held positions as administrators in which we have encountered our own struggles to center equity in decision-making. The three of us are aware that our approaches and efforts have been greatly facilitated by the fact we live in progressive states that are working to center equity in education. We are cognizant that legislation is pending or has passed in many states in the U.S. prohibiting an explicit focus on racial equity (Gupton, 2023; UCLA School of Law, 2023). Throughout the chapter, we give attention to offering some preliminary recommendations to those working in states that are not yet centering racial equity into educational reforms.

The intersectionality of our identities and our resultant experiences of privilege and disenfranchisement informs our work as equity-minded change agents. By combining our areas of expertise, we aim to create a chapter that bridges the gap between research and practice. We enter into this writing with diverse backgrounds but the singular goal of centering equity. Our collaboration ensures that theoretical frameworks are grounded in the realities boards of trustees face. The praxis-based lens we use also underscores the complexities of translating intentions into tangible impact. We hope that this integrated approach strengthens the chapter's rigor and enhances its applicability for readers. We also recognize that equity-centered trusteeship is not a one-size-fits-all concept. It must take root in an institutional context and culture.

Boards and the Equity Agenda

The case has been made that centering racial equity is essential to fulfilling the mission of higher education, supporting the success of all students, and achieving fiscal stability in this time of seismic change in the academy (Bhopal, 2017; Garces & Gordon da Cruz, 2017; Johnson et al., 2019; Warikoo, 2016). Tying their roles and responsibilities to the institutional mission grants boards permission to govern with equity in mind. An essential next step is for boards to understand the business imperative of equity-minded decision making. The return on investment of improving access, graduation rates, and other metrics across backgrounds and identities should incentivize boards to act. Doing so will require that higher education institutions prioritize the well-being and success of all students and become equity-minded in our practices across the institution (Bensimon, 2020; Gentlewarrior & Paredes, 2021; McNair et al., 2020).

This chapter rests on the foundation of equity-mindedness, a theory of practice and change in higher education that is evidence-based and race-conscious in the affirmative sense (Bensimon, 2007; Bensimon & Malcom, 2012). Campuses informed by equity-mindedness assume responsibility for addressing disparate racialized student outcomes as part of their work to “pay off higher education’s racial debt” (Bensimon, 2018; 2020). In order to move from the lip service that too often characterizes higher education’s approach to equitable practice (Forte, 2020; Kolodner, 2020; Wynn, & Ziff, 2022), equity-minded institutions engage in sense-making to understand what can be done to change campus policies and practices in order to address and redress racialized disparate outcomes (Ching, 2023). Equity-minded leaders and campuses do the hard and necessary work of moving from disaggregated data to measurable goals intended to support student success through racially equitable

tenets and practices that transform how institutions serve their students (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015; Gentlewarrior & Paredes, 2021; McNair et al., 2020).

To accomplish this type of institution-wide transformation, campuses must engage in shared equity leadership (Kezar et al., 2021) where campus members, whatever their rank or role, and board members work together to support the success of students through racially equitable practices. This type of shared equity leadership requires that leaders across the institution move from equity-minded values to equity-minded action with appropriate support but also with accountability that ensures that the work for equity on behalf of our students advances in meaningful change (Holcombe et al., 2022; Kezar et al., 2022).

Despite trustees' significant role in governing institutions, before five years ago, there was little higher education research that mentioned the role of trustee boards in maximizing racial equity in our nation's colleges and universities (Brown et al., 2020; Commodore et al., 2022; Rall et al., 2019, 2020; Rall et al., 2022a). Even with the growing awareness and efforts in these areas, some boards of higher education have not prioritized equity as they should. The Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB, n.d.) outlines at least six reasons many boards have not yet centered equity into their work:

1. Alignment: Some boards and board members are simply not aligned with the growing efforts for equity and improved student outcomes on their own campuses.

2. Inclusivity: Some administrators have left their boards out of the conversation for fear that board engagement would slow or reduce their efforts.

3. Value: Some are caught in the misunderstood relationship of equity with quality and fail to grasp the greater value of inclusive excellence.

4. Involvement: Some boards and board members are supportive of efforts to achieve equity, inclusiveness, and equitable student outcomes but see no reason for the involvement of the board.

5. Interest: Some are simply uninterested.

6. Politics: Some shy away from engagement due to local, regional, and state politics. Without intentional effort, this rationale will be used more in the months and years ahead due to the growing counteroffensive to racial equity.

Regardless of the justification, the fact that boards and racial equity are not a normal pairing in higher education is problematic. The Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB) has indicated that governing and leading with equity is more than an optional choice for boards. In fact, a "board focus on student success for all students is not only a moral imperative but also a fiduciary duty and strategic imperative directly related to institutional sustainability" (AGB, n.d.). Boards should play an integral role in student and institutional success (Morgan et al., 2021a, 2021b; Rall et al., 2022b). They "... are uniquely positioned to advance change in ways that other institutional stakeholders cannot ... they can illuminate the context, ensure attention to the issues, hold institutions accountable for progress, and contribute their resources, insight, and wisdom" (Eckel & Trower, 2016, p.4). Trustees can ensure that racial equity is central to a campus' institutional mission (Morgan et al., 2021; Rall et al., 2022b). They can also use their roles and authority to question the president, provost, and other senior leaders about how racially

equitable practices are being utilized and institutionalized (Holcombe et al., 2022; Kezar et al., 2022).

So, while trustees typically avoid getting involved in the management and operational functioning of a campus, they are key in ensuring that senior leadership is adhering to the strategic plan intended to advance key institutional priorities (Rall et al., 2022a; 2022b). For example, one of the most important functions of trustees is their role in guiding the presidential selection process; the importance of bringing an equity-minded frame to their decision in selecting institutional presidents and chancellors is paramount (Bensimon & Associates, 2022). While boards are now starting to be “part of the equity conversation” (Rall et al., 2022a), the challenge is to make words actionable. Many boards have bought into the significance of the equity agenda, but they simply do not know how to advance equity work as part of their fiduciary and other leadership duties (Krisberg, 2019; Rall, 2020). Because “... governance work is equity work too” (Morgan et al., 2023, p. 49), how do we help trustees “... shift the internal environment ... [to] foster racially equal outcomes; and transform campus cultures to serve, validate, and empower minoritized students?” (Ching, 2023, p. 814)

BOARDS AND EFFECTIVE SYSTEMIC CHANGE PRACTICES

Effective systemic change practices play a crucial role in the long-term success and sustainability of higher education institutions. A study conducted by AGB found that boards that actively engage in systemic change initiatives are better equipped to navigate complex challenges and adapt to the evolving needs of students, faculty, and society (Brittingham & Page, 2023). These practices allow boards to proactively respond to external factors such as technological advancements,

changing demographics, and economic shifts, ensuring that their institutions remain relevant and competitive. Furthermore, effective systemic change practices contribute to institutional innovation and growth (Hrabowski, 2014; Kezar, 2018; Elrod, et al., 2023).

Diversity and inclusion are also key considerations in effective systemic change practices. Research has consistently shown that diverse and inclusive institutions are associated with improved student outcomes, increased student engagement, and enhanced institutional reputation (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015; Gentlewarrior & Paredes, 2021; McNair et al., 2020). It is not enough, however, when focusing on leadership for social justice to focus on racial equity as an end; racial equity in decision making should be viewed as a means to that end (Bertrand & Rodela, 2018). Concentrating solely on achieving equity in decision making may not address the underlying ingrained issues that perpetuate injustice and inequality. Instead, racial equity should be viewed as a tool or strategy to advance the broader objective of social justice. This perspective underscores the significance of inclusive decision-making processes in creating meaningful and sustainable change. Centering equity in decision making serves to dismantle oppressive systems. For example, the American Council on Education (ACE) highlights how boards of trustees can play a critical role in promoting diversity and inclusion by establishing policies, allocating resources, and holding institutional leadership accountable (Commodore, 2023).

A focus on governing boards necessarily “... means a focus on chancellors, presidents, provosts, faculty, and others who provide the necessary expertise and guidance to board members who are often without a background in higher education and who typically only engage with institutions episodically” (Rall &

Morgan, forthcoming). Change is particularly important for trustees with limited terms which complicate their understanding of and ability to partner with stakeholders to accomplish their goals for the campus (Kezar, 2009). Though boards are increasingly focused on meaningful change (AGB, n.d.), the board cannot facilitate this shift alone. Campus leaders, especially the president or chancellor, must take an active role in shaping the board's decision-making role towards equity, because as volunteers from "outside" of academia, boards must lean on the context-specific expertise of higher education leaders (Rall & Morgan, forthcoming).

The push for proactive change related to producing equitable educational opportunities and experiences for marginalized groups can lose momentum for multiple reasons, including those tied to campus leadership (Dowd & Liera, 2018). Shifting attitudes and beliefs to embrace new approaches, programs, information, etc. makes change difficult (Goldberg, 2001). If equity is the goal, trustees must work to both initiate equity-centered structures and expectations and establish norms to elevate that aim (Bess & Goldman, 2001). We have to hold trustees accountable to be both visionaries and implementers (Kezar, 2009) when it comes to racial equity work in higher education. By embracing equity-minded systemic change, boards can position their institutions for success and meet the evolving needs of students, faculty, and society in a rapidly changing educational landscape.

DEFINING EQUITY-MINDED SYSTEMIC CHANGE FOR THE BOARD

Postsecondary transformation requires institutions to realign their structure, culture, and business model to facilitate student experiences that dramatically and equitably improve outcomes and educational value (Frontier Set, 2022). We are especially interested in the board's role in advancing

equity of opportunity (e.g., college access) and equity of outcomes (e.g., feelings of belonging, retention, persistence, graduation, and post-graduation social mobility) for Students of Color and other marginalized groups. Boards must undergo a fundamental reorientation, recognizing that their role and responsibilities extend far beyond mere procedural obligations, necessitating a deep understanding and unwavering commitment to their institutions and society, thereby ensuring that they fulfill their maximum potential as key student success leaders (Rall & Morgan, forthcoming).

To provide a clear foundation for our exploration, we will define equity-minded systemic change and its impact on multiple levels. This definition encompasses the intentional dismantling of oppressive systems and the proactive cultivation of racially equitable practices and outcomes. Furthermore, we will introduce the Equitable Student Success (ESS) Model, which serves as a framework for aligning board policies, procedures, norms, cultures, and structures with equity principles. We frame equitable student success as:

The key transformational agenda for higher education. Institutional and sector transformation is about enabling institutions to directly confront and overcome all major threats to their efficacy and their roles in advancing an ever-progressing democratic society. Equitable student success requires that everything that can be done inside of and around an institution to maximize the capability of each and every student is what must be done. This transformation at its most basic level is about eliminating race, ethnicity, and income as predictors of completion and postgraduate success and ensuring an affirming student experience (AGB, n.d.).

Racially equitable student success is the responsibility of all campus stakeholders. Effective boards intentionally support campus actions for equity through board action and decision making. For boards to prioritize equitable student success they must be structured and organized to elevate and accelerate issues like equity (Rall & Morgan, forthcoming). How boards move from equity talk to equity walk (McNair et al., 2020), to connect board roles and responsibilities on paper to the board’s roles and responsibilities in action needs to be delineated.

DEVELOPING AN EQUITY MODEL FOR BOARDS

AGB received funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for a project to conceptualize the role of boards in equitable student success efforts. The strategic aim of the project was “to normalize and outline the board’s role in maximizing equitable student success.” The project team was comprised of Dr. Merrill Schwartz, Dr. Carlton Brown, Dr. Demetri Morgan, and Dr. Raquel Rall (co-author of this chapter). They engaged with the literature, created an advisory group, and

reflected on the happenings that have recently impacted higher education to get a sense of what the role of the board is for equitable student success. The resultant Equitable Student Success Model (ESS) applies critical Equity Student Success principles to the nine common roles and responsibilities of trustees.

We outline here in three tables the nine common roles and responsibilities of boards, the eight Equitable Student Success Principles that emerged from the research, and for illustrative purposes, apply the principles to the nine core trustee duties. Taken together these tables provide a conceptual map of how equity-mindedness facilitates the core work of boards of trustees.

BOARD ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

There are typically nine commonly recognized and long-held roles/responsibilities that boards have in higher education (Abbott, 1970; AGB, 2022, Henderson, 1967; Kerr & Gade, 1989; Larsen, 2001). Understanding these roles and responsibilities is often the fundamental structure of trustee orientations and training. These nine roles are outlined in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Nine Common Roles/Responsibilities of Higher Education Boards

Boards are responsible for:
<div>1. Establishing, disseminating, and keeping current the mission of the institution.</div> <div>2. Selecting, supporting, and assessing the chief executive officer of the institution/system.</div> <div>3. Co-creating, approving, and monitoring the progress of the strategic plan.</div> <div>4. Ensuring the institution’s fiscal integrity, preserving, and protecting its assets for posterity, and engaging directly in fundraising and philanthropy.</div> <div>5. Ensuring the quality of education provided by the institution.</div> <div>6. Safeguarding both the autonomy of the institution and the related tradition of academic freedom requires that boards protect academic freedom.</div> <div>7. Ensuring that the policies and processes of the institution remain current and are properly implemented.</div> <div>8. Engaging regularly with the institution’s major constituencies.</div> <div>9. Ensuring that the board’s business is conducted in an exemplary fashion, that its governance policies and practices are kept current, and that the performance of the board, its committees, and its members are periodically assessed.</div>

These nine roles spell out how most trustees are being asked to perform fundamental advocacy and accountability duties across a range of both public and private institutions of higher education. A core tenet of governance scholarship is that by being proficient and effective in these nine roles, trustees' work is greatly facilitated.

EQUITABLE STUDENT SUCCESS PRINCIPLES

The Equitable Student Success Model provides key principles for trustees to consider as they seek to infuse equity into their work. **Table 2** offers readers an overview of these principles and begins to detail how they intersect with the nine core advocacy and accountability duties of trustees just described.

Table 2. Eight Leadership Principles for Boards for Equitable Student Success (ESS)

Leadership Principles for ESS	Rationale
Equitable student success is possible only with the intentional collaboration of key institutional stakeholders.	<p>In colleges and universities, shared governance is a team endeavor. Students, faculty, librarians, administrators, communities, and boards must work together to make racial equity the priority. Effective boards are knowledgeable about what other stakeholders are doing with respect to racial equity efforts, are open to influence, and intentionally support those efforts through board action.</p> <p>The board must work effectively with others and inspire their commitment to racially equitable student success. Boards operate at a unique policy and leadership level: they lead by example, establish policies, set institutional priorities, determine goals and metrics, and select the president. Boards are accountable for institutional performance and success.</p>
Equitable student success efforts must be data informed across the institution.	<p>Boards are ultimately accountable for racially equitable student success in higher education and play a leading role in setting mission and policies, establishing the tuition, and hiring the chief executive. The roles and responsibilities of boards shape institutions for years to come. No other stakeholder has the power to inform long-term, systemic change in the same way.</p> <p>The priorities of the board shape the direction of the institution. Committing the board and institution to achieving racially equitable student success means applying this expectation to the work of the board and its committees, institutional leadership, policies, budgets, strategic plan, communications, faculty, staff, and students. This leadership should be transformational. Equitable student success requires new approaches and sustained effort to eliminate barriers and achieve goals.</p>

Leadership Principles for ESS	Rationale
<p>Equitable student success must be uniquely overseen by the board to address the culture, climate, and aspirations of each institution.</p>	<p>At its essence, racially equitable student success means demographic and socioeconomic factors are no longer predictors of student outcomes and experiences. A focus on racial equity pushes beyond cookie-cutter approaches to access, retention, student experiences, and other factors. Boards must help stakeholders respond to the history, characteristics, and culture of the campus and reflect institutional mission. What that means will vary from one institution to another — from open admissions colleges to research universities, from Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). The legislative context surrounding racial equity work in each state will also need to be considered and the approach to equity work will need to be adapted accordingly.</p> <p>Each board and institution will need to envision and support racially equitable student success for its students through its policies and resource allocation. Boards hold their institutions in trust for future generations and determine the policies, resource priorities, and strategic plans to achieve this goal. It will take new approaches to protect the long-term stability and vitality of the institution and its mission.</p>
<p>Equitable student success requires the board to examine its policies and practices through an equity lens.</p>	<p>There are direct and indirect approaches to centering racial equity in the role of the board. Boards must examine the policies, practices, and procedures they have in place and assess their own norms, habits, and actions with racial equity in mind. To maximize outcomes for all students, transformation has to happen within the board as well as the campus. Changing the composition and structure of the board is important for a number of reasons. Having a diverse board brings distinct perspectives to the table, augments connections to community, and establishes new relationships. The board is also representative of the institution.</p> <p>Board orientation and training introduce new members to the culture and values of the institution and provide continuing board education for all members.</p> <p>The way the board structures and organizes its work in committees focuses the attention of the board on what matters most. Boards may choose to create a committee to elevate and accelerate this work or reexamine the charges of existing committees to embed this essential work in each one. The framing of this committee will be in part determined by institutional mission and context; possibilities include a committee focusing on student success, racial equity, inclusive admissions, and retention, etc. As the board works more effectively and efficiently to achieve racially equitable student success, so will the institution.</p>

Leadership Principles for ESS	Rationale
<p>Equitable student success requires the board's commitment to continuous learning.</p>	<p>Concepts of racial equity and strategies for achieving equitable student success are continuously evolving. Equitable student success requires each board member to commit to continuing education to stay abreast of changes in higher education, demographics, terminology, challenges, and high-impact practices to advance equity and student success. This should be an ongoing focus in the work of the board and its committees. The board should partner closely with the chief equity officer of the institution as well as campus members engaged in equitable student success in and out of the classroom. Leverage experts to stay up to date on effective practices. Board members' deepening knowledge and understanding of equitable student success fuels continued institutional growth.</p> <p>Like other sectors that commit to systemic change and ambitious goals, higher education boards should expect to focus on issues of racially equitable student success on a regular basis. Any industry that seeks transformational change must commit to this work for the long term; reimagining success for all students will require such effort.</p>
<p>Equitable student success leverages a process of continual improvement.</p>	<p>Achieving racially equitable student success is a journey, not a destination. The iterative process requires training for both the "sprint" and the "marathon" at the same time. It requires an unwavering focus on equity-minded student success, attention to the board and other stakeholders, agility, responsiveness, and unwavering commitment. Trustees and other campus stakeholders must be simultaneously aspirational and humble as they engage in the work. The board is responsible for managing and educating itself and allowing and enabling its administrative team to be a part of its continuing education.</p> <p>The board should be proactive and take responsibility for assessing the board and its members. Simultaneously, the board should hold the president, and other senior leaders accountable for advancing racially equitable student success goals. Incorporating the institution's equity and inclusion goals and plans in these evaluative processes is necessary for holding the board accountable. Continual improvement means that the board will not simply stop at assessment; the board will act in response to evaluation findings, changing conditions, and new understandings to more closely align its work with evolving equity goals.</p>

(adapted from AGB, n.d., <https://agb.org/student-success-initiatives/board-oversight-of-equitable-student-success/leadership-principles/>)

CENTERING RACIAL EQUITY INTO BOARD ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The transformative power of these principles becomes clear when we revisit the nine common trustee roles and responsibilities and look at them with the equitable student success lens. If transforming institutions for racially equitable student success is the goal, then “these leadership principles can guide the governing board in exercising consistent oversight, inspiring change, and sustaining this long-term effort” (AGB, n.d.). The next critical step for higher education leaders is to

collaborate to apply these principles to their everyday practices. This hands-on approach will enable us to bridge the gap between theory and practice, ultimately empowering boards to fulfill their vital roles in creating a truly equitable educational landscape for students.

Table 3 outlines equity-centered board roles and responsibilities. It also provides readers with brief examples of some campuses where trustees are informing their work with ESS principles.

Table 3. Common Roles/Responsibilities of Higher Education Boards Using ESS Principles

Nine Board Roles/Responsibilities	Equity-Centered Board Role/Responsibility	Institutional Example
Establishing, disseminating, and keeping current the mission of the institution	Boards represent the values of higher education (Scott, 2018). Higher education trustees should ensure that the institution’s mission explicitly includes a commitment to racial equity, diversity, and inclusion. They should actively promote and communicate this commitment to all stakeholders, fostering an inclusive environment that supports the success of all students, regardless of their backgrounds or identities.	<p>University of Louisville</p> <p>Mission Statement:</p> <p>The University of Louisville pursues excellence and inclusiveness in its work to educate and serve its community through:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. teaching diverse undergraduate, graduate, and professional students in order to develop engaged citizens, leaders, and scholars; 2. practicing and applying research, scholarship, and creative activity; and 3. providing engaged service and outreach that improve the quality of life for local and global communities. The university is committed to achieving preeminence as a premier anti-racist metropolitan research university. <p>Vision Statement:</p> <p>The University of Louisville will be recognized as a great place to learn, a great place to work, and a great place in which to invest because we celebrate diversity, foster equity, and strive for inclusion.</p> <p>Source: https://louisville.edu/about</p>

Nine Board Roles/ Responsibilities	Equity-Centered Board Role/Responsibility	Institutional Example
Selecting, supporting, and assessing the chief executive officer of the institution/system.	Boards should prioritize the selection of leaders who demonstrate a deep understanding of racial equity issues and possess the skills necessary to advance equitable student success. They should provide ongoing support to the CEO in their efforts to foster an inclusive and equitable campus community. Regular assessments of the CEO's performance should include an evaluation of their commitment and actions towards promoting equity.	<p>Arizona Board of Regents</p> <p>Example: CEO compensation dependent on achieving equity goals</p> <p>Sources:</p> <p>https://www.azregents.edu/news-releases/abor-meetinghighlights-board approves-presidents%E2%80%99contracts-risk-goals-asu-and</p> <p>https://public.azregents.edu/News%20Clips%20Docs/Pres. Cruz New Goals.pdf</p>
Co-creating, approving, and monitoring the progress of the strategic plan.	Strategic plans developed by boards should prominently feature goals and strategies that address racialized institutional performance equity gaps and disparities in student outcomes. Boards should actively participate in the co-creation of these plans, ensuring that they reflect the institution's commitment to equitable student success. Regular monitoring of progress should include a focus on the implementation and impact of equity-related initiatives.	<p>Prairie View A&M and Texas A&M System Board of Regents</p> <p>Example: Comprehensive strategic plan to address access and affordability</p> <p>Sources:</p> <p>Governing Board Best Practices for College Affordability, https://www.pvamu.edu/wpcontent/uploads/2017/10/StrategicPlan_Web.pdf</p>

Nine Board Roles/ Responsibilities	Equity-Centered Board Role/Responsibility	Institutional Example
Ensuring the institution's fiscal integrity, preserving, and protecting its assets for posterity, and engaging directly in fundraising and philanthropy.	With an racial equity lens boards should prioritize resource allocation and fundraising efforts that support equitable student success. This includes directing financial resources towards scholarships, support services, and initiatives that address systemic barriers faced by marginalized and underrepresented students.	<p>Saint Mary's College</p> <p>Example:</p> <p>Every new equity and inclusion initiative receives funding or fundraising support from board and advancement.</p> <p>Source:</p> <p>https://www.saintmarys.edu/inclusion-and-equity</p>
Ensuring the quality of education provided by the institution.	Boards must hold the institution accountable for providing a high-quality education that is accessible and equitable for all students. They should request, review, and assess data on student outcomes, retention rates, and graduation rates disaggregated by race/ethnicity and other demographic factors, taking proactive measures to address disparities and ensure that students with a diverse range of identities have equal opportunities to succeed.	<p>Xavier University of Louisiana</p> <p>Example: Xavier was ranked #4 in social mobility and remains the top preparer of Black students for medical school.</p> <p>Xavier is “committed to admitting a certain percentage of “at-risk” students who exhibit the will to succeed.” Please see rankings and distinctions page that showcases Xavier as a national leader in the sciences and liberal arts. https://www.xula.edu/about/factsandfigures/index.html</p> <p>Sources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • https://www.xula.edu

Nine Board Roles/ Responsibilities	Equity-Centered Board Role/Responsibility	Institutional Example
Safeguarding both the autonomy of the institution and the related tradition of academic freedom requires that boards protect academic freedom.	It is critical that higher education continue to be characterized by diversity of thought around all manner of issues and commitment to aiding students in developing competencies for critical and inclusive dialogue. <i>There is nothing contradictory in trustees supporting academic freedom and efforts to diversify the curriculum, promote inclusive and racially equitable pedagogical approaches, and create a campus environment that values diverse perspectives and experiences.</i>	<p>Brown University</p> <p>Was one of the first institutions to examine and make public its history with slavery in this report and website.</p> <p>Report: https://digitalpublications.brown.edu/projects/first-readings-2020</p> <p>Website: https://simmonscenter.brown.edu/</p>
Ensuring that the policies and processes of the institution remain current and are properly implemented.	Boards must take responsibility for shaping an equitable campus environment that supports the success of students. By aligning institutional policies, practices, and processes with racial equity, boards acknowledge their role in providing fair opportunities and inclusive environments for students, regardless of their backgrounds.	<p>University of Alaska</p> <p>Example: The University of Alaska Board of Regents committed to addressing barriers to the success of Alaska Native students and set new reporting requirements and goals for the system head and institutions.</p> <p>Sources:</p> <p>“The Board of Regents establishes understanding and addressing racial justice issues as a board priority. As a first step, the board authorizes and directs the university president to take the necessary actions to collect data; study and understand the university climate and programming; and identify the barriers, challenges, and opportunities to improve participation and outcomes for Alaska Native and Indigenous students, faculty, and staff.... This motion is effective November 6, 2020.” Read the full report. https://go.boarddocs.com/ak/alaska/Board.nsf/files/C38QDU66257F/\$file/UA%20Alaska%20Native%20Success%20-%20June%202021%20BOR%20Report.pdf</p>

Nine Board Roles/ Responsibilities	Equity-Centered Board Role/Responsibility	Institutional Example
Engaging regularly with the institution's major constituencies.	Accordingly, boards should actively seek input from and engage with diverse student populations, faculty, staff, alumni, and community partners. They should create opportunities for meaningful dialogue and collaboration, ensuring that the voices of diverse communities are heard and valued in the decision-making processes.	Virginia Commonwealth University Example: The Virginia Commonwealth University Board of Visitors established a Committee on Commemorations and Memorials to conduct extensive listening sessions and examine and make recommendations regarding Confederate names and symbols on or adjacent to campus, then took action to decommission them. Sources: https://agb.org/trusteeship-article/extraordinary-board-leadership/
Ensuring that the board's business is conducted in an exemplary fashion, that its governance policies and practices are kept current, and that the performance of the board, its committees, and its members are periodically assessed.	Boards should regularly evaluate their governance policies and practices through a racial equity lens. They should assess their own performance in advancing equitable student success and ensure that board members receive the necessary training and education to effectively fulfill their roles. Boards should strive to be models of equity-centered governance, embodying the principles they advocate for within the institution.	Adler University Example: The Adler University Board of Trustees committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) goals for student success and undertook changes to board composition, orientation, and ongoing training in DEI to address its own role in remedying structural racism. Sources: https://agb.org/trusteeship-article/extraordinary-board-leadership/ https://www.adler.edu/2022/01/26/adler-university-board-of-trustees-named-recipient-of-2022-john-w-nason-award-for-board-leadership-by-association-of-governing-boards/

As **Table 3** illustrates, the board's role in prioritizing racial equity is not a radical departure from its existing responsibilities but rather a nuanced framing that elevates the importance of what has always been important — ensuring fairness, justice, and equal opportunities for all individuals within the institution. While the concept of racial equity may be receiving increased attention in recent years, the governing board must

recognize that the principles it embodies are not new. As stewards of the institution's mission and values, the governing board has long been responsible for promoting the best interests of the institution and its stakeholders. By actively incorporating an equity-minded lens, the board critically examines policies, processes, and resource allocation to identify and dismantle systemic inequities. The board plays a crucial role in ensuring that

racial equity is at the forefront of institutional priorities. It sets the tone, establishes policies, and holds institutional leadership accountable for advancing equity goals. This combined framework for action has the power to be transformative for institutions and for students.

THE EQUITY-MINDEDNESS JOURNEY FOR BRIDGEWATER STATE UNIVERSITY TRUSTEES: A CASE STUDY

What follows is a case study of Bridgewater State University (BSU) in Massachusetts and the process we are engaged in to center equity-mindedness into the work of the board of trustees. Readers will note that the work has been intensive, iterative, and transformative, occurring over nine years. While every campus will have a different journey as they center equity-mindedness into the work of the board of trustees, the case study that follows provides an overview of the change process used, trustee actions taken, questions asked, and how equity-mindedness is being integrated into regular trustee roles and responsibilities. We connect the ongoing work of BSU to the nine common trustee roles and the Equitable Student Success (ESS) Model (AGB, n.d.) that was just delineated. We also summarize six emerging practices that are intended to offer ideas for consideration for trustees from multiple contexts.

INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

Over the past decade, Bridgewater State University has experienced a period of extraordinary growth and transformation. Total student enrollments have surged by nearly 50%: Student of Color enrollment has increased to 28.5% overall – a 70.7% increase in 10 years. BSU is the 10th largest four-year college or university — public or private — in Massachusetts. Bridgewater graduates nearly 2,500 students every year and has more than 75,000 alumni worldwide. In 2015, The Education Trust (2015) ranked BSU as

a national leader in addressing institutional performance gaps resulting in a decrease in racialized student outcomes. Very recently, the Chronicle of Higher Education (2021) ranked BSU as ninth in the nation among institutions in our mission class for six-year graduation rates for undergraduate Black undergraduate students who began their studies in 2013.

In Massachusetts, trustees for public universities and community colleges are appointed by the governor using nominations from the institutions and the public at large. They can be reappointed for a second five-year term at the discretion of the governor. Appointed trustees are successful leaders in business and industry but typically do not have higher education professional experience; one of the trustees is an alumni member elected by their peers. The boards also have student trustees elected by students at each campus for one-year terms who are voting members. At the time of this writing, the board of trustees (BOT) at BSU has 11 members, seven are male, with three being Black males. There are four female board members who are all White. There are no Latinx members although this is the fastest growing population in Massachusetts. When this article was being written, the Board Chair (Jean MacCormack) was a White female with a history of senior leadership in higher education.

BSU was established in 1840 by Horace Mann as one of the first normal schools in America. The work of the campus is imbued with the ethos expressed by the institutional motto “not to be ministered unto but to minister.” And while educational equity is found in BSU’s institutional beginnings, the work was catalyzed by President Adrian Tinsley (who served from 1989-2002) and President Dana Mohler-Faria (who served from 2002-2015). Both took substantive steps to prioritize diversity, inclusion, and student success at

BSU. However, the current journey to equity-mindedness for trustees at Bridgewater State University began with the appointment of President Frederick W. Clark in 2015. Responding to the board's call for a leader committed to diversity and inclusion, during his interview process, the president clearly expressed his desire to lead an institution that was committed to each student's success. As an alumnus of BSU, he was convinced that the university had the will and the capability to ensure that every student who entered could persist, graduate, and go on to a successful career and engaged citizenship through the focused work and attention of everyone at BSU.

ESS PRINCIPLE: EQUITABLE STUDENT SUCCESS IS POSSIBLE ONLY WITH THE INTENTIONAL COLLABORATION OF KEY INSTITUTIONAL STAKEHOLDERS.

Infused through his application process in 2015, Frederick Clark emphasized that he would embrace and build upon the momentum of the institution's successful efforts to address and eliminate institutional performance gaps between Students of Color and White students at BSU. He spoke with passion and commitment about fully actualizing this mission imperative and declared that the focus of his presidency would be "supporting the success of every student, one student at a time — without exception." Having been educated during the search process about the value of diversity and the necessity of ensuring every student's success, the board responded positively to this catalyzing commitment and selected him as the new president and embraced his call to action. In addition, the board became much more self-aware, recognizing that its composition was not as diverse as it needed to be.

In 2016, the president, the senior leadership team and the board adopted, signed, and published a values statement emanating from a group of faculty leaders on campus.

Bridgewater State University reaffirms the values of our community as a welcoming, compassionate, and intellectually rigorous learning, working, and living environment. We reject all forms of bias, discrimination, xenophobia, and violence. We commit ourselves to actions that put into practice our individual and institutional values of diversity, inclusion, and equity (Bridgewater State University, n.d.).

Did the board fully understand what this meant in terms of realizing racial equity and fully transforming themselves and the campus for student success? No, not at that time; but the board publicly embraced the values and welcomed the challenge. The board did integrate equitable student success into the annual presidential evaluation process, and it began to discuss equitable success as a key part of BSU's mission. These were important first steps in the journey to normalize the work for equity campus-wide as the "BSU way."

As his first act in his role, President Clark created the division of Student Success, Equity and Diversity and appointed a vice president to lead it. The creation of this division was charged with collaborating with faculty, librarians, and staff campus-wide on issues of student success, diversity, and equity. It was a notable structural change, that clearly indicated that the president was prioritizing the success of every student. Very often, this work is assigned to campus affirmative action or diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) offices on campuses with no direct access to the President and with a limited scope of authority (Kezar, et al., 2022). This new structure premised in collaboration across the institution

put equity, diversity, and student success front and center and made it clear that everyone was needed to move this agenda forward (Holcombe et al., 2022; Kezar & Posselt, 2020). Further, this action signaled that resources would be made available campus-wide to scale the work for equity-minded student success (Mullin, 2020), thereby taking an important step towards institutionalizing these efforts (Elrod, et al., 2023).

The president also asked the board chair to create a board committee on student success and diversity so that the board could be fully aware of these efforts and be engaged and ultimately supportive of the developing change process. The board chair appointed trustees to this committee who embraced diversity and inclusion values and who he thought were critical influencers on the board of trustees (BOT). If changes were to be proposed to achieve equitable student success, he wanted to be sure that the trustees were aware, informed, and ready to act. In a very clear way, this new board committee prioritized diversity and student success and made clear these issues were part of trustees' assigned advocacy and accountability duties.

A foundational task in advancing the work was ensuring that the campus had a shared definition of what was meant by "student success." Some campus members were worried that the emphasis on equity meant lowering standards so all students could succeed. Others felt it meant including diverse perspectives in their curricula and teaching. Some even worried that it meant becoming less focused on the liberal arts and science and becoming more vocational. Many thought it was just about creating a welcoming and inclusive community for diverse students. Everyone thought they "knew" what student success meant, but there was no real actionable consensus.

An inclusive and intensive process involving hundreds of students, faculty, librarians, staff, and trustees generated a clear, collaborative definition of student success that had implications for the work ahead. If everyone really had a role in supporting each student's success, then mobilizing the campus around a shared understanding was critical. What is notable about BSU's definition of student success is that it includes more measures focused on assessing institutional performance serving students rather than on those focused on individual student-level outcomes (Bridgewater State University, 2017). The campus clearly committed to deepening its work to move from asking students to be college ready to ensuring that as an institution BSU is student ready (McNair, et al., 2016).

The process of establishing a shared definition for student success built on the campus' existing commitment to educational excellence, student success, and addressing and closing disparate student outcomes. For some years the campus had been engaging in data-informed work in order to advance the success of our students. The data infrastructure at this time provided some clarity as to needed next steps, but our data practices of looking at all Students of Color in aggregate and comparing their outcomes to White students, for example, provided an incomplete view of our institutional performance gaps and the next necessary steps.

ESS PRINCIPLE: EQUITABLE STUDENT SUCCESS EFFORTS MUST BE DATA INFORMED ACROSS THE INSTITUTION.

New questions began to be asked in campus discussions: "Are there unexamined institutional barriers to success for students contributing to drop-out and stop-out rates that BSU could rectify? What disparate academic outcomes exist, and what do these

patterns tell us about the campus' performance in serving specific groups of students? Since the structure and norms of most higher education institutions were originally developed to serve affluent White males (Cabrera et al., 2017; Evatt-Young & Bryson, 2021), what needs to change in how we do business to ensure we are meeting the needs of students from diverse identities?"

When BSU started asking itself these questions, it was clear that we needed to engage in more data disaggregation in order to catalyze equitable student success (Dowd et al., 2018; McNair et al., 2021). Additionally, it became apparent that data from all sources — financial, student profile, financial aid, academic outcomes, credit load, etc. — needed to be better coordinated to get a full picture of what was happening. Once we could see “what,” we could delve into “why,” using inclusive, transparent equity-minded sense-making and action planning (Gentlewarrior & Paredes, 2021; McNair et al., 2020). These efforts were greatly facilitated by institutional research staff firmly committed to equitable student success (McLaren-Poole, 2021).

Over time, BSU developed a statistical model that is used for identifying students potentially at risk for non-persistence (McLaren-Poole, 2021). A range of data-informed student success strategies were developed and are being assessed to serve students including: equity-minded teaching and learning strategies; the expansion of open educational resources; designing racially equitable high impact practices; implementing summer bridge and transition programs for students at risk for non-persistence; addressing students' financial needs; creating strategies for ensuring we listen to Students of Color about their campus experiences and act on what we hear.

The faculty and staff engaged in these initiatives presented their work to the trustees and shared their successes and raised issues that needed further attention. Trustees engaged in equity-minded sense-making (McNair et al., 2020) with these campus equity leaders by asking questions such as: “How does this differ from how we used to do things? What students are being helped by this work? What students are still not benefiting from these practices? What changes in policies and practices are occurring because of what we are learning from this work?”

The data-informed discussions were important; the questions asked about the data and its meaning were central (Baxter, 2020). These types of dialogues about student success with faculty and staff and the trustees both serves to educate the board members but also telegraphs to the broader campus audience that trustees know about and seek to use their role to advance the work for equitable student success.

ESS PRINCIPLE: EQUITABLE STUDENT SUCCESS IS MISSION CRITICAL AND STRATEGY-CENTRIC.

In an important step designed to institutionalize the work, equitable student success became the first goal in the BSU Strategic Plan finalized in 2018. Through an inclusive and extensive collaborative process, BSU institutionalized its commitment to equitable student success as a primary focus for campus-wide activities. Clear objectives and measurable outcomes were outlined. The trustees were engaged in the process of plan development with many other campus constituents. The trustees enthusiastically approved the plan and set up a regular schedule for reports on progress for this and all the other goals. The preamble to the strategic plan stated the following:

Student success is the highest priority at Bridgewater State University. As the institution looks to 2027; its vision centers on an interdivisional, university-wide commitment to access, opportunity, and diversity, building on demonstrated success in reducing achievement gaps over the past 10 years. Bridgewater will be the leader in student success outcomes in its mission class, advancing its goals through data-driven decision making, program review and strategic planning. The institutional plan aligns resources and decisions to eliminate gaps, create pathways to degree completion, support student wellness and provide access to high-quality, affordable education” (Bridgewater State University, 2018).

Readers interested in reviewing this plan will note that while the institution clearly commits to the work for equitable student success, the language used (i.e. achievement gap) reflects a deficit frame and that equity was largely focused on in the final goal of the strategic plan, which did not yet have clearly defined goals to measure the institution’s work in this area. As the institutional efforts have progressed, these issues were addressed, and one can see that in the next institutional strategic plan that measurable racial equity objectives are infused into each of the five institutional strategic priorities (Bridgewater State University, 2024).

ESS PRINCIPLE: EQUITABLE STUDENT SUCCESS IS TRANSFORMATIONAL. TRANSFORMATION REQUIRES BOARD INVOLVEMENT.

The murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor had a galvanizing effect on the ongoing work across the nation and at BSU. These tragic deaths followed by national protests brought issues of racial justice and

equity into sharp national and local focus. Twenty of BSU’s Students of Color met with President Clark just a few days after George Floyd’s death and told him that while they felt welcome at BSU and believed the campus wants them to succeed, on matters of race and equity “you need to do better” (Santiago et al., 2021). While other presidents and campuses at this time simply made statements of support for racial justice and then pivoted to focusing solely on pandemic-related concerns (Misra et al., 2021), President Clark formed the BSU Racial Justice Taskforce to assess how BSU could continue to transform itself. The taskforce, with 70 members from across the campus and external communities, was co-led by two senior campus leaders and a trustee. Having trustee leadership for a management task on campus was unusual, but because BSU benefitted from having a senior African American trustee with expertise in this work who was willing to serve, we were able to convey the trustees’ commitment to understanding and sharing leadership responsibility for these critical issues. The taskforce’s charge was expansive: identify obstacles to racial equity at BSU and offer recommendations to aid the campus in becoming more racially just.

The taskforce involved input from 1,000 additional members of the campus and made 72 major recommendations in the areas of teaching and learning, student service provision, campus policing, creating safe processes for addressing racialized bias and human resources practices (Bridgewater State University, 2021). To ensure that the work advances in measurable ways, the Racial Justice Taskforce called for presidential and trustee leadership to ensure that the recommendations were implemented. Upon receiving the taskforce report, President Clark elevated the role of provost to include the title and duties of executive vice president

in order to aid in coordinating the progress on the recommendations and to amplify the importance of the academic enterprise in the work of racial equity at BSU. This served as yet another structural step toward institutionalizing the importance of equity-minded practice across Bridgewater State University.

In addition, understanding that trustees must advocate for equity work and help bring it to scale, members of the board have donated funds to advance the work. One trustee established an endowed fund and helped to raise additional monies to scale effective equitable student success initiatives at BSU. Another trustee established a full scholarship to support Students of Color attending BSU. One trustee offered a matching challenge grant that leveraged 100% participation by trustees in annual fundraising. Trustees are clearly trying to balance their advocacy and philanthropy roles with their accountability responsibilities.

ESS PRINCIPLE: EQUITABLE STUDENT SUCCESS MUST BE UNIQUELY OVERSEEN BY THE BOARD TO ADDRESS THE CULTURE, CLIMATE, AND ASPIRATIONS OF EACH INSTITUTION.

As trustees exercise accountability and advocacy over all the key areas of the institution – academic programs, student activities, enrollment, administration and finance, facilities and capital operations, alumni and development, diversity and student success, university safety and security — bringing an equity-mindset to each of these committee tasks was critical. As one of the clearest demonstrations of equity-minded trustee actions at BSU, a standing committee on Racial Justice and Equity of the board was established. This committee is comprised of all the chairs of the other board committees. This was done to convey that racial justice and equity must be integrated into the work of

all the trustee committees — and the entire campus. The Racial Justice and Equity Trustee Committee receives reports on the progress being made on taskforce recommendations. In addition, every other committee reporting to the board is expected to inform their work with equity-minded practices and report on this in their regular meetings as well.

ESS PRINCIPLE: EQUITABLE STUDENT SUCCESS REQUIRES THE BOARD TO EXAMINE ITS POLICIES AND PRACTICES THROUGH AN EQUITY LENS.

As the trustees have begun to bring equity-mindedness to their committee chair roles, trustee equity advocacy and accountability roles are clearly reflected in the trustee committee minutes and actions. For example, in the Finance and Operations Committee there are discussions of how BSU is offering workshops for diverse contractors in how to effectively compete for contracts with public institutions. Massachusetts law requires that in large contracts at least 8% of the work should be awarded to eligible women and “minority” vendors. Previously, trustees would be told it was difficult to meet that goal because there were not enough participating vendors that met the criterion. Trustees began asking “why is that”? And “what role does BSU have in addressing this”? Campus leaders reached out to minoritized vendors and got feedback that their staff was small, the process to be eligible was onerous, and the Commonwealth payment schedule was difficult for them to manage cash flow. The BSU staff took the initiative to review the qualification process, streamline where they could, provide support and training workshop for vendors, do proactive notification to vendors when a bid was posted, and to suggest ways to facilitate faster payments. The results immediately saw more active participation of diverse vendors, and notable progress in diversifying contracts awarded.

Another example of trustee equity-minded leadership focused on offering supportive accountability around BSU's goal of engaging in equity-minded hiring practices. Trustee questions about diversity of the pools and about BSU outreach strategies to attract candidates are common. Equity training for all BSU employees participating in search processes has been done. We are seeing more diversity in our hiring outcomes. In the Enrollment and Marketing Committee, the trustees are asking about all the channels for outreach to diverse students, and regularly see disaggregated data about outcomes.

In the Academic and Student Affairs Committee, as new programs are being brought forward for approval, trustees are asking about the recruitment profile for the programs and how they will attract diverse students and bring a diverse workforce to future industries in Massachusetts who will recruit from the programs. The provost has reported on DEI workshops for faculty and how curricula in existing programs might be enhanced and has made presentations on a new partnership with the Gardner Institute to transform undergraduate students' first and second year experience from a frame of equity-mindedness.

The trustees in all these committees regularly ask: "Is there something more that we should be doing? What additional resources might we need? How can we institutionalize this effective pilot program? How can we assist?"

Like most campuses across America, BSU is exercising strategic fiscal stewardship in order to meet the challenges in this post-COVID era. BSU has been fortunate in that the campus' racial equity and student success work has garnered attention from an array of external funders interested in supporting the campus' work for equitable student success. This has

allowed campus members to advance the equity-minded intervention of increasing the availability of Open Educational Resources (Davis Foundation). BSU is also engaged in a partnership with Worcester State University and Framingham State University in advancing a five-year National Science Foundation funded project focused on equity-minded hiring and retention practices for STEM faculty. The Lumina Foundation has supported the REJI and the piloting of BSU's Navigator Program offering students who would benefit from additional support and wholistic mentoring in order to aid their success. The Massachusetts Department of Education has awarded BSU numerous grants in recent years to scale the Racial Equity and Justice Institute (REJI) and to further infuse racially equitable practices into BSU's student service provision. Finally, an anonymous donor awarded BSU 1.6 million dollars to scale racial equity work.

Trustees are regularly informed about these externally funded pilots, but also engage in ongoing discussions about how effective efforts can be institutionalized going into the future. It is incumbent upon trustees to be well-informed about externally funded projects intended to advance equitable student success. When these efforts are successful, trustees have a specific role in ensuring that institutional funds are brought to bear to scale and ultimately institutionalize the work. Appropriately resourcing this work with internal and external resources is key in order for equity-minded systemic change to be sustained (Elrod, et al., 2023).

ESS PRINCIPLE: EQUITABLE STUDENT SUCCESS REQUIRES THE BOARD'S COMMITMENT TO CONTINUOUS LEARNING.

Progress on racial equity work has been slow but steady. The work is challenging as unexamined biases and assumptions among

participants surfaced. From time-to-time questions arise about the “quality” of incoming students and whether BSU’s long-standing commitment to educational excellence is being watered down. Once again, the importance of data was illustrated as it clearly showed that not only did the admissions profile of BSU’s students remain steady over the years, but that those programs that utilize equity-minded approaches in their work are reporting that educational excellence has remained but is now more equitably enjoyed (DeOliveira et al., 2021; Shanahan, 2021; Willison et al., 2015; Willison et al., 2016).

Training for the senior leadership team and trustees was offered so a common understanding and language could be developed for talking about diversity, inclusion, belonging and racial justice and equity. Books from national thought leaders on these issues were shared with trustees and discussed, and speakers made in-person and Zoom presentations for trustees and senior leaders. Dr. Raquel Rall’s (2021) scholarship on the importance of centering racial equity into the work of trustees was introduced to BSU’s president, cabinet and trustees and was discussed and began to inform both trustee thinking and the way we approached our work.

In 2019, the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education (MA DHE) worked collaboratively with public institutions of higher education in the Commonwealth to conceive of and launch the Equity Agenda. This bold and transformative charge from our system office made clear that “racial equity is the top policy and performance priority for the Department of Education” (MA DHE, 2019). Representatives from all public institutions in the state collaborated, at the request of the MA DHE, in writing a vision for higher education that provides a blueprint for undergraduate education characterized by racially equitable

tenets and practices (MA DHE, 2022). This then led to the MA DHE releasing the ambitious but utterly attainable 10-year Strategic Plan for Racial Equity which states that the overriding objective of the plan is “eliminating racial disparities in the Massachusetts Public Higher Education System” (2023, p. 4). Representatives from the MA DHE attended numerous BSU board retreats and shared guidance and support that helps to inform BSU’s equity-minded efforts.

The BSU trustees also benefit from the Racial Equity and Justice Institute (REJI). While BSU is the founding institution and convener of the REJI, the campus benefits immensely from this active learning community as member campuses identify effective practices and share them freely. The REJI received its first state appropriation in the 2023 Massachusetts state budget to offer a four-session leadership series for senior campus leaders and trustees focused on enhancing their equity-minded leadership competencies. More than 150 senior leaders participated in the virtual series and the culminating in-person summit where trustees were able to talk with trustees from other campuses about their equity and student success work and their challenges and progress.

ESS PRINCIPLE: EQUITABLE STUDENT SUCCESS LEVERAGES A PROCESS OF CONTINUAL IMPROVEMENT.

While the work of BSU’s trustees is distinctly more equity-minded than in the past, we are mindful of the need for continual improvement. For example, the BSU board is highly cohesive and united in our equity efforts. However, half of our members will be coming to the end of their terms by mid-2024. While we are confident that remaining trustees and senior administrative leaders will continue this work, BSU’s current efforts are still dependent on

having equity-minded people in key roles. What will happen when these individuals cycle out of their roles?

Some of the questions we will need to answer include: “How will BSU’s practices and policies need to be refined to meet the realities of our students’ lives? How can we ensure that the campus is knowledgeable about and feels supported by trustees’ equity-minded efforts? How can trustees continue to engage in the nine roles we are charged with in an equity-minded manner?” Clearly, if we are going to be able to answer these questions, we must engage in continual improvement and change.

EMERGING BEST PRACTICES FOR TRUSTEES

While we have much yet to learn, what follows are six recommendations emanating from Dr. Rall’s research and Bridgewater State University’s experience to date that may be of use to trustees in multiple contexts. As equity-minded scholars and practitioners, we want to stress that we believe that an explicit focus on the realities of racism in the lives of Students of Color is foundational to the work. However, on campuses where speaking openly about the realities of racism is not currently possible, the work for equitable student success can and must still be advanced.

In recognition that trustees in some states must balance the needs of students with legislation that makes centering racial equity in their efforts more challenging, some preliminary thoughts are also offered to these colleagues; we are mindful, however, that those working in these contexts — and the students they serve — are the true experts on how to advance the work in these spaces.

1. Aligning campus and trustee leadership is critical to move racial equity forward.

- Shared leadership is critical
- A collaborative approach to ongoing education and training is most productive
- Developing a shared language and understanding of diversity, inclusion, belonging, racial justice, equity and student success is essential
- Making racial equity everyone’s responsibility takes time

The impetus for racial equity work can come from campus leadership or from trustees but it must be aligned. Trustees are not campus managers; their role is to advocate and hold accountable in the nine key areas of trustee responsibility (AGB, n.d.). However, it is essential that they be in sync with the president and the senior leadership team if progress is going to be made. To do this will require some assessment of the campus along multiple domains. Are the president and the chair of the board of trustees aligned on an equity-minded agenda? Is the senior leadership on board? What are the institutional processes for racial equity being infused and routinized in the work of the campus?

On the trustee side, it is important to keep in mind that the roles are primarily volunteer activity and that trustees will come from various professional backgrounds with various understanding and expertise. They all start from different places in terms of their understanding about how higher education institutions work and certainly from different perspectives on issues of racial equity and student success. Trustee orientation needs to introduce equity-mindedness as a key concept right from the beginning. Professional development on the topic needs to inform as well as provide time for listening and discussion. Assessing where you start from on

equity-mindedness is key to determining the pace and scope of what will be needed to move trustee leadership forward on an equity agenda.

If education and training is needed for trustees and senior campus leadership, we recommend doing this collaboratively to increase dialogue on this shared agenda and to underscore the different roles to be played — campus management and implementation, and trustee accountability and advocacy. We also found the larger group made asking questions easier and encouraged people to see themselves as part of a working team. It also allowed for getting a shared language on diversity, inclusion, belongingness, racial justice and equity and student success. This shared understanding was essential for ongoing communications.

On the campus side, do members across the institution see equity-mindedness as their responsibility? How do you empower and support those with primary responsibility to lead the work? How do they engage the whole campus in the work? How do you make racial equity and student success everyone's responsibility?

Be patient but push forward. For BSU this has been a nine-year journey that is still in process. We recognize that transforming our institutions will be a continuous improvement journey. Celebrate wins and acknowledge missteps, but do not stop moving forward.

For colleagues in states that are facing legislative prohibitions to equity-minded work in higher education, readers are reminded that one of the key tenets of equity-mindedness is that institutions take responsibility to change if our student success efforts fall short (McNair, et. al., 2020). All trustees in every state can and should use their roles to ensure that

their campuses change if they fail to serve all students. Trustees should keep at the top of their agendas active discussion about what campuses are doing to advance student success. Trustees in these contexts can ask: "How do we define student success? How is the institution's responsibility in the success of our students operationalized and assessed?"

2. Recognize that equity mindedness brings major change to your institution.

- Acknowledge this change is necessary and hard
- Ground your equity commitment in your core mission
- Provide a clear value and practical rationale for embracing the work
- Be prepared for dialogue in your context

This work is difficult. It challenges a system that has a long history of racial inequity, and it does not change easily. Resistance, internally and externally, will be present, even from people of goodwill. It requires determination, patience, and persistence. Linking the work to the institution's history and mission is critical. Be prepared to be clear on how it advances your mission. In our case, we made a clear connection to changing demographics to underscore that if we want to serve the students in Massachusetts who look to public higher education as their pathway to success, we had to be better prepared to ensure that racially marginalized students could enroll, persist, and graduate with a high level of knowledge, competency and skill. We also link it to our tradition of service to others, and to our tradition of democratizing opportunity. Each institution has to find this critical linkage so that there is continuity of institutional purpose in this important work.

Trustees in all states can ensure that the mission of the institution explicitly addresses the mandate of serving all students. Goals should be set, advanced, and assessed in order to ensure that students from all identities and lived experiences succeed. By doing so, trustees in challenging institutional contexts will be fulfilling the equity-minded tenet of ensuring that equity-advancing goals are set and advanced (McNair et al., 2020) —even if they are not discussed in this manner. Trustees can ask: “What are our students telling us they need to succeed? And once we have that information how are we making it actionable?” Ensure that students from all social identities are involved in these inquiry efforts.

3. Find a way to mobilize equity-minded leadership both on campus and among trustees.

- Leverage catalyzing events, but do not wait for them to begin the work
- Acknowledge things that need work
- Be as transparent as possible
- Communicate clearly the trustees’ commitment to equity

Higher education institutions are complex, have a life and schedule that is predictable, and have routines that roll on year after year. We have found that it is important to have a catalyzing event at some point to allow the commitment to equity mindedness to be clearly made visible by institutional leadership and trustees. For BSU, the appointment of a new president was that event. For other institutions it could be a new strategic plan, a large gift given to support change, an external event that impacts equity, etc. Use or create an occasion where everyone is invited to the dialogue and to participate in the change process. Open communication on the issue and find a way to make the trustee commitment clear. Trustees have different

visibility levels on different campuses. On this issue, they need to be visible and aligned with the president and senior leadership team.

Trustees in all states can and should request frequent interactions and discussions with members across the institution to explore opportunities for partnering with the campus community in their student success efforts. Trustees can ask: “What are our institutional student success resources and strengths? How can we scale these? How are we encouraging refinement and change in those areas or practices of the university that are not effective in supporting the success of all students? What resources are needed to make these changes?”

4. Institutionalize your commitment to equity.

- Create a clear structure for trustee engagement and action on racial equity
- Link it to the way you normally do your work
- Ground decision-making in data and equity-minded sense-making
- Ensure you have robust, accurate data that is disaggregated by race and ethnicity and other identities

We feel strongly that this work will have leadership champions. But we cannot rely on these champions alone to move the work forward. It is important to create roles and structures that are not person specific, that will remain when people change; these roles and structures should embed the commitment to equity into the working operations of the trustees and the campus. We used our trustee committee structure as the way to embed equity-mindedness, accountability and advocacy. We created new committees. We linked the work of all committees to

racial equity work making the chairs of all other board committees the members of the Racial Justice and Equity Committee. With the president, we also institutionalized a coordinated institutional research and data structure and made disaggregating data a way of doing business at BSU. We have asked senior leaders to engage in active sense-making activities in analyzing data and to make those thought processes visible to the trustees when data is presented. Trustees who previously just received data reports welcome this activity, and readily engage in these meaning making conversations with staff. These conversations also help staff and trustees identify whether additional data and/or action is needed.

In states facing legislative prohibitions to openly conducting equity-minded work, trustees should engage with campus members in sense-making discussions about what is working and for which students. All trustees can fulfill the equity-minded work of asking for data on a regular basis that is disaggregated (McNair et al., 2020) along multiple student identities. The racialized patterns in that data will emerge even if these patterns cannot be openly discussed. Trustees are encouraged to ask questions such as: “What data is available to us and what does it tell us about which students we are effectively serving? Which groups of students are not enjoying the same benefits from the institution in terms of involvement in high impact practices, engagement with co-curricular activities, retention, persistence, graduation, and post-degree social mobility than their peers?” Create structures that elevate student success at the board level. Keep it at the top of agendas and hold the campus — and yourselves — accountable for the work.

5. Learn from others — you do not have to reinvent the wheel.

- Borrow good ideas and practices
- Adapt practices to your context
- Share what you are doing with others

At BSU, we were fortunate to be doing this work in partnership with 38 other institutions through the Racial Equity and Justice Institute. As a coalition, we invite the most prominent racial equity leaders in the country to come and share their insights and ideas with us. We also gather books, articles, and research. We share ideas and strategies with each other and adapt them to meet our own needs. We have visited other campuses to see work in action. We have avoided actions that others had tried and found not to be productive.

The Racial Equity and Justice Institute provides a structure for creating campus-specific racial equity action plans but does not prescribe any strategy. It is also a group of like-minded colleagues who are enthusiastic about this important work. It is a diverse group of colleagues who are not hesitant to challenge each other's racial biases and assumptions in an honest, but helpful way. We recommend that as you do this work, you find a viable partnership, or consortium of colleagues that can be a source of encouragement, ideas, strategies, and experiences that will scaffold your work.

In states where legislation prohibits the use of fiscal resources to be spent on equity-related matters or that limits openly engaging in this work, trustees can still learn from free access materials on equitable student success and apply the information to your context. This article ends with some key resources that may be of use in these efforts.

6. Recognize potential challenges.

- Structural change takes time
- Strategic change is key
- Staying the course is required

For trustees in all states and contexts, changing structures does not happen overnight. Boards of trustees are often comprised of individuals with diverse backgrounds, experiences, expertise, and perspectives. These differences can lead to conflicting agendas or competing priorities when it comes to equity-centered work. Board members may have varying levels of awareness, understanding, or commitment to equity. This divergence can create challenges in building consensus, setting priorities, and implementing effective strategies. Overcoming these conflicts requires open dialogue, education, and efforts to cultivate shared values and goals. Getting all the stakeholders on board takes time. And, even once consensus is reached, change does not manifest as quickly or as noticeably within the bureaucratic higher education environment.

Significant structural change materializes over time. In the context of higher education, where historical systems and entrenched practices can impede change, patience and persistence are key. Board members must be prepared for the long haul and understand that the journey toward equity requires sustained effort and commitment. Further, trustees may not see the results of their efforts during their terms. While progress may seem slow or incremental, it is important for boards to remember that the work of dismantling deeply rooted inequities and reconfiguring structures is long-term work. It involves challenging long-standing norms, addressing power imbalances, and reshaping institutional cultures and practices.

Change must be approached strategically to allow for careful examination, assessment, and adjustment along the way, ensuring that the desired outcomes align with the institution's mission and values. Additionally, a deliberate and steady approach to change helps build trust and credibility. Demonstrating a long-term commitment to the success of all students sends a powerful message to the community that the institution is invested in lasting transformation, rather than pursuing superficial or temporary fixes. This dedication fosters a sense of confidence among stakeholders, encouraging their active participation and support for the board. Though the process may be challenging and at times frustrating, it is essential to remain steadfast in pursuing equity. Reflecting on the progress made, celebrating milestones, and learning from setbacks can help sustain motivation and drive.

CONCLUSION

This chapter serves as a roadmap for empowering boards of trustees to advance equity-minded systemic change in partnership with the campuses they serve. By centering racial equity and recognizing the interconnectedness of fiduciary duties, policies, procedures, norms, cultures, and structures, boards can play a transformative role in shaping organizations and institutions. By examining the experiences and lessons learned from Bridgewater State University, an institution that has made significant strides in centering racial equity in its governance, readers gain valuable insights into actionable strategies and effective practices that can be adapted and implemented in their own contexts.

As emphasized repeatedly in this chapter, boards of trustees must have a clear action plan that centers the most powerful tools board wield — questions. Inquiry is critical

for the board. “Who are our students? What data do we have? What data do we need? What does the data tell us about how we as a campus need to improve to eliminate racialized disparate outcomes? What patterns do we see in which students we are serving and which students we need to better serve? How will our campus need to change to serve these students?”

The work is not simple, but it is necessary and worth it. Moving from intentions to impact, to effectively aligning policies, procedures, norms, cultures, and structures with racial equity principles and practices in higher education requires an inclusive, deliberate, and comprehensive approach that will transform our institutions and support our students. The need for trustee leadership in this work is clear. The outlook is one of hope and possibilities.

KEY RESOURCES:

- The Racial Equity & Justice Institute:
<https://reji-bsu.org/>
- The Equitable Student Success Framework
<https://agb.org/student-success-initiatives/board-oversight-of-equitable-student-success/>

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INSTITUTIONALIZING RACIAL EQUITY ON CAMPUSES: THE ROLE OF PRESIDENTS IN EQUITY-MINDED SYSTEMIC CHANGE

By Frederick Clark, Karen Hynick, Christine Mangino

Keywords: Equity-Minded Presidential Leadership, Racially Equitable Senior Leadership, Shared Equity Leadership

One of the core duties of presidents in higher education is overseeing institutional processes to ensure that students enrolled at their institution succeed (Francis, 2019; Wyner, 2021). In view of the long-standing disparate outcomes experienced by Students of Color in higher education (Bensimon et al., 2016; Dowd, & Bensimon, 2015; Gentlewarrior & Paredes, 2021; Kim et al., 2024; McNair et al., 2021), senior campus leaders will benefit greatly by “making student success and equity synonymous” (Knight, 2023, p. 195).

Equity-minded student success practice in higher education is characterized by a theory of inquiry and change that is: (a) evidence-based; (b) race conscious – particularly as it relates to factors influencing student experience and outcomes; (c) committed to putting the responsibility for needed change on the institution instead of on students experiencing disparate racialized outcomes; (d) cognizant of the impact of historical and current racism on campus members, communities, and society; (e) and committed to setting and advancing measurable racial equity goals (Bensimon et al., 2016; Dowd, & Bensimon, 2015; McNair et al., 2020).

The model of shared equity leadership (SEL) has offered research underscoring the necessity for and process in support of all members of the campus advancing equity within their roles; readers are encouraged to learn more about SEL by reading the chapter titled Shared Equity Leadership Supporting Racially Equitable Culture Change in this handbook (Kezar & Holcombe, 2024). While everyone on a campus has a role to play in advancing equity (Holcombe et al., 2022; Kezar et al., 2022), presidents “are responsible for casting a vision of what transformational change will lead to, how ... it will embrace equity, and what accountability measures will be in place for tracking achievements” (Knight, 2023; p. 187). Presidents/chancellors and CEOs play a “critical role” in communicating transparently and often about the campus’ commitment to racial and other forms of equity; creating and implementing metric driven accountability systems to ensure that equity is advancing; and modelling the values and behaviors of equity-driven leadership (Holcombe et al., 2022, p. 34).

This chapter is a collaboration among two presidents and a CEO, who functions as a president, within an integrated public higher education system who have been actively involved in the Racial Equity and Justice Institute (REJI) along with our campus-based REJI teams. We bring to this collaboration knowledge of our positionalities and the ways in which these social identities influence our work for equitable student success. We all serve in New England, a part of the United States that has not faced extensive legislative effort to curtail the work for racial equity; we recognize our peers leading campuses with this type of legislation face additional challenges as they do this work. Two of us identify as female and one as male. We all are White and benefit from the privilege that racial identity is given in America (Centers for

Disease Control and Prevention, n.d.; Dyer et al., 2023; National Urban League, 2022) and in American higher education (Carducci, Harper & Kezar, 2024; Stead, 2023). We recognize that our roles also afford us greater economic rewards, power, and autonomy as compared to many of our colleagues across higher education engaged in the work for racial equity who are not chief executives. We believe it is our responsibility to use these multiple forms of privilege to advance the work for equity and the success of minoritized students and communities.

As noted by Sheila Edwards Lange (2022), Chancellor of the University of Washington Tacoma, presidents must be able to answer key questions about racial equity on their campuses:

Who are the leaders for the work? Does the campus lead with racial equity, and how is that manifested in programs and other activities? Who is being held accountable for advancing the work? What does your governing board expect, and how much are they engaged? Is your campus community more liberal than the town in which you are located, and how will you address that in town-gown relationships?

By sharing how we are attempting to answer these questions, we hope that the practices offered in the three case studies that follow will serve as a source of affirmation for those already engaged in equity-minded leadership on their campuses. For others some of these ideas may be new and offer potential strategies on behalf of the students you are charged to serve. We will conclude this chapter with joint recommendations for advancing equity-minded systemic change during the course of your presidency.

CENTERING A CULTURE OF EQUITY AND CARE AT QUEENSBOROUGH COMMUNITY COLLEGE

By Christine Mangino, President,
Queensborough Community College

Queensborough Community College is one of seven community colleges within the larger City University of New York system, comprising 25 colleges and schools. Located in Queens, our campus, formerly a 37-acre golf course, offers a park-like setting with beautiful trees and green spaces in our urban borough. Known as “The World’s Borough” Queens is recognized as the most diverse county in the United States, with a population of two million, where 47% were born outside the U.S. and more than 130 languages are spoken.

Our college serves more than 10,000 students in degree programs with additional enrollments through continuing education and workforce development, all of whom represent the borough of Queens. Our degree and certificate students identify as 1% American Indian or Native American, 29% Asian or Pacific Islander, 31% Black, 28% Hispanic, and 11% White. Unusual for a community college, 70% of our faculty hold a doctorate or terminal degree and 71% of our students transfer to four-year colleges upon graduation. Our student population is diverse in various aspects, including 76% take care of family members while pursuing their degree, 38% report a household income under \$30,000, 32% are over the age of 24, 34% attend part time and 40% are the first in their family to attend college. Recognizing that degree obtainment not only impacts our students, but also transforms their families’ lives (Association of American Colleges and Universities 2020), we play a significant part in CUNY’s role as an engine of economic mobility.

FOSTERING A CARING COMMUNITY

The framework of shared equity leadership reminds us that in order to transform our institutions on behalf of the students we serve, key values must be actualized on our campuses including love and care (Kezar & Holcombe, 2024; Kezar et al., 2022). In an effort to cultivate a sense of community and a culture of care for students and those that serve them, I prioritize actions that communicate to our campus members they are valued. For example, I have a beautiful and large balcony outside my office that few people have visited, so we have been holding gatherings, weather permitting, on the balcony for various groups. To ensure everyone feels recognized, I've been sending handwritten birthday cards to each colleague's home. Additionally, we're launching a coffee klatch a couple of times a month, providing a space with complimentary coffee for colleagues to drop by and connect across offices. Complementing our efforts, our picturesque campus now features strategically placed Adirondack chairs. These additions not only enhance the beauty of our surroundings but also create inviting spaces for students to relax between classes. The positive response to these seating areas underscores the importance of fostering a sense of community and inclusivity on our campus.

As part of a broader culture of care initiative, we have instituted a monthly Cares Award, inviting nominations for colleagues who have gone the extra mile to assist a student. Recipients of this award receive recognition through a brief bio on our website, a specialized Cares Award badge for their email signature and a sign to display on their desk. Furthermore, awardees are given the choice of having lunch with me or receiving a gift card for the purchase of QCC swag. This recognition program aims to celebrate and appreciate the outstanding efforts of individuals contributing to the well-being of our community.

PLACING EQUITY AT THE CORE

However, as important as these actions have been it must be acknowledged that minoritized students, faculty and staff rarely feel they are prioritized or fully cared for on our campuses (Bensimon, 2020; Dowd & Bensimon, 2015; Gentlewarrior & Paredes, 2021; McNair et al., 2020). I assumed the presidency in August 2020, amidst the pandemic and in the aftershock of the brutal murder of George Floyd. During my first several weeks on campus and my virtual listening tours with various constituents totaling more than 500 members of our campus, two themes emerged: the first was the systemic racism on campus and the other was the deep-rooted trauma that many were experiencing. Tears were not uncommon in the Zoom rooms. It quickly became clear that the campus needed to engage in practices to share the labor – both emotional (Vigil et al., 2023) and instrumental – that is associated with the equity-minded work being done on campus.

One of the first things I needed to foster was honest conversations around the racialized disparate outcomes experienced by Students of Color attending our campus and acknowledge the very real pain and fear that racially minoritized faculty and staff on campus experienced. These conversations were key to the creation of the campus' inaugural five-year Strategic Plan. Equity was intentionally placed at the core of this plan in order to address the needs of students, faculty, and staff. Key to this strategic planning process was looking at who was being served by our campus, and determining if anyone was being left out of our success efforts. We frequently discussed that students must navigate bureaucratic hoops to apply to college, complete the FAFSA, and register for classes. They come to our campus with the intent to graduate. When they don't graduate, we need to ask ourselves, what barriers have we placed in the students' way

and how do we dismantle those barriers? How do we become student ready (McNair et al., 2016)?

Following Bensimon, Dowd, and Witham's Five Principles for Enacting Equity (2016), instead of blaming students, we examined our practices to see how we are failing Students of Color. The resultant awarenesses were reflected as measurable commitments in our Strategic Plan.

To hold ourselves accountable to equity, one of our working agreements as a cabinet is to always ask ourselves, "Who are we centering in this conversation?" Anyone can ask the question at any time and there have been times where we have had to catch ourselves because we are speaking from a place of power and positionality looking out for the "college" rather than our colleagues or students. This follows the liberatory design thinking principle of ensuring that bias and power are checked before taking action (Culiver et al., 2021).

INFORMING WORK WITH EQUITY-MINDED DATA

The initial steps toward implementing our strategic plan and transforming the campus culture included disseminating disaggregated data by race and gender. The college has a very talented Institutional Research Office and a wealth of data, but the data was not being shared in a meaningful way across the campus. I established a cabinet-level position for Equity, Inclusion and Belonging. This colleague began sharing data across campus relating to institutional performance gaps in retention, persistence and graduation experienced by Students of Color and helped colleagues understand the data from an equity lens. My active participation in these initiatives underscored my commitment to the work. Climate surveys were administered across stakeholder groups. Some of the data

is stark and demands honest reflection and action. Data revealed, for example, that our Black male students were more likely to see themselves reflected in our public safety and buildings and grounds colleagues than in the classroom or administration.

PRIORITIZING STUDENT BELONGING

The literature makes clear that Students of Color typically report feeling they do not belong on our campuses; the emotional and cognitive resources these students must expend to try and navigate our campuses too often decreases the energy they can expend on student success related endeavors (Artze-Vega et al., 2023; Healey and Stroman, 2021; Johnson, 2022). The sense that they neither belong nor matter can decrease the ability of Students of Color to fully succeed in the classroom (Artze-Vega et al., 2023; Strayhorn, 2012). Feeling that one belongs is integrally tied to flourishing and success (Pichère & Cadiat, 2015). Creating an environment where everyone felt they belonged became a priority of my campus leadership.

The journey toward creating a sense of belonging involved truly listening to all of our community members, tailoring support for diverse needs, and taking the time to implement and communicate the work happening. For our Black students we held our first Sankofa celebration last year. The event ended with a Kente Cloth Ceremony. Graduates and their guests crossed the stage and received a Kente stole to wear during commencement. Based on a REJI project that discovered we had a couple of boutique programs that supported our Black and Hispanic male students but that they had little impact because of their isolation, we opened a Male Resource Center, with a full-time director, peer and faculty mentors; the high visibility center offers rich programming to create community and support student success. For

the past two years, we raised a Juneteenth flag with our Black Faculty and Staff Association.

We created flags that say “Welcome!” in the nine most spoken languages on campus (Arabic, Bengali, Cantonese, Creole, English, Korean, Mandarin, Spanish and Urdu) and they fly in the center of campus. A Global Awareness Series has significantly enriched our understanding of the diverse backgrounds and identities within our student body. For instance, among our Asian students, we discovered connections to 60 different countries of birth, while Black students showed ties to 71 countries. White students represented 58 countries, Native Americans had connections to four countries, and Hispanic/Latine students showcased diverse backgrounds spanning 38 countries.

To support Muslim students and employees, we established a Wudu station after realizing that students needed a dedicated place to wash before prayer, rather than using public bathrooms. Additionally, to honor the needs of female students and accommodate religious practices, we installed a second door for the mediation room. We are currently working on having a selection of Halal foods in our cafeteria.

The LGBTQIA+ community is celebrated through the raising of the Pride Flag. I join a cohort of QCC colleagues and students each year in the Queens Pride Parade. So that we can enhance our competencies to advance equity for this community we offer Safe Zone training on a regular basis. I attended our first offering and have added the ally banner in my email signature. We have added the location of the gender-neutral restrooms on our college map and have recently converted additional bathrooms based on recent data that revealed 10% of our students identify as non-cis-gender.

Heritage month celebrations were initiated to create informal gatherings with colleagues across campus. In an effort to institutionalize support for events intended to build an ethos of belonging and care, a Mosaic Fund was established, enabling colleagues to request funding.

INVESTING IN CONTINUOUS LEARNING

During my first semester at the college, I initiated a book club as a means to foster community and enable colleagues to get to know me better. I offer two books each semester and anyone can sign up to participate. To support inclusivity, we choose books with a deliberate focus on works that align with my commitment to equity and the expansion of conversations around race. In the inaugural semester, we read *From Equity Walk to Equity Talk* (McNair et al., 2020) and for the current semester I've chosen *Caste* (Wilkerson, 2023). The complete list of book selections can be found at the link: <https://www.qcc.cuny.edu/president/pbc.html>.

In our commitment to enhance both teaching and learning and ensuring the retention of our Faculty of Color, we established a faculty fellow for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Over the past three years, this initiative has yielded significant outcomes, including the development of anti-racist guidelines designed to prompt faculty to reexamine their curriculum and pedagogy through a more inclusive lens (Smith, 2023). Additionally, we implemented a mentoring program tailored specifically for Faculty of Color, with a special emphasis on supporting untenured faculty. The Association of College and University Educators' semester and year-long programs focused on Inclusive Teaching and Equitable Learning as well as the program titled *Fostering a Sense of Belonging* are offered by our faculty fellow. Notably, 143 colleagues have successfully completed these programs, earning badges as a testament to their commitment to our students.

COMMITTING TO THE LONG-TERM WORK OF EQUITY-MINDED SYSTEMIC CHANGE

Implementing this work demands time, resources, and patience. Following the initial year of implementation, there were concerns expressed across campus regarding the perceived lack of visible changes and the continued prevalence of racism. Recognizing the need for broader support, we identified additional colleagues who could assist us in our daily efforts and in building the necessary structures to sustain these initiatives. Furthermore, we understood the importance of ongoing communication, consistently articulating the progress of our work and emphasizing how it aligns with and contributes to our strategic plan. This ensures transparency and helps maintain a collective understanding of the purpose and impact of our initiatives.

Two years into our strategic plan, positive progress is evident. Institutional performance gaps are closing in student outcomes. One-year retention rates for Black men who began as first-time full-time freshmen increased from 47.4% in fall 2020 to 55.4% in fall 2022. For Hispanic/Latine men, the one-year retention rates increased from 50.6% to 58.5% for the same cohort years. For both groups we have seen higher rates in fall 2022 compared to rates before the pandemic. It should also be noted that I inherited a cabinet that was 89% White people even though our student population is 11% White students; through staff changes and new hires, our executive team is now 78% People of Color, which is much closer to reflecting our student population.

Throughout our efforts, it's crucial to acknowledge that the impact is contingent on those who we actively engage. Despite significant participation in various events among large segments of our population, it

is important to recognize that not everyone on campus is involved in our equity efforts. As we persist in this work, a vital aspect is identifying strategies and activities that broaden participation, along with a continuous commitment to recognizing who might be excluded. It is evident, for example, that not every office has thoroughly examined potential barriers to equitable student success. Thus, our journey continues, and there remains work to be done in ensuring inclusivity and breaking down barriers for all.

ADVANCING EQUITY STATE AND CAMPUS-WIDE

By Karen Hynick, Chief Executive Officer,
Connecticut State Community College,
Quinebaug Valley

Higher education leadership must be rooted in the advocacy and advancement of the students and communities we serve. To effectively lead, one must be informed by disaggregated data and must have the courage to shine a light on and expose inequities when they exist (Holcombe et al., 2022; Johnson-McPhail & Beatty, 2021). Leading is not an individual activity; it requires collaboration, research, buy in, shared vision, assessment, and constant adaptation from the entire campus (Kezar, & Holcombe, 2024). Systemic racism is not a new phenomenon in higher education and eradicating it will require intentionality and an ongoing laser focus on accountability and action. This section of the chapter will share ongoing work occurring state-wide in Connecticut State Community College (CT State) and the campus-specific work occurring at Connecticut State Community College-Quinebaug Valley Campus (CT State-Quinebaug Valley) which I am privileged to lead as chief executive officer.

CONNECTICUT STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

In July 2023, Connecticut State Community College officially became the largest community college in New England, merging the 12 legacy state community colleges into one statewide institution with 22 locations. This act resulted in Quinebaug Valley Community College going from an independently accredited institution to become a campus of the statewide college. This significant transition in our history was more than seven years in the making with a goal of improving efficiencies and service to and outcomes of our students.

Recognizing the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion, Connecticut State Community College embedded The Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (ODEI) to lead and support college-wide initiatives focused on the recruitment and well-being of a diverse faculty, staff, and student body while fostering an inclusive and equitable community at Connecticut State Community College. The inaugural vice president of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion serves on the president's cabinet and is a direct report to the president of the college.

Creating systemic change is a multifaceted endeavor, requiring true intentionality, equity minded leadership, and a multi-year timeline, with many checkpoints along the way to ensure continuous institutional progress is being assessed and areas of continuous improvement are routinely identified (Dowd & Elmore, 2020; Dowd et al., 2018; McNair et al., 2020). At CT State, part of our institutional practice to create systemic change and prioritize our focus areas includes the use of leadership action teams, which are a subgroup of our president's cabinet and including members of our leadership council. One of the leadership action teams advises and oversees diversity, equity, and inclusion

initiatives college wide. Five of the 12 campus chief executive officers; the vice president of diversity, equity and inclusion; the associate vice president of finance; and the associate vice president of academic operations serve on this group. We meet monthly and provide guidance and assessment of where the college needs to focus attention and resources related to DEI. This group was instrumental in utilizing the Seven Strategic Pillars of Equity that the Connecticut State Community College and Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU) use to hold us accountable. These guidelines include focusing on equity in recruitment, hiring, and talent development; using a model of collective leadership; committing to being accountable to the communities we serve; investing in learning around cultural competencies; innovating through the use of disaggregated data focused on supporting equitable student success; advocating for inclusion and equity in practices and policies; and assessing and reflecting "to ensure that all established policies and practices are anti-racist, close existing equity gaps, and support social mobility ... to improve student outcomes particularly for low-income and racially minoritized populations" (Connecticut State, n.d.).

In our inaugural year, the group prioritized launching our climate survey, scheduled for April 2024, to establish baseline data and to identify areas for continuous improvement and to give our students' and employees' voice in our progress and in our culture. Once the study is conducted and the data is gleaned, it will be analyzed collegewide and disaggregated by campus. Training and professional development will be co-planned by our campus and collegewide diversity, equity and inclusion committees and be a priority focus for next year.

Using these principles along with the engagement of our campus and collegewide communities, our Transitional Strategic Plan was crafted and prioritizes three goals where diversity, equity and inclusion are embedded in our aspirations and measured in our benchmarks of accountability:

- Provide students an accessible high quality and affordable educational experience.
- Achieve equity in student outcomes and workforce cultural representation.
- Strengthen internal community and external community relations.

CONNECTICUT STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE-QUINEBAUG CAMPUS

As one of the 12 legacy community colleges, Connecticut State Community College-Quinebaug Valley Campus (CT State-Quinebaug Valley) is located in the quiet corner of Northeastern Connecticut and has proudly served the population of Windham County since 1971. With its primary campus situated in Danielson, Connecticut, and a satellite location that was recently reopened in May 2023 in Willimantic, Connecticut, the college is the only public open access post-secondary institution in the region.

Windham County is both the least populated and poorest county in the state of Connecticut. The county is 86.5% White, 2% Black/African American, 9% Hispanic, and 2.5% Multiracial. CT State-Quinebaug Valley serves a more diverse population than resides in their service area. Seventy percent of our students are White, 17% Hispanic, 4% Black/African American, 4% Multiracial, 1.5% Asian, and 3% unspecified. Our employees identify as 74% White, 4% Hispanic, 2.5% Black/African American, 0.5% Multiracial, and 15% unspecified.

In a rural area, our campus has historically served as our region's cultural center, offering a variety of programming to build cultural competency and creating a safe venue for building understanding and appreciation of one another's backgrounds and experiences across our community. The people in our region are proud, hard-working people who like every corner of America represent a range of political thought, lived experiences and perspectives. Our college, like our community, represents a continuum of understanding related to matters of race, equity and justice and is a work in progress.

CT State-Quinebaug Valley has long been engaged in numerous diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives to promote student success and improve our student outcomes for all segments of our student population. In 2021, our college joined the Racial Equity and Justice Institute (REJI) to elevate our training of our faculty, staff, and administrators and to plan our next steps on how to continuously improve our work to address systemic racism and strengthen our equity outcomes. When the college joined the REJI, we were an independently accredited institution and integrated this work with our existing Student Success Council. During our first year, 20 faculty and staff participated in trainings offered through our membership in REJI. As a small campus, this equates to 20% of our full-time employees going through training. The importance of this was creating a critical mass of employees engaged in equity-minded competency development and action planning. This would prove pivotal for our efforts. After examining our disaggregated institutional data, the campus' REJI team identified four goals that they believed would begin to move the needle in our work.

FACILITATING LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY OF FACULTY AND STAFF IN ORDER TO SUPPORT STUDENTS

First, we focused on providing access to a free conversational Spanish course for interested employees to increase their competency and fluency with the language. In large part the team identified this need based on our Willimantic satellite site. Our Willimantic campus has a sizeable Spanish speaking population and only a few of our faculty and staff are bilingual which can be a challenge for our Willimantic student population. We were aware that having additional campus members that could converse in students' primary language would increase their sense of belonging and potentially foster their success (Castro, & Calzada, 2022). This opportunity was offered over the lunch hour and six of our colleagues participated in this class and gained additional fluency. We anticipate working to continue this practice as it is simply too new to draw significant conclusions from this workshop, but faculty and staff who participated self-report their belief that their additional fluency in Spanish is helpful to their connection with our Spanish speaking students and helps them to be more effective servicing students' needs.

ENGAGING IN EQUITY-MINDED DATA-DRIVEN SENSE-MAKING AND CHANGE

Second, our team led a book club opportunity for 14 faculty and staff to read and dialogue on the book *From Equity Talk to Equity Walk: Expanding Practitioner Knowledge for Racial Justice in Higher Education* (McNair et al., 2020). These dialogues led to our institutional researcher offering a monthly brown bag lunch series on our institutional data for interested colleagues to familiarize themselves with our campus data.

The book discussion and the trainings led to the faculty co-chair recommending that our

faculty members be offered access to examine their own course level data. Following this recommendation, three faculty members worked with our institutional researcher to view and analyze their own course level data related to student outcomes based on race. Based on the positive response from our REJI and Student Success Council on the training, the team developed a follow-up data driven professional development session for all full-time faculty. The faculty chair of our REJI and Student Success Council and another brave faculty member of our team, led the training using their own disaggregated course level data on student outcomes. They walked their colleagues through how to review the data and their reflections and conclusions they saw from an individual faculty perspective and the questions of continuous improvement that it led them to ask themselves. At this training, all full-time faculty then were provided with their course level data to review, disaggregated by sub populations aligned to the populations covered in our Equity Audit Report. Our faculty were given time to individually and collectively reflect on their own outcomes and the additional questions the data asked them to ponder as it related to equity.

CONDUCTING AN EQUITY AUDIT AND STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

Understanding the importance of campus accountability, our team focused efforts on creating our first Equity Audit Report and chose to disseminate the findings during our opening day all staff meeting in August 2022. This comprehensive report included a review of our data on key performance indicators for both student outcomes and for employee outcomes disaggregated by race, first generation status, gender, age, income level and disability. This information was gathered to establish a baseline to begin to track subsequent years' data for reasons of accountability and continuous improvement.

Our equity audit in 2022 gave us a much clearer understanding of who our students are — allowing us to be better equipped to serve them. Thirty-three percent of our students are first generation students, 58% of our Hispanic students are first generation versus 28% of our White students. Sixty-five percent of our students are part time students including 68% of our Hispanic students, and 76% of our Black and Asian students. This was particularly important to note, as the Pledge to Advance Connecticut (PACT) program was designed as the state’s tuition-free college program as a last dollar in program, initially required students to be full time to receive the PACT scholarship. Our data showed that 19.5% of our students in 2022 were PACT recipients, 21% of White students received PACT versus 10.5% of Black students, 12.9% of Hispanic students and 4.8% of Asian students. Fortunately, in 2023, the Connecticut legislature reviewed similar trend data among all of the community college campuses and listened to the collective feedback from local communities and adjusted the requirements for PACT to open access to students who attend part time.

The equity audit also revealed key student success milestones where there were identified institutional performance gaps (Bensimon & Spiva, 2022). For instance, 37% of our students pass a college level math course in their first year, yet this is true for only 25% of our Hispanic students. When we reviewed the data regarding passing a college level English class in the first year, 48% of our students pass college English in the first year, whereas 32% of Hispanic students do. Clearly, the campus needs to improve on behalf of our students. This information led us to look to implement embedded tutors into our courses to help improve student success rates. We will be monitoring the effectiveness of our efforts going forward.

Together, we engaged in our Equity Audit Report and the college-wide equity-minded sense-making. The results helped us understand (a) what our baseline was, (b) how we were performing, (c) to identify students we were not yet fully serving. From this work, the college has continued to monitor progress related to our equity audit findings and are planning to share our data again in the opening days of 2024-2025 with a similar type of training.

As leaders we must acknowledge the historical, social, and economic context that systemic racism has had on Students of Color attending our campuses. We must use our voice and influence to define the issue of inequities both implicit and explicit and identify how to change the current frame, identify what needs to be done, who needs to do it and the value of changing. For this reason, I named the murders of Black and Brown people and the rising discrimination and hate crimes targeting the Asian American and Pacific Islander communities in my preamble to the campus’ strategic plan for years 2022-2027. Doing so, signaled to campus members and all campus constituents that read our strategic plan that the campus is committed to equity-minded institutional transformation (Rodriguez, & Escobar, 2023). The plan includes a commitment that the campus will “embrace equity and antiracism as a framework and cultivate a sense of belonging” which was a new focus guiding our work (https://qvcc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/26jan2022_strategic-plan_22_27.pdf).

PRIORITIZING EQUITABLE STUDENT SUCCESS IN OUR BUDGET DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Like many colleges, CT State as a whole and CT State-Quinebaug Valley individually are dealing with challenging fiscal climates with declining enrollment, inflation, and changes

to state funding. As a result, we must balance these challenges with understanding the importance of prioritizing budget resources for additional wrap around student support services to help better address the unique needs of the multiple populations that we serve, including expanding access to embedded tutoring in courses with high DFWI rates, holistic advising, expansion of access to our food pantry, and strengthening our academic and student alert system. Research has long shown the importance of these student success practices for our populations.

In a time of significant budget challenges, CT State prioritized having mental health counseling on campus; while this will help all students, we are mindful of the mental health concerns experienced by Students of Color due to systemic racism (Mathews, 2023). Through a philanthropic donation of the building to the state, CT State Quinebaug Valley reopened its downtown Willimantic campus with plans to expand full programs to this community, beginning with practical nursing, slated to launch in spring 2025. As this campus and its curricular and student support resources are developed, we are guided by the knowledge that 40% of the Willimantic community is Hispanic. CT State-QV is expanding resources to support students and community members served by this campus in a culturally affirming and linguistically proficient manner premised in the cultural wealth of these students (Yosso, 2005).

CHARTING OUR NEXT STEPS

From a statewide college perspective, we will be revisiting a number of our policies and procedures through a racial equity lens and making changes based on this equity-minded audit. In addition, in the next year, our campus will focus our efforts to expand programming to include a symposium series on Courageous Conversations, launch student focus groups

to garner a deeper understanding and context needed to better understand the necessary elements to support students experiencing the impact of our institutional performance gaps, update our progress regarding our equity audit baseline data, and provide additional professional development for faculty and staff to understand and act on equity-oriented data. We look forward to our ongoing efforts at the campus and state-wide levels as we engage in this work on behalf of the students we serve.

ADVANCING EQUITABLE STUDENT SUCCESS AT BRIDGEWATER STATE UNIVERSITY THROUGH EQUITY-MINDED PRACTICE

By Frederick Clark, President, Bridgewater State University

“Supporting the success of every student – without exception” is both the aspiration of Bridgewater State University (BSU) and the ethos of my presidency. As a first-generation student from a modest income family, it was my good fortune to attend and graduate from Bridgewater State University and 32 years later to become its 12th president. BSU, the 10th largest institution of higher education in Massachusetts, is proud to be a state and national leader for providing all of our students with an exceptional education at an affordable price, leading to their social mobility (<https://www.bridgew.edu/Wall-Street-Journal-Best-College>) as they create the lives and careers of their choosing.

In fall 2023, BSU had a total enrollment of 9,550. Students of Color comprised 28% of our student enrollment, with Black and Latine/Hispanic students comprising 9% of our student body each. LGBTQIA+ students, our fastest growing student group on campus, are 14% of our student body. Pell-eligible students comprise 31% of our enrollment. We are proud that 47% of our students are first in their family

to enroll at a four-year campus; seeing these students graduate with multiple generations of their families in attendance at graduation day is a highlight for our whole institution.

I know from my own experience about the transformative role of a liberal arts education. Over the years, this has been confirmed in conversations with hundreds of students and their families, and countless employers in our region who confirm that a liberal arts education, like that provided at Bridgewater State University, prepares students for our knowledge-based job market (Finley, 2021; Kumar, et al., 2022), to be lifelong learners and to contribute to democracy (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2020). At this time of growing political polarization, the role of a liberal arts education in aiding students in developing skills for civic engagement and discourse, building competencies for thriving in our diverse and global world and developing the sensibilities and critical thinking abilities key to democracy cannot be overstated (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2020).

By its very nature, a liberal education frees the mind from past dispositions, producing independent thinkers who seek the truth unfettered by dogma, ideology, and preconceptions. Yet it also has the capacity to foster civility, promote dialogue across difference, and contest anti-intellectualism, producing citizens who are less susceptible to manipulation and prejudice and more disposed to civic and democratic engagement (Pasquerella, 2020).

Despite the importance of a liberal arts college education to the success and social mobility of our graduates, their families, and to our country, it is well known that higher education has a long history of overseeing disparate outcomes for the Students of

Color that we serve (Bensimon & Felix, 2019; Gentlewarrior & Paredes, 2021; McNair, et al., 2020). While this is due to a range of factors, chief among them is the legacy of current and historical racism borne by Students of Color attending our campuses (Bensimon, 2020). It is incumbent upon those of us leading campuses to prioritize equity-minded practices across our institutions. Doing so will ensure that all students succeed at higher rates while addressing the racialized disparate outcomes that too often characterize the academy (Bensimon & Felix, 2019; Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, 2022; Taliaferro & Launius, 2023). As Gilda Barabino, President of Olin College of Engineering, an institutional member of the Racial Equity and Justice Institute, has stated, “higher education must do its part to bend the arc” of the “moral universe toward justice” (2020).

Following best practices in this area, from the beginning of my presidency, I made clear that BSU was committed to the success of all students. Numerous conversations and convenings occurred immediately that focused on examining if BSU was indeed “student ready” (McNair et al., 2016) and serving all students equitably. The campus knew that we were building on a strong foundation established by my predecessors and the faculty, librarians, and staff who had been focused on student success for decades. BSU faculty, librarians, and staff have long engaged in innovative work with our students that demonstrated time and again that educational excellence combined with support and care results in the success of our students. A few months into my presidency, The Education Trust (2015) named BSU as a leader in our mission class for closing racial institutional performance gaps and increasing Student of Color graduation rates.

As the early years of my presidency went by, advancing student success and being student ready (McNair et al., 2016) were the overriding themes in the campus narrative. A range of pedagogical innovations were launched and assessed by our faculty and librarians. BSU's Undergraduate Research Program was recognized as a national leader for offering educational excellence and equity (<https://www.bridgew.edu/news-events/bsu-top-tier-undergraduate-research>). Staff in multiple departments were assessing and refining their service provision models to ensure we were meeting the needs of our students. The Division of Student Success, Equity and Diversity was established to collaborate with campus members on identifying and implementing data-informed, equity-minded strategies intended to support all students and eliminate equity gaps. Our campus climate survey in 2018 indicated that Students of Color felt slightly more welcome at BSU than their White peers. Due to the hard work of many, I felt progress was being made to support the success of all students, while emphasizing the elimination of institutional performance gaps leading to disparate student outcomes.

PRIORITIZING A COMPREHENSIVE RACIAL EQUITY AUDIT

But in 2020, after the brutal murder of George Floyd, 20 of our Students of Color and recent Alumni of Color met with me and said, “we know BSU loves us, but do better.” I began to understand that Students of Color at BSU still did not feel they truly belonged. I knew that a proactive and action-oriented institutional response to this heartfelt request by our students and alumni was needed (Pifer et al., 2023; Rodriguez & Escobar, 2023). Four days after that meeting with students and alumni, I established the Special Presidential Task Force on Racial Justice. The charge of the 70-member group, comprised of

students, faculty, staff, administrators, alumni and community members was expansive: to complete a comprehensive racial equity audit of our practices at Bridgewater State University. Over the next year, the task force members engaged in inclusive conversation with 1,000 additional members of our campus community; they looked at our disaggregated data; they audited our practices in the major functional areas of our campus (Santiago et al., 2021). Their work was fearless and comprehensive resulting in a 451-page document, listing 72 recommendations for racially equitable transformation focusing on key institutional areas and practices. It provided a blueprint to aid us to “do better.” (Bridgewater State University, 2021).

Overall, the task force report indicates that while explicit racism at Bridgewater State University is contrary to our institutional ethos, as a microcosm of America, it does occur. However, the findings indicate that far more prevalent were university practices and processes that were race neutral and that did not address the disparate outcomes or experiences steeped in current and historical racism that play out in the lives of racially diverse students and employees at BSU. Further, it was clear from the task force report is that while BSU had individuals and departments engaged in exemplary racially equitable work, the effort needed to be more fully infused into the work of our campus and institutionalized into our structures. What follows is a brief description of some of the actions BSU is engaged in to deepen our racially equitable work for systemic change.

LISTENING TO AND BELIEVING STUDENTS OF COLOR

One of the recommendations in the Racial Justice Taskforce (2021) report was that we needed to “amplify the voices of ALANA/ BIPOC students and make actionable what is

learned” (p. 35). Students of Color are experts on their experiences and uniquely qualified to offer leadership and expertise regarding campuses’ racially equitable institutional change efforts. Further, partnering with Students of Color in transformation efforts helps to mitigate the deficit mindset too often applied to them in higher education (Taylor & Ambriz, 2022).

As part of our work to implement the Racial Justice Taskforce recommendations, BSU initiated a Student Advisory Council for Racial Justice and Equity. Students apply for this position by sharing their experience advancing racial equity and justice. Members of this group are offered training in communication, equity practices and peer leadership. These students offer feedback and information that is shared on a regular basis with BSU leadership and the faculty/librarian and staff Racial Justice and Equity Council members.

In addition, in recognition that racially minoritized students are subjected to racism in society and too often on our campuses, at my request, BSU established the ongoing program “Speak Your Piece” that provides regular opportunities for students to share their experiences with racial justice or injustice at BSU and beyond. Supported by equity-minded faculty and staff but led by members of the Student Racial Justice and Equity Advisory Council, these once monthly meetings are advertised widely to all students at BSU. Mindful of the feedback that students want to be heard and supported but not feel on display as they share their experiences, a few equity-minded faculty, librarians and staff are at every session; additional employees are invited to the sessions at students’ request. Informed by the core tenets of equity-mindedness (Bensimon, 2020; Dowd & Bensimon, 2015; McNair et al., 2020), emphasis is placed on hearing students’ experiences around

racism, placing the responsibility for change on the institution, and setting and advancing goals intended to aid BSU in achieving our institutional commitment and strategic priority to be a leader in equitable student support and success.

Every session provides students with an opportunity to have honest and in-depth conversations about their experiences at BSU around race and racism. Students are offered the opportunity to make requests and suggestions about how BSU could improve around the issue under discussion. The conversation then turns to the faculty and staff in the room to share what is already occurring around that specific issue or what could occur and on what timetable. For example, Students of Color on campuses frequently share their feeling that after making reports to the Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action office on campus, that nothing happens as a result of that report (Hernandez-Reyes, n.d.). This issue was shared repeatedly at Speak your Piece Sessions. As a result, BSU’s Director of Affirmative Action attended a session of this group and shared in-depth information about the Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity investigation process, the law relating to investigations, and steps taken if cases are deemed discrimination or bias. While students understandably continue to wish they could receive detailed information after making a report to the Affirmative Action Office, they now understand the processes followed and the laws that are applied to investigations. Now when students new to the group attend and bring up this concern, it is their peers that are empowered with information who share what occurs during an investigation process.

Other issues brought up by students, however, bring to light areas where BSU needs to improve. For example, students have pointed out several key departments who do not have

employees reflective of the racial and ethnic diversity of our student body. Information was shared with the students about steps occurring to enhance BSU's equity-minded hiring processes. In addition, this feedback was offered to these departments; in the last year, students report that they have seen progress in this area. Another issue pointed out by students is that more collaboration was needed to occur between some student-facing service provision offices with the Lewis and Gaines Center for Inclusion and Equity, the department charged with intercultural student success. That feedback has been shared and collaborations on behalf of students have deepened.

Recently I was invited to a Speak Your Piece session so students could ask me questions and we could engage in an in-depth discussion. They asked me to share my definition of racial justice at BSU. I started my comments much like I started this section of the chapter. I told them that I honestly thought BSU was doing well in the area of racial justice until those 20 students and alumni told me that BSU needed to “do better.” I talked about the Racial Justice Taskforce and the recommendations we are advancing from that process. I emphasized that racial equity and justice and their success was a priority of my presidency. When I paused, they asked, “how can we partner with you?” I was humbled by the students’ honesty about how BSU needs to continue our work, but also their willingness to work with us to ensure that BSU honors all students in the fullness of all of their identities in all that we do.

Finally, in a stellar demonstration of leadership, the Student Government Association reviewed their process of reviewing funding requests from student groups from an equity lens. They also are prioritizing issues of racial equity in their funding and advocacy efforts on campus.

INSTITUTIONALIZING SHARED EQUITY LEADERSHIP

While grateful for the leadership demonstrated by our students, we are mindful that the responsibility for institutional change falls to those with formalized power and positions. Great effort and intentionality are being exercised to both advance racial equity work now and create institutionalized structures embedding this work into the fabric of our institutional culture for the future. This commitment to shared equity leadership (Holcombe, et al, 2022; Kezar & Holcombe, 2024) and systemic equity-minded change is being demonstrated in ways large and small.

Part of our shared equity-leadership practice is the understanding that continual learning in racially equitable practice is normal and necessary. Virtually every week opportunities are available to campus members for facilitated workshops or conversations focused on racial justice and equity-mindedness; for those preferring self-directed studies, resources have been curated and made available as well. The ongoing resources offered by the Racial Equity and Justice Institute to learn from national equity leaders and from our peers in the consortium have also advanced our practice.

Like many campuses across America, BSU has heavily utilized the foundational text *From Equity Walk to Equity Talk* (McNair, Bensimon, Malcom-Piqueux, 2020) to inform our thinking. The book posed several key questions that have greatly refined our work at BSU:

- *In what ways could this practice, program or policy disadvantage minoritized students?*
- *Who, by race and ethnicity, is most likely to benefit from this practice, program or policy? Why?*

- *How did the architects of this practice, program or policy take racial equity into account?*
- *Who, by race and ethnicity might not meet the criteria that determine who qualifies to be hired, to be accepted into an honors program, or to receive promised program benefits? (p. 45).*

By pausing in our work and asking equity-minded questions such as these of ourselves, looking at our disaggregated data, and accepting institutional responsibility for what we found, racially equitable practices are being implemented in an array of areas.

Faculty and staff are using equity-minded inquiry as they consider how to infuse equitable practices into the design, student recruitment, program implementation and assessment of our high impact practices. Classroom practices, curricular design, and faculty/librarian scholarship reflect the diversity of thought and perspectives appropriate for a campus engaged in the liberal arts (AAC&U, 2020); and within that diversity of perspective is a growing and vibrant interest and engagement in inclusive excellence and equitable practices. An array of policies and practices have been reviewed with an equity lens and refined to ensure they support equitable student success. Numerous academic departments have begun or scaled their diversity, equity and inclusion committees in the last several years. These committees, emanating from and led by faculty, provide a setting where, among their peers, faculty can engage in activities ranging from looking at departmental and course data through an equity lens, to discussing student feedback, to planning curricular innovations. Through faculty leadership, courses and curriculum are being revitalized or created informed by diversity, equity, inclusion content and tenets. As these changes are made, the credo of

academic excellence through equity is borne out. It must be said clearly and often that faculty and librarians are key to an institution's equity-minded systemic change (Liera, 2020; MA Department of Higher Education, 2023).

Using McNair's et al. (2020) questions shared earlier, equity has now been integrated into and institutionalized within BSU's Enterprise Risk Management (ERM) process. By so doing, we are openly identifying racism as a risk to our students, employees, and institution, and engaging in equity-minded discussions and action planning during our ERM meetings to determine if equity-minded practices would decrease risks in key areas. These same questions inspired BSU to create equity-minded processes for thinking about our utilization of current space and the renovations of buildings. See the chapter by Karen Jason (2024) in this volume.

Student service provision departments have engaged in racial equity audits of their work with students using the tools offered by the Center for Urban Education (n.d.). When racialized practices are discovered, they are changed. Data is regularly disaggregated by race and ethnicity to identify disparate outcomes; if found, plans of action are put into place to transform our institutional practices in these areas (Dowd et al., 2018; Dowd & Elmore, 2020; Ivie, 2020).

Equity-minded inquiry also led to the development of BSU's Navigator Program, adapted from the model created by the University of South Florida. Students identified through predictive analytics as at risk for nonpersistence are offered a professional staff person for their entire time at BSU who provides wholistic mentoring and support. The service provision model is informed by equity-minded practices and then applied to all students served by the model. Due to

the realities of systemic racism, Students of Color are overrepresented in the cohort served by Navigators. Navigators aid students in becoming comfortable with the campus setting, demystifying and decoding campus resources and processes, and helping students know they truly belong and are a valued part of the BSU community. Navigators also identify potential institutional obstacles to student success and share it with campus partners so they can consider making student-centered and equity-minded changes. While early in the program's implementation, preliminary data indicates that this personalized support and care is correlated with student persistence.

ENSURING MEANINGFUL ACCOUNTABILITY

Soon after receiving the Racial Justice Taskforce Report, the chair of the board of trustees and I made a joint recommendation that the trustees develop a standing committee of the board focused on racial equity and justice. We felt it was essential to ensure that the board be charged with holding the entire campus responsible for advancing not only the taskforce recommendations, but for infusing equity-minded practices into our work generally. As Dr. Raquel Rall (2021) has pointed out, without board involvement, it is far more difficult to ensure that equity is advanced in a comprehensive and campus-wide manner. After reading and digesting the Racial Justice Taskforce recommendations, there was a consensus on campus that our work would be greatly enhanced by having “results-based accountability” (Bernabei, 2017) which board involvement would help provide. Readers are encouraged to benefit from the chapter in this handbook dedicated to the topic of equity-minded work of boards of trustees, including Bridgewater State University's work in this area to learn more (Rall et al., 2024).

In order to institutionalize equity-mindedness at BSU, I work directly with the vice presidents

to ensure that equity-minded practices characterize their work. As our efforts mature and our competencies grow, with the support from the board, we are deepening our efforts to ensure that our racial equity efforts are measurable and having the intended effect. This work is shared in formalized reports to the board of trustees, and the employee and student Racial Justice and Equity Councils; regular updates are provided to the entire campus community using a variety of campus-wide communication mechanisms including a regular e-publication titled *Action: Racial Justice and Equity at Bridgewater State University* (see <https://www.bridgew.edu/the-university/action-racial-justice-equity>). Readers are encouraged to examine this publication not only to see additional practices BSU is engaging in, but the way we are intentionally working to create community as we do so.

BSU's new strategic plan has infused equity-minded practices into each of our five strategic priorities (Bridgewater State University, 2023). The unique contributions and commitments of the Racial Equity and Justice Institute in advancing racial equity on campus and nation-wide are delineated in the fifth goal of this plan. BSU uses a nested design of strategic planning; all divisions are in the process of creating plans based on the institutional one, and departments will then create strategic plans based on the institutional and divisional ones. The expectation is that measurable, equity-advancing goals will continue to be set and advanced across the institution. The strategic planning process provides campus-wide involvement, shared equity-minded leadership, and mutual accountability that will aid us in keeping our commitments to our students and each other.

In addition to receiving support and counsel from the board, I am also fortunate to benefit from the Massachusetts Department of Higher

Education's Equity Agenda that has identified the elimination of disparate outcomes for Students of Color the overarching policy and practice priority for the public institutions in the state (Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, 2019). As such, part of my performance evaluation each year, as well as every leader of public higher education institutions in Massachusetts, must include detailed information about how the campus is advancing the Equity Agenda under our leadership.

BRIDGEWATER STATE UNIVERSITY'S EQUITY-MINDED SYSTEMIC CHANGE CONTINUES

Bridgewater State University's work for racial equity is far from done. However, our efforts are beginning to show early results. Equity-minded inquiry is becoming more the norm. Institutionalized structures ensuring the identification of racialized institutional performance gaps (Bensimon & Spiva, 2022), and the advancement and assessment of racial equity goals are being created and utilized. Shared equity leadership and mutual results-oriented accountability are evident campus-wide.

Students of Color tell us that they see our progress and want to partner with us in our work. But they also report experiences that tell us we are not yet a campus fully characterized by racially just practices. Our students asked us to "do better" (Santiago et al., 2021). We do our work for equity-minded systemic change with this as our motivation and mandate.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRESIDENTS SEEKING TO ADVANCE EQUITY-MINDED SYSTEMIC CHANGE

This chapter has underscored the fact that presidents are uniquely situated to advance the work for racial equity campus-wide (Kezar et al., 2022). "Long-term, consistent leadership

from a president, [chief executive officer], or chancellor allows transformational change to begin, gain the support and resources needed to happen, and stay focused on [equitable] student success throughout the years of change" (Knight, 2023, p. 189). In order to lead in this way, presidents, chief executive officers, and chancellors must be aspirational on behalf of the students they serve, and humble in the knowledge that they must be involved in a "personal journey" focused on developing the values, knowledge and skills to both lead change and participate in shared equity leadership (Kezar & Holcombe, 2024; Kezar, et al., 2022).

The recommendations below from our three campuses illustrate some foundational practices that we offer to campus leaders seeking to lead for equity-minded systemic change.

1. Make equitable student success a top priority of your presidency.
2. Create an ethos of community and care for all on your campus.
3. Acknowledge that due to historical and current oppression, additional belonging work is necessary to demonstrate in real ways that racially minoritized students, faculty, and staff are valued, celebrated and belong on your campus.
4. When racialized harm occurs at your institution or beyond, quickly name it, learn from it, and create strategies to address harm associated with this racialized incident. Intentionally describe how the campus is addressing the situation and advancing equitable change.

5. Prioritize strategies intended to listen to and make actionable what you hear from Students of Color about their experiences on your campus.
6. Engage in a fearless and inclusive racial equity audit that includes all the major functions of the campus.
7. Utilize equity-minded data, sense-making and action planning as the foundation of the decision-making processes on your campus.
8. Normalize continuous learning and improvement as the campus engages in equity-minded change.
9. Develop the practices and structures of shared equity leadership at your campuses.
10. Engage your Board of Trustees in the work of equity-mindedness.
11. Ensure multiple mechanisms for accountability for progress towards institutional racial equity.
12. Infuse equity-mindedness throughout your strategic plan; ensure that clear and measurable goals are set to help drive progress.
13. Prioritize equitable student success in your budget decision-making process.
14. Create institutional structures that will continue after the end of your presidency ensuring that racial equity is a key part of your legacy.

CONCLUSION

While we believe that every president has the responsibility to advance equitable student success (Kezar et al., 2022; Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, 2019), the methods used will differ based on a wide array of contextual factors. We also understand with the complex stressors that presidents must manage, and in view of the growing backlash to diversity, inclusion and equity in higher education, this work can be difficult to advance. At this time, “leadership competences will be tested. The senior leadership and management must remain consistent and recognize the institution’s capacity for change. It’s important to manage the equity transformation in a way that is nimble and flexible” (Johnson-McPhail & Beatty, 2021, p. 81).

As this chapter illustrates, however, the practice of equity-mindedness provides campus leaders with tenets to guide their work (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015; McNair et al., 2020). Equity-minded presidential leadership is in alignment with most campus mission statements and will help to ensure that you meet the needs of the diverse students attending your campuses (Gentlewarrior & Paredes, 2021). The success of our students will in turn help to ensure the fiscal health of our campuses due to increased student retention and persistence (Mullin, 2020). Finally, advancing equity-minded practices campus-wide will help us to actualize higher education’s role in advancing civil discourse, critical thinking, democracy – and justice (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2020; Bensimon, 2020; McNair et al., 2020; Pasquerella, 2020).

We close with the words of two experienced equity-minded presidents whose sentiment we heartily endorse:

The change and drive toward an equity centered institution will never stop (p. 77). ... Leaders of the equity agenda have to be ready for the long haul. The culture of an institution takes a long time to penetrate, but, with strong collaborative leadership skills, it can be accomplished (Johnson McPhail & Beatty, 2021, p. 86).

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EMBRACING EQUITY, LEADING EQUITY: THE ROLE OF THE PROVOST IN HIGHER EDUCATION EQUITY PRACTICES

By Arlene Rodríguez, PhD

Keywords: *Equity-Minded Leadership; Shared Equity Leadership; Provosts*

INTRODUCTION

This is the time when American higher education understands that our strength as a country will be inextricably tied to our success in bringing people from all backgrounds into the problem solving as we face the future.

Freeman Hrabowski III, President, University of Maryland, Baltimore County (Burns, Bridget & Jeff Selingo, 2020)

To be a provost in higher education today necessitates being a leader who promotes equity-centered practices on a campus (Holcombe et al., 2021; Kezar & Posselt, 2020). While this work must first and foremost be prioritized in order to “pay of higher education’s racial debt” (Bensimon, 2020), it is also clear that when looking at enrollment trends, the survival of our institutions depends on this work. In 2023, undergraduate enrollment in higher education increased by just over 1%, the first increase in several years (National Student Clearinghouse Center, 2024); however, most institutions have not reached pre-pandemic numbers. Doug Shapiro, executive director of the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, reminds us. “[W]e’re still in a deep hole. ...The total number of undergraduates is over a million fewer than the number enrolled five years ago, in 2018” (Weissman, 2024).

For many of us, the changing demographics in our service areas, may be the first driver towards asking question about equity practices. The racial and ethnic diversity of our students is clear; according to the Lumina Foundation (n.d.) nine percent of college students are first-generation immigrants and 42% of college students are Students of Color. Yet as more diverse students look to higher education for a pathway to economic prosperity, most institutions are not addressing the needs of these students (Gentlewarrior & Paredes, 2021; McNair et al., 2020).

In a series on mental health among college students, Annelle B. Primm listed some of the struggles Students of Color in higher education have faced:

Students of Color can experience a variety of difficult situations contributing to experiencing greater psychological distress than White students: being victims of micro-aggressions and racism, Islamophobia, cyberbullying; encountering culture-related extreme expectations; and experiencing isolation and loneliness from the often vast differences between home culture and environment and that of school. Difficulties posed by these circumstances may be worsened when students lack a supportive social network and face barriers to seeking help. (2019).

In their brief, yet highly powerful book, *The Little Book of Racial Healing: Coming to the Table for Truth-Telling, Liberation, and Transformation*, DeWolf and Geddes (2019) underscore Primm’s comments:

Today, White people and People of Color fall on opposite ends of virtually all measurable social indicators, from infant mortality to poverty, unemployment, wealth, incarceration rates, education, housing

and healthcare. The cumulative effects of America's past are a compilation of historic traumatic wounds passed down through generations (p. 16).

These wounds and these inequities make staying enrolled a challenge for students. In the Gallup-Lumina annual report and survey, *The State of Higher Education 2023: Breaking Down the Barriers to Student Enrollment and Retention*, 41% of college students said staying enrolled in college is "very difficult" or "difficult," compared to 39% in 2021 (n.d.). With disaggregated data, the same report found more Black and Hispanic students revealed it was "difficult for them to retain" with Hispanic students struggling more than the other groups of students: 50% of Hispanic students affirmed it was difficult to stay enrolled, with 52% stating they considered stopping out within the past same 6-month period. During the same period, 43% of Black students said they considered stopping out, a significant increase for both groups compared to 2021.

Writing about community colleges, Christine John McPhail and Kimberly Beatty (2021) have noted "the new populations of students ... must carefully evaluate how the institution relates to them." If our campuses do "not connect with them in a relevant manner, they will begin to question the institution's authenticity and relevancy" (p. 3).

LEADING AS AN EQUITY-MINDED PROVOST

Given this picture of higher education and the institutional performance gaps (Bensimon & Spiva, 2022) our campuses oversee as we serve Students of Color, the role of the provost is key to shifting their institutions to evolve into campuses serving all students through equity-minded practice (McNair et al., 2020). We often see the provost as someone who has come through the academic side of higher education

and has been selected for experience in academic programming, strategic planning, and budgeting for the academic areas. In partnership with the president who sets the goals and vision for the college, the provost works to meet those goals and promote that vision among faculty and staff. Faculty development, policies around academic and student support issues, academic issues in shared governance, program assessment, institutional accreditation, and, in a unionized environment, regular communication with union leadership, are all expected of the provost (Mrig, n.d.). With such a large scope, it is no surprise that the position provides the connection among other areas of the college, balancing the president's goals and visions for the institution with the conflicts of the everyday (Simon, 2016; Stellar et al., 2016.; Tanner, 2016).

The landscape of higher education requires provosts to fulfill their role while being intentional in their leadership around equity (Baker, 2021). It entails acknowledging historical injustices, dismantling discriminatory practices, and actively promoting opportunities for racially minoritized students, faculty, and staff. An equity-minded provost operates from a framework that prioritizes racial equity, diversity, and social justice, seeking to create an environment where every individual has the resources and support needed to thrive.

Despite the importance of equity in higher education, equity-minded provosts must navigate many priorities simultaneously. These include competing institutional priorities, presidential goals, and balancing the needs of various stakeholders. Outright challenges to this work include resistance to change, limited resources, entrenched inequities, and competing institutional priorities. However, these issues also present opportunities for innovation, collaboration, and collective

action. By leveraging partnerships, advocating for resources, and fostering a culture of accountability, equity-minded leaders can drive meaningful progress towards a more just and inclusive academic community (Johnson McPhail & Beatty, 2021).

There should be no doubt that equity-minded institutional transformation is an imperative for higher education to remain the pathway to economic prosperity and social mobility for the students we serve. Without a commitment to equity-minded practice and the understanding that this commitment is a long-term process, the work devolves into a culture of one-off projects, ill-defined policies and practices merely scratching the surface without advancing equitable change (McNair et al., 2020; Harper-Marinick, 2016; Hughes, 2016). To borrow from Johnson McPhail and Beatty “equity not an event” (2021, p. 3).

Not knowing how to create an equity-centered institution or where to start may be the first hurdle for a provost. A clear framework is essential to make significant, transformative change. Dr. Estela Bensimon identified five key principles of equity-minded action that are key to guiding equitable change on campuses: race consciousness, awareness of the systemic nature of inequities, sense of institutional responsibility to change, reliance on disaggregated data, and action to eliminate racial inequities (Bensimon, 2004; Bensimon, 2005; Bensimon, 2020; Felix et al., 2015; McNair et al., 2020).

EMPOWERING AND LEADING FOR EQUITY-MINDED PRACTICE AT THREE PUBLIC COMMUNITY COLLEGES IN MASSACHUSETTS

It should be underscored that provosts serving American campuses are still largely White individuals. Latine/Hispanic provosts currently comprise 13% of all college provosts; provosts

who identify as Black/African American declined about 1% between 2010-2023 to 13%. Despite being one of the fastest growing racial groups in the United States, only 4% of provosts identify as Asian, and less than 1% are Native American/Alaskan Native (Provost Demographics and Statistics, 2024).

During my 30-plus year career in the public community college sector, I have served as a faculty member, provost, vice president of academic and student affairs or vice president of academic affairs at three public community colleges in Massachusetts. At each institution, I was the first Latina — Puerto Rican, specifically — to serve in the role. Like most of the community college students attending these campuses, I worked as I earned each of my degrees. Raised in a Spanish-speaking household, I am a first-generation college graduate. My decision to stay in the community college sector is based the diversity of their students, their goals, and their needs.

What follows are three case studies of community colleges that I have been privileged to serve as provost. Readers will note that while the practice of equity-minded practice is utilized at each institution, the ways in which I needed to leverage my role as provost varied by context. At the end of each of these case examples, recommendations will be offered for colleagues who are academic leaders interested in leading for equity.

BUILDING A FOUNDATION OF EQUITABLE PRACTICE

The first campus where I had the honor to serve as provost was at Springfield Technical Community College (STCC) in Springfield, Massachusetts. STCC is an urban campus located in a part of the state which once held manufacturing jobs in several industries that supported a vibrant post World War II middle

class. As these industries moved or closed, the city's economy declined. At the same time, the city's population became more diverse, with families from Puerto Rico and other parts of the Caribbean moving into neighborhoods once home to White families now living in surrounding towns.

For more than 50 years, STCC has prepared students for careers in healthcare, engineering, and education, as well as transfer to one of the five baccalaureate granting institutions within a 15-mile radius; however, as the student population became more diverse, there was a dearth of Hispanic students passing key gateway courses. While I was the academic vice president, the college was designated a Hispanic-Serving Institute (HSI). Also during my tenure, the college was awarded a \$2.09 million Title III: *Strengthening Institutions Grant, Decreasing Inequities, Increasing Student Success*, as well as, a \$3.4 million HSI-STEM Grant, *Hispanic and Low-Income Transformed Education in STEM*. Among the projects for both grants were initiatives that addressed teaching practices to better support historically underserved students. An interdisciplinary team of faculty in high enrollment/low completion rate courses and staff met regularly with the grants department to articulate the goals of the grant, research and design appropriate projects to reach those goals, as well as establish the success metrics that would be collected and assessed. The team also took responsibility for implementing the initiatives of the grants.

Among the priorities of these grants was providing students with supplemental instruction (SI) facilitated by students who received training, support and supervision. The faculty on the team agreed to be the first to implement SI in their classes and, if it was successful, to be the advocates for it among their departments. Once awarded, we started the supplemental instruction program for

students in high enrolled/low success courses, such as math, biology, chemistry, and anatomy and physiology, key courses for admission into the high paying and most competitive degree programs such as nursing.

Students who acted as the supplemental instructors were required to have taken the class before, but not required to have earned an A. Students were nominated by faculty and selected on their capacity to learn and share knowledge, not on their final grade. To emphasize their role as professionals, students were called supplemental instructors, and they were paid \$4-\$5 above minimum wage. Our goal was to keep them employed on campus so they did not need to stitch together a series of part-time jobs. They met with their faculty member and, in many instances, they led study workshops and recapped previous lessons. Courses with high enrollment-low success rates — math, some biology and chemistry classes — were among the first to be assigned a supplemental instructor.

Of all the students who received the support of supplemental instructors, 56% were Students of Color. In the aggregate, those who attended the supplemental instruction sessions had final grades that were about 12 points higher than their peers who did not attend — the difference between a C-minus and a B-plus. We did, however, see a major challenge. While Students of Color were enrolled in the program at higher rates, White students were more consistent in their use of supplemental instruction. Understanding the importance of representation, we became intentional in hiring and preparing more Students of Color to serve as supplemental instructors. In addition, we researched help-seeking behavior and using those early studies accessible to us at the time, created training programs for faculty so that they were aware of how to create a culture of help-seeking in their classes (Arbreton, 1998; Karabenick & Knap, 1988; Gall, 1985).

Given the impressive early results, steps were taken to increase the courses eligible for the program and more supplemental instructors were trained. Training began with a two-week session in the summer for which faculty and students were paid. The training began with team building exercises between faculty and students, introduction to learning principles and help-seeking behavior for students and faculty. Those involved in the project also received development in supplemental instruction design and were offered the opportunity to practice with the cohort. Providing participants the opportunity to engage in brief reflections on their own learning was prioritized.

The initial undertaking into this equity-centered practice was not without challenges. Student employment programs were concerned that paying the student supplemental instructors the higher than usual salary would discourage students from other campus-based employment programs like work-study. Some faculty were a bit reluctant about letting students — even those who had already taken their courses — into class to serve as supplemental instructors, protective of their teaching space. Yet word of the program's early successes and presentations at all-college and division meetings encouraged additional faculty to volunteer to participate in the project. Key to the success, however, was the intentional creation of a community of practice with on-boarding training sessions for both faculty and students, as well as space to meet and discuss experiences.

STCC provides a strong model of collaborative work and collaborative planning with a mutual goal of equitable student success. As a team, we discussed how our designation as an HSI opened up opportunities to not simply support students, but to change how they were taught by giving them the space to work with peers providing academic support. In the process of

collaborative work and planning, we gained each other's trust. That trust facilitated honest conversations about equity-oriented pedagogy and supporting students' help-seeking behavior.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACADEMIC LEADERS ADVANCING EQUITY-MINDED SYSTEMIC CHANGE

Looking back at these successes, I utilized my role as provost to encourage several key equity-minded actions. I encouraged honest, trusting relationship building focused on the personal and institutional changes needed to advance equity-minded systemic change (Holcombe et al., 2021). It was also essential to identify and incentivize equity-oriented campus team members to work on the grant projects; within those teams, it was imperative to partner with faculty in the work for equity-minded institutional transformation (Villarreal et al., 2024). Finally, I championed the importance of obtaining and making equity-minded sense of student completion data, disaggregated by race/gender/ethnicity in order to drive institutional change (McNair et al., 2020).

DISAGGREGATING DATA AT A PREDOMINATELY WHITE INSTITUTION

As demonstrated by my time at Springfield Technical Community College, equity-minded practice is deeply informed by the analysis of disaggregated student outcomes data (Dowd & Elmore, 2020; Gaddy & Scott, 2020; Hawn Nelson et al., 2020). This involves analyzing metrics such as retention rates, graduation rates, and academic performance broken down by race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and other relevant demographic factors. By understanding the patterns of disparities, institutions can identify areas of concern and develop targeted interventions for institutional change and transformation (Bensimon, 2005; Knips et al., 2022; Pinkett, 2023).

Bensimon (2004) provides the equity scorecard, a practical framework to display these data and metrics in a meaningful way. Bensimon and Hanson (2012) explain that the process for a scorecard is not simply a form to download data, but as part of a data process that is informed by equity-minded questions and sense-making that focus on the institution's role in creating and resolving these gaps. The metrics are selected by teams addressing the gaps and are continuously monitored to ensure institutional change to address systemic inequities (Bensimon, 2004; Liera & Desire, 2023; McNair et al., 2020; Witham et al., 2011).

The importance of obtaining and utilizing disaggregated data was paramount as an equity-minded practice at the next institution I served. Just two years after the implementation of the supplemental instruction program at STCC, the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education (DHE) published its Equity Agenda (Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, n.d.) – a clear mandate stating that the overriding practice and policy in the Massachusetts public system of higher education is racial equity. As part of our work to actualize the Equity Agenda, every public institution in the Commonwealth is required to review policies and practices from a race-conscious framework for language and actions that are barriers to students' success and flourishing (Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, n.d.). Citing critical early briefs published by the Community College Research Center (Bailey, 2009; Bailey et al., 2010), the DHE prompted colleges to review their student success data around course completion in developmental math, college-level math, and college-level English. To reify the state's commitment, the Board of Higher Education (BHE) and the Department of Higher Education (DHE) — along with all 29 public institutions in all sectors — developed

a 10-year statewide strategic plan focused on racial equity (Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, 2023). By identifying specific success metrics, a statewide action plan, and equity-centered principles, the BHE and the DHE now calls on campuses to make the necessary changes to become truly equity-centered campuses.

At the start of this statewide initiative, I was a provost at Cape Cod Community College, a predominately White institution in a part of the state known for its beautiful geography and wealthy residents. The vast majority of students attending the college worked to serve wealthy residents and tourists. The college acknowledged the service economy which our students depended on by creating 7.5 week semesters which began after “shoulder season,” those weeks between a peak season and off-season (Rock Ventures, 2024).

The demographics of the college were, in some respects, intriguing: the population of the college was predominantly White at about 75% in 2018. The remaining 25% were Students of Color. Reviewing trend data on the populations showed this group — the racially diverse 25% identified as “minorities” — was the only increasing enrollment group. However, understanding who was in the group and what their experiences were at the college was difficult as institutional data was aggregated, making it unclear what our institutional performance gaps were in supporting students from diverse identities. Based on this aggregated data the college reported “minority” students actually performed better than their White peers in several areas including persistence. And — in the aggregate — this narrative was true.

I encouraged the campus to disaggregate student outcome data to learn who was succeeding — and who we were leaving

behind. Almost immediately concerns about disaggregating data were presented to me. It was said that Students of Color were already performing well so the inquiry was unneeded. In addition, it was argued, the number for each racial and ethnic group would be “too small” to count if the data were disaggregated. Arguments against providing those small sample data sets continued and were based on traditional practices in statistics: if the sample is too small, the argument goes, it should not be shared or made actionable.

However, during in-depth conversations over some months, my colleagues and I discussed that as an institution we could not make decisions if we did not know how all our students were doing in key success metrics. And if our narrative were correct — that “minority students” performed as well as White peers, if not better in some cases, we needed to know what we were doing right so that we could replicate it. I pointed out that any information we learned through the data disaggregation and sense-making process would be key to the drafting of our institutional plan informed by the state’s Equity Agenda.

Over time a compromise was reached: we would disaggregate the student outcomes data based on a 3-year average. Once this data was provided, we were able to quickly see that Students of Color did not pass math or English at the same rate as their White peers. As shown in the table on the next page, with disaggregated data, the college created an equity matrix, modeled after Bensimon’s score card (Bensimon & Hanson, 2012) with key success indicators for the major student groups. Readers interested in the process CCCC engaged in are encouraged to read the chapter in the first *Racial Equity and Justice Institute Practitioner Handbook* that shared the process the campus took to arrive to more equity-minded data collection and sense-

making practices (Rodríguez et al., 2021). In addition, readers may be interested in viewing the REJI-hosted video entitled *Equity-minded Data: Exemplars from REJI Campuses* (Rodríguez & Dunseath, 2022) where this equity-minded data practice and a few others are shared: see <https://reji-bsu.org/video-library/>.

Student Equity Matrix 2017-2019												
Success Indicator	All			Latinx			African-American			Pell-Recipient		
Access (change from 2017-2019)	-10%			+14%			+ 11%			-10%		
	2700	2544	2440	205	228	234	171	194	190	1552	1456	1395
Course success rate	77%			+1%			-3%			+7%		
Complete college-level math within first 24 credits	21.6%			-1.0%			-12.1%			-4.4%		
% enrolled in college level math	34%			+1.7%			-15%			-5.4%		
College-level math success rate	63.5%			-8.5%			-13.5%			-7%		
Complete college-level English within first 24 credits	52.3%			-2.3%			-2.3%			+2.9%		
% enrolled in Col-lege-level English	72.6%			-3%			-3.6%			+2.5		
College-level English success rate	72.1%			-0.3%			+0.3%			+1.4%		
Fall-to-Fall Retention (3-year average)	52%			+ 0.3%			+ 5.0%			+ 3.4%		
4-year Completion Rate	19%			-7%			-13%			+2%		
6-year Transfer Rate	27%			+0%			-5%			+0%		
6-year Success Rate	42%			+2%			-8%			-1%		

■ = No Equity Gap: Sustain and Improve

■ = Equity Gap: Action Needed

Equity Matrix Chart originally published in Cape Cod Community College's Strategic Plan 2021-2025

As a result of this equity-minded data practice the campus learned that the approximately 200 African American students enrolled did persist at a higher rate than other Students of Color; however, they were also the least likely to successfully complete college-level math. A deeper dive into transcripts showed they were also most likely to repeat their math classes. This equity matrix became the lever for change at the institution leading to a deepened

commitment to equity-minded action. To learn more about the campus' equity-minded journey, please see the chapter in this handbook entitled *Operationalizing the Quest for Equity at Cape Cod Community College* (McCarron et al., 2024).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACADEMIC LEADERS ADVANCING EQUITY-MINDED SYSTEMIC CHANGE

Data for all students are critical to initiate any pilot or program. Disaggregated quantitative data focused on key student success metrics is an essential step to understanding who our students are and what they are experiencing. A provost must work with the college's office of institutional research to utilize data to identify disparities and track progress towards equity goals. Challenges will come from those wedded to statistical practices around small sample sizes; however, there are strategies to address those concerns, including the use of three-year averages, allowing for the disaggregation of data.

SUSTAINING AN ESTABLISHED COMMITMENT TO EQUITY

Currently, I am serving as provost at Middlesex Community College (MCC). With almost 10,000 students enrolled and campuses in Lowell and Bedford, Massachusetts, the college has a long-standing history of equity work. Since 2016, MCC has been designated as an Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution (AANAPISI) and received the first of two grants for the designation. MCC is currently an Emerging Hispanic Serving Institute. Before the statewide Equity Agenda was published, this community college had already drafted an equity strategic plan, with a vision statement and commitment statements. Its 5-year strategic plan titled "With Equity At Its Core" clearly identified equity as core to the college's work on behalf of students. As further testament to the campus' work in this area, in 2021, the college was the only community college in Massachusetts to have received a grant from the American Association of Colleges & Universities to establish a Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation Center.

The college is also a leader in a state-supported program modeled after the federally-funded TRIO program called SUCCESS. For the SUCCESS program, each community college utilized data to identify student populations experiencing institutional performance gaps. Focusing on its Latinx/Hispanic, African American, and LGBTQIA+ populations, MCC launched several initiatives under the SUCCESS program including peer mentor and coaching programs, special 1-credit affinity group orientation courses, and workshops on financial literacy and leadership. The program's framework includes numerous touchpoints with students, such as time spent with coaches and peer mentors. This creates a robust support network and fosters a sense of belonging, particularly for students who may feel excluded. These touchpoints address various aspects of the students' academic journey, including grades, progress, and assistance with enrollment for future semesters.

The SUCCESS program, initially a voluntary initiative for student engagement, transitioned to an opt-out model after demonstrating significant potential. We observed that students participating in SUCCESS were more likely to continue their education from one year to the next. Notably, for certain groups, the year-to-year persistence rate for those in the program exceeded that of non-participants by more than 30%.

As expected, students with a higher number of touchpoints within the SUCCESS program showed greater persistence compared to those outside the program. However, it is important to note that an increase in touchpoints did not universally lead to a reduction in DFW (Drop, Fail, Withdrawal) course outcomes. A closer look at the data reveals that Black/African American students who engaged in more than 19 touchpoints had a persistence rate

of 79%, a significant improvement over those without any touchpoints, and also experienced a decrease in DFW rates. Similarly, Hispanic students with five to nine touchpoints had a persistence rate of 73%, which is more than 10 percentage points higher than their Hispanic counterparts who did not participate in the program. In the 2024-2025 academic year, we will implement a similar program in our nursing program, where many students need additional support starting with a faculty ambassador who can help oversee those touchpoints in a highly structured program.

Compared to my previous work, my role as provost shifted with this initiative. Rather than helping to design or catalyze the effort, my role was focused on making sure it reached its goals with the metrics outlined, supporting diverse hiring, and, with appropriate funding, scaling it up.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACADEMIC LEADERS ADVANCING EQUITY-MINDED SYSTEMIC CHANGE

With a campus already committed to equity-minded practice, the equity-minded provost empowers teams to review current practices and policies with a lens to examine the effect they have on students, and implement policies and practices promoting equity and inclusion at all levels of the institution. This may include revising recruitment processes to attract diverse faculty and staff, providing support services for marginalized students, and integrating diversity and inclusion into the curriculum. A provost who is equity-minded fosters collaboration, amplifies diverse voices, and ensures decision-making processes are transparent and participatory.

CONCLUSION

Committing to equitable student success will test a provost's mettle as a leader. It is imperative for the provost to remain steadfast,

knowing the viability of the campus depends on supporting all students through equity-minded practice (McNair et al., 2020). By prioritizing equity and inclusion in their leadership practices, provosts can create a more equitable academic landscape where all members of the community have the opportunity to thrive.

Some of the key roles outlined in this chapter include the importance of an equity-minded provost communicating and engaging a campus community about the importance of equitable student success; remaining emotionally balanced when others fear changes in long-standing practices; insisting on the use and application of disaggregated data and equity-minded sense-making focused on supporting the success of all students through racially equitable action; providing on-going support and professional development on equity-minded role-specific practices; creating partnerships campus-wide, while honoring the central role our faculty and librarians play in the equity-minded transformation of our campuses.

As suggested earlier, higher education institutions often run as if they were their own ecosystem. A provost who recognizes the need to be equity-centered will also recognize the need for partnerships with professional development organizations such as the Racial Equity and Justice Institute. It is also essential to remain committed to individuals and organizations from the communities we serve to ground us in the realities of our students' lives and the need for ongoing systemic change on our campuses.

Lastly, an equity-minded provost needs to recognize their positionality to serve as an advocate and ally for marginalized groups within the institution. By prioritizing equity and inclusion in their leadership practices,

provosts can create a more equitable academic landscape where all members of the community have the opportunity to thrive. Only then, will higher education remain relevant as a pathway to economic and social mobility for all in our communities.

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EQUITY-MINDED ORGANIZATIONS AND FACULTY-LED COALITIONAL CHANGE

By Cynthia D. Villarreal, Román Liera, Steve Desir

Keywords: Equity-Mindedness, Faculty Change, Organizational Change, Racial Equity

INTRODUCTION

To build the equity-advancing organizations that so many campus mission statements and strategic plans aspire to, campus leaders must invest in and develop a community of faculty, staff, and administrative leaders who are committed to interrogating and redesigning institutional policy and practice in ways that advance equity for groups that have been marginalized and excluded in higher education. Faculty members participating in equity-minded structural change processes at colleges and universities are often driven by their individual commitments and passions to advance equity in their departments or campuses. On many university campuses, the evaluation criteria for promotion and tenure incentivize individual-level effort (e.g., research, teaching, and service) that bring resources or prestige to the university, which tends to create campus and departmental expectations that collective or collaborative work for advancing equity is secondary to the expectations for earning tenure. Rethinking equity work as a collective community endeavor requires an overhaul in how we view and ultimately structure higher education organizations. Equity-minded organizations (Liera & Desir,

2023), like shared equity leadership (Kezar et al., 2019), is a perspective in higher education that aims to bring forth models of organizational design, structure, and practice that recognizes the important role faculty collaboration must play in moving campuses forward in achieving their racial equity goals.

In this chapter, we revisit the notion of equity-minded organizations by looking at a case study of a community-led faculty change initiative in the College of Education at Northern Arizona University in the hope that the case study will help leaders to identify ways they can incorporate principles of the equity-minded organization into the way their campus thinks about and conducts equity work. Driven by our own experiences as three early career racially minoritized faculty members¹ who have navigated, participated in, and researched equity-advancing faculty-led change initiatives, we know that faculty are crucial to the success of institutional change efforts that are designed to disrupt racial inequities in higher education (Hughes et al., 2022; Kezar, 2013; Liera & Dowd, 2019). This chapter argues that faculty-led equity change efforts can uplift campus communities and build coalitions that foster equity-minded and anti-racist campus cultures. Colleges and universities are increasingly engaging in strategic efforts to hire more diverse faculty and recruit diverse students. However, the focus is often on diversity and representation rather than systemic equity-minded change that allows members of minoritized and oppressed groups to participate fully in university life. Through the frameworks and ideas we present in this chapter, we encourage institutional change agents to broaden the focus of equity initiatives to include an increased emphasis on community coalition building to advance equity and inclusion

¹We use racially minoritized, People of Color, Faculty of Color, and Communities of Color to refer to members of Asian Pacific Islander Desi American, Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and other historically minoritized racial groups.

initiatives that empower, center, and elevate the voices and interests of those that have been traditionally marginalized and excluded in higher education.

THE ROLE OF FACULTY MEMBERS IN RACIAL EQUITY WORK

Scholars studying DEI initiatives in higher education have documented the important role that faculty, administrators, and campus leaders play in advancing equity in higher education (Ching, 2023; Kezar, 2013; Kezar et al., 2008; Sax et al., 2017). In higher education, routine teaching, research, and administrative management practices are boundary-spanning activities that many organizational units across a college or university are actively engaged in; these processes speak across communities and are reflections of an institution's values, priorities, social positioning, and commitments (Fox, 2011; Gonzales et al., 2023; Kezar, 2014; Liera & Dowd, 2019). Given their boundary-spanning nature, teaching, research, and routine administrative processes can be crucial levers for institutional transformation and have the potential to facilitate learning about equity-minded principles of practice that may provide universities and their actors the agency to deconstruct and restructure teaching, research, and administrative processes in ways that are designed to advance equity for minoritized and excluded groups in higher education (Liera, 2020a.; 2020b, 2023). In many ways, faculty research, teaching, and service have been crucial spaces for championing "particular issues, ideas, or innovative practices" (Fox, 2011, p. 72) across departments and units on many campuses.

Faculty have and continue to be important partners in institutionalizing equity-minded structural changes at higher education institutions across the country. As campus leaders design, adopt, and institutionalize equity-advancing institutional policies and

practices, they must engage faculty as partners and also create spaces for faculty to develop the skills necessary to create inclusive learning environments for students who have been traditionally excluded and underrepresented in higher education (Buchanan et al., 2022; Ching, 2023).

Scholars have found that faculty professional development or learning spaces that are intentionally designed to create opportunities for faculty to define "what equity means" and how it is operationalized in their everyday teaching, research, and administrative practice are crucial for shifting mindsets and behavior (Buchanan et al., 2022; Ching, 2018, 2023; Liera, 2020, 2023). The cultural, cognitive, and behavioral changes that intentionally designed professional learning spaces can cultivate are described in the section that follows. We introduce equity-mindedness and equity-minded organization as concepts that we hope will guide the development of professional learning spaces where faculty can develop habits of practice that are focused on advancing equity for minoritized and oppressed groups in higher education.

EQUITY-MINDEDNESS AND THE EQUITY-MINDED ORGANIZATION

Equity-mindedness is a mindset and corresponding habit of practice designed to aid administrators and faculty in exploring how racial inequities in higher education are associated with organizational practice (Bensimon & Malcom, 2012). Equity-mindedness challenges us to think about how routine practices, policies, and procedures reproduce and maintain inequity in higher education. Equity-minded practitioners are those faculty, staff, and administrators that are: (a) aware of their racial identity and its impact on racial equity; (b) use data to identify patterns of racial inequity and reflect on the racial consequences of their practice; (c) view the campus as an environment where

race matters, and; (d) feel empowered to advance racial equity by changing practices, policies, and procedures that perpetuate racial inequity (Bensimon, 2007; Bensimon & Malcom, 2012; Dowd & Bensimon, 2015). Bensimon (2007) argued that structured, resourced, and collective training is required for faculty to learn about equity-mindedness and apply its principles in their daily practice. In **Table 1**, we provide some examples of how faculty can operationalize equity-minded principles with the hope that readers may think of ways to provide opportunities for faculty and administrators to think about how they might embed elements of equity-mindedness as they execute their responsibilities.

Table 1
Examples of Equity-Minded Principles Among Faculty Members

Equity-Minded Faculty Principle	Sample Equity-Minded Faculty Actions
Awareness of Racial Identity	Faculty invest in developing culturally relevant practices because they understand that institutional cultural norms are often not aligned with or represent those of Students of Color.
Data Disaggregated by Race	Faculty analyze their grade books to identify racial patterns regarding student grades and attendance.
Critical Reflection	Faculty assess their biases and begin to shift their consciousness toward equity-mindedness.
Race Matters	Faculty are comfortable discussing how race affects students' classroom experiences.
Empowered to Enact Agency	Faculty create the equity advocate role and change the university faculty hiring policy to include the equity advocate role as a requirement for each search committee.

When faculty collectively learn how their practices reproduce inequities, they learn on behalf of their organization (Bensimon & Malcom, 2012; Liera, 2023). In our experience as faculty and researchers, when organizations learn, they begin to behave as a single unit, moving collectively toward becoming an equity-minded organization (Liera & Desir, 2023). An equity-minded organization approach can be a useful guide for administrators and faculty engaged in organizational change efforts.

Administrative and faculty leaders who are interested in transforming their universities into equity-minded organizations must work to center racial equity in the design of programs, policies, and practices if they intend to create the enduring structural change necessary to advance racial equity in higher education (Liera & Desir, 2023). Inspired by Victor Ray's Theory of Racialized Organizations (2019), an equity-minded higher education organization can center racial equity and challenge the status quo by deconstructing and redesigning structures, policies, and practices in ways that (a)

enhance the agency of racially minoritized groups; (b) redistributes resources in ways that disrupt the deeply rooted white supremacy, anti-Blackness, and anti-Indigeneity found in organizational structures, policies, and practices; (c) delegitimizes whiteness as a credential by recognizing and integrating the experiences and knowledge of racially minoritized groups; and (d) couples formal rules with organizational practice to identify, disrupt, and change organizational routines that perpetuate racial inequity. In the section that follows, we offer a case study of a faculty-led group at Northern Arizona University (NAU) to illustrate how a group of faculty change agents implemented policies, practices, and procedures that are hallmarks of an equity-minded organization (Liera & Desir, 2023). Through the case study, we expand on the equity-minded organization theory and argue for deeper coalitional action across campuses.

CASE STUDY: NORTHERN ARIZONA UNIVERSITY'S BETTER TOGETHER LEARNING COMMUNITY

The Better Together Learning Community (BTLC) is a faculty-led group at Northern Arizona University (NAU) in the College of Education committed to institutionalizing anti-racism in education. This group of equity-minded faculty, which consisted of faculty members from various professional ranks, was driven by their commitment to engage in ongoing work to disrupt and dismantle racist, colonial, neoliberal, and white supremacist attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs in education. In what follows, we elaborate on the principles of equity-minded organizations and illustrate examples of how faculty implemented the principles of equity-minded organizations at NAU. Although we discuss each principle individually, the four are not mutually exclusive. Instead, the four principles are interrelated and often happen simultaneously. After describing

each principle through the application of the case study, we also offer Cynthia's (first author) personal narrative about her experience being hired the same year as NAU's cluster hiring initiative and being part of The Better Together Learning Community. We conclude the chapter with recommendations for administrative and faculty leaders to consider when strategizing how to model similar efforts.

PRINCIPLE 1: EQUITY-MINDED ORGANIZATIONS ENHANCE THE AGENCY OF RACIALLY MINORITIZED GROUPS

This equity-minded organization principle speaks to the significant importance of creating structures that centralize and value the experiences, identities, and norms of People of Color. Generations of research have shown that organizational structures, policies, practices, and norms constrain People of Color from acting independently, controlling their own time and work, expressing themselves, and determining their futures (Ray, 2019). Equity-minded organizations are aware of this reality and take intentional steps to foster academic and work environments where People of Color can freely express themselves and feel that they are "accepted, supported, respected, valued by, and important [members of] the community" (Johnson, 2022, p. 64). Equity-minded organizations facilitate the agency of racially minoritized groups because of the equitable and inclusive structures, policies, practices, and norms they have intentionally put in place.

In our illustrative case study, a group of equity-minded faculty members at NAU created new structures that enhanced the agency of Faculty of Color in the College of Education. They created two communities: the Anti-Racist Work Group and the Better Together Learning Community (BTLC). The equity-minded faculty

group, which evolved into the Anti-Racist Work Group, used the Peoplehood framework as a model to disrupt whiteness² and center the experiences, identities, and norms of People of Color in the College of Education. Normally, Faculty of Color at Historically White Serving Institutions³ (HWSIs) often work in isolation and have to navigate racialized and gendered notions of collegiality (Ward et al., 2024) and niceness (Liera, 2020; Liera et al., 2023; Villarreal et al., 2019) that benefit those in power which often are White faculty. Their understanding of Peoplehood allowed the Anti-Racist Work Group to build community among colleagues in the College of Education. It was set around an understanding that they were all related through language, history, places, and the ceremonial cycle at NAU. In centering Indigenous knowledge, community, and relationships, Peoplehood allowed the Anti-Racist Work Group to understand and relate to each other while centering anti-racism and humanizing education. These feelings of being understood and being in solidarity with a collective of like-minded faculty members led to a greater sense of agency to critique inequities on campus. Recognizing that the Anti-Racist Work Group was in solidarity with the experiences of People of Color at NAU, minoritized individuals were empowered to be equity-advancing in all other areas of their roles on campus.

As we elaborate on the following principles, the Anti-Racist Work Group created the BTLC as a retention intervention to build a culturally relevant community for the newly hired Faculty of Color. Building upon the idea of Peoplehood as developing relations through language, history, places, and ceremony, the Anti-Racist Work Group leaned on Kimberlé Crenshaw's

work on intersectionality as the impetus for the BTLC. In the forward of the children's book *Intersectional Allies* (Johnson et al., 2019), Crenshaw states, "[We] believe we are strongest when we build communities that are founded on the understanding that we have a stake in each other." Using this concept of being better together and building community sparked both the idea and the vision for a community of faculty members intending to retain and support Faculty of Color. For example, the faculty hired across multiple colleges and departments, many of which were part of the Latinx and/or Indigenous scholarship cluster hires, which we expand on in the following principle, were invited to participate in BTLC to build relations, receive mentorship, network with other faculty, and receive professional development. The first BTLC event occurred in October 2022 and was titled "Teaching as an Act of Solidarity." The workshop materials stated that the BTLC "wanted to find intentional ways to sustain and grow faculty diversity through engaging joy and justice at NAU's multiple campuses." They introduced the concept of Peoplehood as the framing for the workshop and emphasized their efforts to humanize education and bridge communities of solidarity across departments and disciplines. Some of the topics discussed in this first workshop were experiences of shared trauma in academia, navigating microaggressions in student evaluations, translating research and scholarship for the public, and positionality as educators to create community in the classroom and engage in difficult discussions.

In the following equity-minded organization principle, we explain how the Anti-Racist Work Group invested in activities to redistribute

²Whiteness is a social location and an ideology that empowers White people to structure inclusion and exclusion based on racial identities (Gusa, 2010; C. Harris, 1993; J. Harris, 2019).

³We use Historically White Serving Institutions to refer to universities that traditionally are described as Predominantly White Institutions to centralize the power structures that exist in U.S. universities. Unlike Predominantly White Institutions, which focus on student demographics, our use of Historically White Serving Institutions emphasizes that structures, policies, and practices were created to serve White students, faculty, and administrators even though the number of People of Color continues to grow across college and university campuses.

resources that supported their efforts to create culturally relevant communities for the Faculty of Color in the College of Education. In this section, we highlighted that using knowledge and practices with origins in collectivistic cultures and Communities of Color facilitated opportunities to create inclusive environments where Faculty of Color felt empowered to engage in activities that would advance racial equity.

PRINCIPLE 2: EQUITY-MINDED ORGANIZATIONS LEGITIMATE THE DISTRIBUTION OF RESOURCES TO INTENTIONALLY DISRUPT RACIAL INEQUITY

This equity-minded organizational principle highlights the significance of administrative and faculty leaders using financial (e.g., budgeting) and social (e.g., public support) resources to advance racial equity on campus. Administrative and faculty leaders seeking to embody or enact this principle can allocate financial resources to demonstrate institutional commitment and publicize their support of racial equity initiatives. The reallocation of resources will normalize the belief amongst campus constituencies that university resources are best utilized when they are leveraged to ensure that minoritized and oppressed groups have the opportunity to participate fully in university life. At NAU, the Anti-Racist Work Group did two things to redistribute resources for their racial equity efforts. First, they engaged in inquiry as a catalyst to advocate for resources (e.g., support to help retain Faculty of Color) that could intentionally disrupt racial inequity in the College of Education and within NAU. Second, they aligned their racial equity efforts with NAU's DEI initiatives to secure the resources necessary to broaden the expertise and knowledge of their faculty. To expand the capacity for Indigenous and Ethnic Studies courses, the Anti-Racist Work

Group sought to participate in the university's cluster hiring program. The Anti-Racist Work Group in the School of Education legitimated the distribution of resources by developing a formal proposal and garnering support from faculty colleagues within their unit for the cluster hire. Before the Anti-Racist Work Group, individual faculty encountered challenges to advocate for change, let alone to receive support for change. However, the presence of the Anti-Racist Work Group in the College of Education normalized advocating for the distribution of monetary resources to support Faculty of Color because they had already created the structure that facilitated the group's presence in the College of Education.

In fall 2021, NAU announced the Cluster Hire Initiative authorizing 36 faculty searches university-wide, all focused on attracting scholars with a demonstrated commitment to scholarship grounded in Latinx and/or Indigenous communities and epistemologies (Northern Arizona University, 2022). Several institutional actors, including those of the Anti-Racist work group, recognized the need for intentional efforts to support the incoming faculty from the cluster hire. Leveraging their personal networks, members of the Anti-Racist Work Group, in collaboration with the Diversity Curriculum Committee, informally surveyed faculty, asking for ideas on increasing retention and supporting these incoming faculty members better. These informal survey results indicated several elements that later became the foundation for the next phase of the Anti-Racist Work Group efforts. The results showed that faculty wanted: (a) opportunities for diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice mentoring for faculty; (b) increased opportunities for publication; (c) an action plan for addressing the high cost of living; (d) monthly meetings focused on diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice college- and university-level initiatives; and (e) thorough exit interviews

conducted to determine why there had been poor retention previously.

Through these conversations, ongoing reflection, and the cluster hire on the horizon, the Anti-Racist Work Group's new focus was exclusively on efforts to retain the incoming Faculty of Color. To institutionalize their efforts, they designed a retention intervention for the cluster hire that utilized elements of Peoplehood — specifically building community, decolonizing, and humanizing each others' stories. With the shared goals of equity, justice, anti-racism, and decolonization, the Anti-Racist Work Group developed a grant proposal for a retention intervention called the Better Together Learning Community. In spring semester 2022, the Anti-Racist Work Group of the Education Specialties Department designed a series of activities and workshops to support the incoming cluster hire faculty. They submitted a proposal to financially support this work in summer 2022. Though the proposal was not funded, they partnered with NAU's Teaching and Learning Center (TLC) to aid in hosting their workshops and professional development for new faculty.

PRINCIPLE 3: EQUITY-MINDED ORGANIZATIONS DELEGITIMIZE WHITENESS AS A CREDENTIAL

This equity-minded organizational principle focuses on administrative and faculty leaders creating structures, policies, practices, and cultures that disrupt and eliminate biases toward experience, knowledge, and identities associated with White sociocultural norms. The faculty workgroup delegitimized whiteness as a credential by engaging in an inquiry process where they assessed and questioned existing faculty practices (e.g., research, teaching, service) in order to identify and adopt new practices that would help meet their university's espoused and stated equity goals (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). The Anti-Racist

Work Group came together to assess the curriculum and began to examine the types of knowledge and content faculty were teaching students in their courses and the experiences they were providing students in their academic programs.

During the 2020-2021 academic year, the Anti-Racist Work Group held monthly meetings, including discussions, reflections, and action. In April 2021, for example, the Anti-Racist Work Group engaged in a syllabi review activity (Ahadi & Guerrero, 2020) where they asked participant colleagues to reflect on their course syllabi in the Education Specialties department through an anti-racist and decolonial lens. Guided by the work of Ahadi and Guerrero (2020), the Anti-Racist Work Group facilitated a reflective exercise to get faculty members to critique the language on their own syllabi. The discussion began with how language emphasizing professionalism in teacher preparation courses was often unintentionally clouded by racism (Joseph et al., Forthcoming). They modeled their own reflections to engage participants in discussions of racist historical interpretations of syllabi content and systemic biases in curricula that have perpetuated racist educational practices. Given the nature of the courses, which intended to prepare student teachers for the classroom, professionalism was a concept that divided faculty members. They ultimately ended the workshop, unable to unify around revising language and ideas of professionalism in course syllabi.

Through ongoing reflection, the Anti-Racist Work Group envisioned the next phase of their efforts, which aimed to disseminate the anti-racist teaching practices beyond their department and into the College of Education more broadly. Holding these dialogues with faculty colleagues about decolonizing syllabi and being anti-racist in their praxis proved to

be only scratching the surface of their broader transformational goals. Their visioning included a continuation of the curricular changes through ongoing reflections on pedagogy and course designs as well as sustainability, scalability, and expanding the reach of the Anti-Racist Work Group, which, in part, led to the formation of the BTLC.

The Anti-Racist Work Group and the BTLC worked collectively to advance equity by asking critical questions clarifying that the College of Education would achieve its racial equity goals if resources were redistributed in ways that coupled racial equity policy with racial equity practice. In the preceding section, we describe a cluster hiring process that resulted from the collective efforts of the Anti-Racist Work Group and the BTLC's discussions about the faculty knowledge and experiences that would be necessary to achieve their goals. Identifying alternative forms of academic expertise and experience necessary to decolonize the curriculum is one example of how an academic unit can delegitimize whiteness as a credential. The Anti-Racist Work Group and the BTLC stewarded ongoing retention efforts surrounding the cluster hire, and within these efforts was an intentional focus on community and coalition-building. They developed a community of faculty on campus that was attuned to structural disadvantages experienced by members of minoritized groups. They used research and informal assessments to report on how racially minoritized faculty would bring the expertise that NAU was seeking.

PRINCIPLE 4: EQUITY-MINDED ORGANIZATIONS COUPLE FORMAL RULES WITH ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICE TO IDENTIFY, DISRUPT, AND CHANGE ORGANIZATIONAL ROUTINES THAT PERPETUATE RACIAL INEQUITY

This equity-minded organizational principle focuses on strategic efforts to hold faculty and staff accountable for using practices aligned with equity-minded organizational policies. Establishing accountability structures requires intentional efforts by leaders and should be developed with faculty to ensure fidelity and adoption. Like many university leaders, NAU administrators communicated their intention to train students with the skills and competencies to work with local Indigenous and Latinx communities. NAU administrative leadership requested the Academic Affairs and Educational Attainment Committee to recommend a General Education Studies Program to the Arizona Board of Regents. After the board of regents approved NAU's request, the Diversity Curriculum Committee of the Faculty raised the issue of NAU's capacity to meet these newly espoused DEI goals. The Diversity Curriculum Committee of the Faculty created an action plan to build NAU's capacity by proposing the use of cluster hiring to recruit, hire, and ultimately retain faculty, specifically Faculty of Color, with the expertise and experience to properly train students to work with the local Indigenous and Latinx communities.

NAU faculty aligned a practice advancing racial equity, in this case cluster hiring, with NAU's espoused DEI values. Faculty coalition efforts resulted in redistributing resources to disrupt inequitable outcomes in hiring and retaining Faculty of Color because NAU allocated 36 new faculty lines specifically focused on Latinx and Indigenous communities. Faculty used cluster hiring to advance racial equity goals because this initiative required search

committees to use hiring practices that valued faculty who demonstrate experience and scholarship rooted in Latinx and Indigenous communities, forms of knowledge, and commitments to Latinx and Indigenous people.

The cluster hiring also prompted the Anti-Racist Work Group to align its racial equity efforts with the campus DEI initiatives. Not only were these events of interest to the Anti-Racist Work Group because of the emphasis on diversity and intersectionality of the cluster hire, but they were also directly impacted by the cluster hire as members of the College of Education, which had six faculty lines as part of this initiative. No longer was the Anti-Racist Work Group solely interested in humanizing their pedagogy and curriculum; they now needed to focus on retaining the diverse faculty that these cluster hires sought to attract. This led to further institutionalizing their community practice, leading to expanded coalition-building around Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Justice, anti-racism, and anticolonialism.

The Anti-Racist Work Group and the BTLC stewarded ongoing retention efforts surrounding the cluster hire, and within these efforts was an intentional focus on community and coalition-building. They developed a community of faculty on campus that was attuned to structural disadvantages experienced by members of minoritized groups. They used research and informal assessments to report on how racially minoritized faculty would bring the expertise that NAU sought. Now that we have identified how the principles of the equity-minded organization were present in the work of the BTLC and the Anti-Racist Workgroup, we will share the reflections of a BTLC participant organizer, with the hope that this first-person narrative might further illuminate issues or considerations faculty engaged in change efforts might wish to consider.

REFLECTIONS FROM A BTLC PARTICIPANT ORGANIZER

As a scholar focused on faculty diversity, hiring, and decision-making issues at Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs), I found myself in conversations about the NAU cluster hire and HSI initiatives with my new colleagues very early on. I was invited to attend an NAU HSI Research and Teaching Consortium meeting in April 2022 while still teaching at my previous institution. I received many emails and invitations to participate in HSI-related activities before I was officially contracted. When I officially arrived at NAU in August 2022, it did not strike me as odd that I was asked to review and give feedback on some of the workshop materials for something called the Better Together Learning Community. I remember reviewing the workshop description and actually getting excited about the event. Once the final marketing materials were shared with me, I eagerly emailed my other first-year faculty friends to encourage them to attend.

The workshop was titled Teaching as an Act of Solidarity and brought together a panel with current faculty members across campus from various colleges, departments, and disciplines. Among the many topics introduced on the panel, they discussed the ways that their teaching praxis centered on equity and inclusion for racially minoritized students. But the conversation did not feel like sharing “best practices.” One might even call these topics of conversation “radical.” One of the discussions I remember was on the issue of student course evaluations and how those impact our dossier for tenure. As someone familiar with the literature on how biases in student evaluations disproportionately impact racially minoritized faculty and those who often teach “diversity courses,” I was surprised that we were having a vulnerable and open discussion about these inequities with first-year faculty. As someone also familiar with the outcomes of cluster hires,

I was glad to see these efforts focused on the retention of faculty from the cluster hire. In the workshop, we weren't just receiving information about how to be better college instructors, we were strategizing together, building trust, supporting each other, and finding mentorship across faculty hierarchies. Whether intentional or not, the hybrid workshop was on its way to building a coalition of like-minded faculty intent on transforming the university.

Following the first workshop, I was asked if I would be a panelist for the BTLC spring workshop: Research as an Act of Solidarity in February. I was a bit surprised that they asked me since I was still in my first year of teaching at NAU. What impression had I given them about my approach to research and solidarity with the communities I research? Then, I realized I had given a presentation on my research for the HSI Research and Teaching Consortium in October 2022, which some of the BTLC organizers had attended. They invited me to share some of the insights from my research on HSIs and serving Latinx students but asked me to emphasize how my identity informed this research. Although I was on maternity leave during the workshop, I agreed to participate because I felt passionately about the topic. Using Gloria Anzaldúa's Path to Conocimiento Framework, I discussed my researcher positionality and how this framework led me to engage in liberatory and decolonial scholarship. During the workshop, several participants and the BTLC organizers spoke about how we could find ways to collaborate, given many overlapping interests. It became clear during these conversations that the BTLC was looking for grants to submit to sustain the BTLC work. I talked with the BTLC organizers following the spring workshop about possible ways to collaborate. We submitted a grant proposal internally that asked for programs or research

on elevating excellence in undergraduate learning, but it was ultimately not funded.

Now, in my second year at NAU, I have taken on an even more active role as one of the main organizers at the BTLC. I am committed to sustaining and scaling the BTLC's efforts to engage in equity-minded systemic change. I also understand the literature on faculty hiring, faculty promotion and tenure, and cultural transformations. I see how NAU is undergoing a cultural shift beyond diversity toward equity, justice, and liberation. This collective effort requires a coalition across disciplines, identities, and ranks.

RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCLUSION

In the chapter, we shared a case study to illustrate an example of faculty-led change efforts aligned with the equity-minded organization framework. As we highlighted in this chapter, collective and coalitional efforts created opportunities for faculty to intentionally engage in a process of discovery and practitioner inquiry that grappled with and explored how their routine administrative, teaching, and mentoring practices have facilitated the exclusion of racially minoritized groups. These faculty and university leaders also spent time assessing their local context (e.g., organizational culture, climate, commitment to equity), hoping that the insights learned would help them design policies and practices that were attuned to the equity issues that faced their respective colleges. This process of critical self-reflection, which has been a hallmark of campuses that have advanced equity, is a fundamental aspect of the equity-minded organization framework we have proposed and is a necessary first step in deconstructing and redesigning routine processes in ways that will lead to more equitable outcomes for communities that have and continue to be excluded and marginalized in higher education. We end this chapter with

sample reflective questions (**Table 2**) that campus teams that are interested in designing equity-minded organizational policy and practice might wish to ask themselves as they assess routine policies, practices, and programs.

Before providing the reflective questions, we want to acknowledge that university leaders must provide the resources necessary for faculty to champion and advance campus racial equity initiatives. Successful campus-based equity initiatives often require universities to redistribute resources in ways that disrupt the traditional academic capitalist and meritocratic belief systems deeply ingrained in university processes and routines. Many university initiatives fail to meet their stated goals and objectives because university funding priorities and attention continually shift. Framing faculty championed change efforts as an endeavor rooted in advancing racial equity has the potential to transform institutions in ways that will make the principles and practices associated with equity-mindedness a central and enduring component of a department or university's organizational identity (Whetten, 2006).

As we noted in the introduction to this chapter, campus leaders will also need to work with faculty governance bodies to develop a promotion and tenure process that rewards and acknowledges faculty and administrators who are engaged in campus equity work. Faculty evaluation and incentive structures should also be deconstructed and redesigned to incentivize the collaborative effort necessary to advance equity work in higher education. For example, campuses can develop grant programs that provide course buyouts for faculty service on campus, DEI task forces or workgroups. Campuses might also formally recognize this service in faculty reviews for promotion and tenure (O'Meara et al., 2022).

Including equity service expectations in formal faculty dossier policies will normalize equity work across the campus.

Additionally, it is critically important for campus leaders to take the time to build institutional capacity for equity work. Capacity building will require the development of formal roles, such as the equity advocate, whose role is to identify biases present in university practices (e.g., hiring, course syllabi, etc.) and make recommendations to advance equity (Liera, 2020). The equity advocate role draws its inspiration from research in the improvement of organizational decision-making and organizational change that posited that teams made better decisions when individuals were assigned to roles that were formally responsible for challenging group decision-making (Schwenk & Cosier, 1980; Waddell et al., 2013). Capacity building will also require campuses to create professional learning spaces that facilitate reflection and provide ample opportunities for faculty and staff to engage in dialogue about what equity is and how it can be operationalized in their local context (Bensimon & Malcolm, 2012; Ching, 2023; Liera, 2023). Treating equity as an organizational learning problem (Bensimon, 2005) that requires ongoing dialogue and reflection is one process for ensuring that the equity-minded change initiatives that faculty leaders adopt are adaptive and flexible enough to meet the ever-changing needs of students and communities served by higher education.

Table 2**Equity-Minded Organization Reflection Questions**

Equity-Minded Organizational Principle	Sample Reflection Questions
Enhance the agency of racially minoritized groups.	Who wields power in the decision-making or administrative processes? How might power be redistributed to empower marginalized or excluded groups? Have I consulted with members of the campus community who are from marginalized or excluded communities?
Redistribute resources in ways that disrupt the deeply rooted White supremacy, anti-Blackness, and anti-Indigeneity in organizational structures, policies, and practices.	Who determines how resources are allocated? How might I include individuals from communities that have been excluded or marginalized in the distribution of resources? How can I distribute resources in ways that incentivize the equity-minded behaviors and outcomes that are important to me?
Delegitimize Whiteness as a credential by recognizing and integrating the experiences and knowledge of racially minoritized groups.	How do our evaluation and promotion criteria reward the knowledge and experience of minoritized groups? How are individuals from minoritized and excluded groups engaged in the hiring and promotion process? Do our evaluation and promotion criteria privilege individuals from elite institutional contexts? Have we assessed our evaluation and promotion process for bias?
Attend to the structural disadvantages experienced by members of minoritized groups.	Who does this policy or practice serve? What is its origin? How has the practice impacted marginalized or excluded groups? How can the practice or policy be revised to ensure that individuals from excluded or marginalized communities benefit?

In addition to these reflection questions, we encourage campus communities to consider how they are cultivating community and facilitating coalitions with communities that have been marginalized and excluded in higher education. While equity is everyone's work, we are better together.

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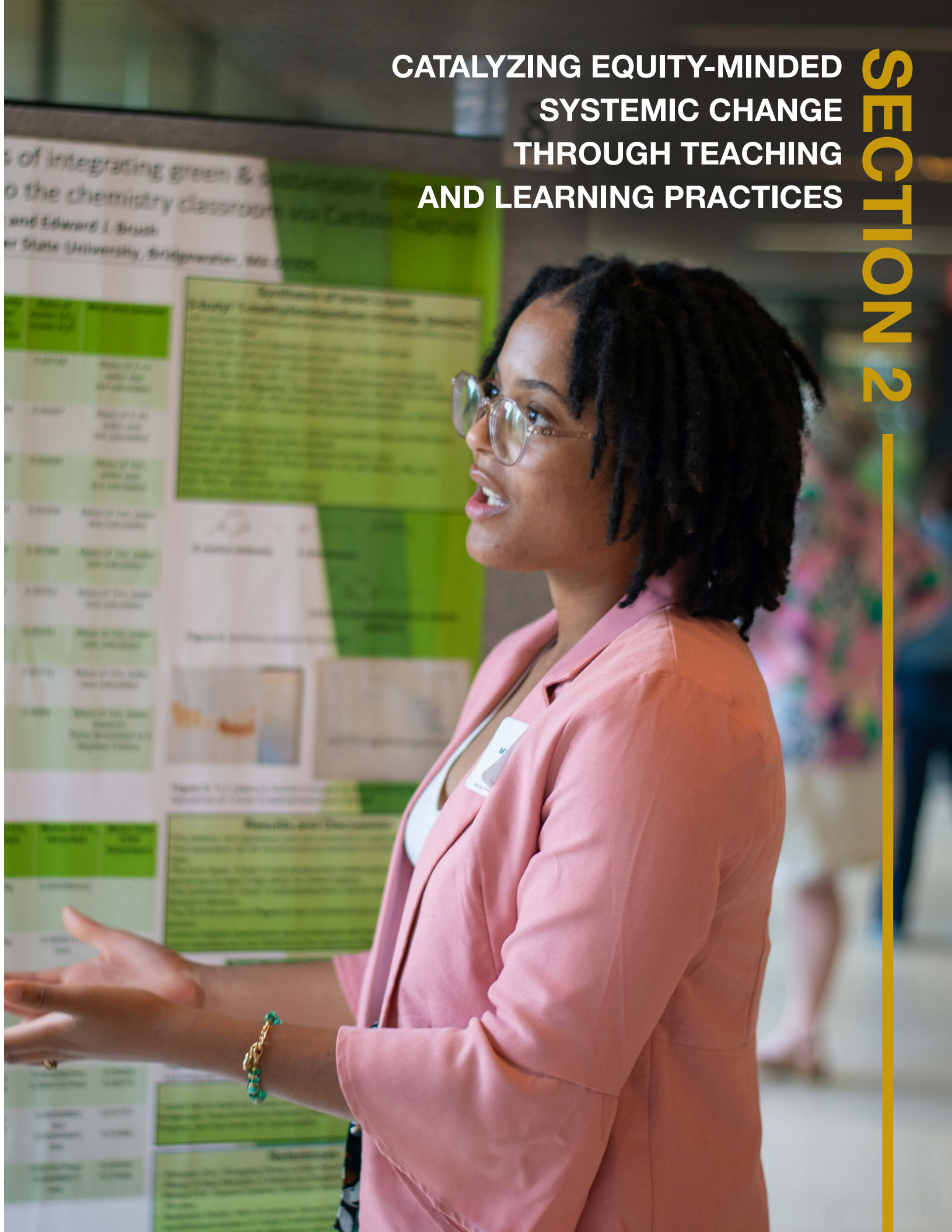
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CATALYZING EQUITY-MINDED SYSTEMIC CHANGE THROUGH TEACHING AND LEARNING PRACTICES

SECTION 2



SECTION 2: TEACHING AND LEARNING PRACTICES

CATALYZING EQUITY-MINDED SYSTEMIC CHANGE THROUGH TEACHING AND LEARNING PRACTICES

By Yolany Gonell and Uma Shama

While everyone on campus has a role to play in advancing campus racial equity efforts (Kezar & Holcombe, 2024), the work that faculty do in the classrooms is foundational to an institution's equity-minded systemic change efforts (Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, 2022; Holcombe et al., 2022). Holcombe et al. (2022) point out that faculty's role in educating students, creating and implementing the curriculum, and serving in the shared governance of campuses affords them unique opportunities and central importance in an institution's equity-minded systemic change efforts.

Drawing on the work of Liera, Rall, Artze-Vega & Gentlewarrior (2024), equity minded teaching is:

'informed by principles, practices, and historical understandings that aims to realize equal outcomes among all students, with particular attention to students of minoritized races and ethnicities' (Artze-Vega et al., 2023, p. xxi). The emphasis on outcomes and on taking responsibility for advancing racially equitable outcomes differentiates equity-minded teaching from other teaching theories.

This section of the handbook provides seven chapters focused on equity-minded teaching strategies that are helping to create systemic change by transforming multiple courses, departments, academic procedures, and classroom norms (Elrod et al., 2023).

While the strategies in this section vary widely, all utilize core tenets of equity-mindedness (Bensimon et al., 2016; Bensimon & Malcom, 2012; McNair, et al., 2020). The faculty and academic affairs administrators ground their work in the commitment to facilitating institutional change in order to address racialized institutional performance gaps (Bensimon & Spiva, 2022). The authors used data disaggregated by race and ethnicity to understand the work that needed to be done on behalf of students and to examine the impact of their change efforts. They centered the assets and needs of Students of Color in the design and implementation of their efforts. Finally, the authors demonstrate that by centering racial equity in their work, racialized disparate outcomes in student outcomes are decreased and all students succeed at higher rates.

PRIORITIZING THE SUCCESS OF MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS

Multilingual learners are the fastest growing population in public schools in the U.S. (Quintero & Hansen, 2017) and yet, higher education's teaching practices continue to emphasize the needs of predominantly White, middle-class, and monolingual students (National Council on Teacher Quality, 2021). Recognizing linguistic diversity and supporting multilingual learners is an equity-minded practice which institutions can utilize to close equity gaps.

Leveraging Perkins Funds for Equity-Minded Instructional Videos in College Accounting: A Scalable Approach for English Learners (ELs) and Multilingual Students by Rondon explores the application of equity-minded, asset-based principles in higher education, particularly in accounting education. The chapter shares

work being done at a community college that developed instructional videos for accounting courses, designed to support multilingual and bilingual students. The initiative, funded by a Perkins grant, utilized AI-powered voice-overs, translations, and subtitles to cater to the diverse language needs of students. The chapter emphasizes the importance of recognizing linguistic diversity as an asset and harnessing it to foster equity in higher education.

Access and Opportunity: Preparing Future Teachers for a Diverse and Multilingual World by Glenn and Ingle discusses the need for equity-oriented pedagogies to support multilingual teacher candidates in STEM education. Despite the growth of multilingual learners, teachers often lack the necessary preparation, pedagogical resources, and understanding of how to apply general strategies for teaching multilingual learners in the STEM classroom (Buck et al., 2005). To address the equity gaps in STEM, the authors provide a comprehensive overview of an interdisciplinary program at a four-year public regional comprehensive campus aimed at improving undergraduate education majors' attitudes and self-efficacy towards teaching multilingual learners STEM subjects.

FOSTERING RACIALLY EQUITABLE STUDENT BELONGING AND SUCCESS

A sense of belonging is crucial for student success, positively influencing student success, academic achievement and persistence (Strayhorn, 2012). However, not all students experience this equally, especially racially and ethnically minoritized students at Predominantly White Institutions who often face exclusion and marginalization due to

racist and oppressive institutional structures (Johnson, 2022). Curriculum and instructional practices play a significant role in fostering student belonging. This involves creating racially equitable institutional conditions, policies, practices, and cultural norms that ensure all students feel accepted, supported, respected, and valued (Bensimon 2005; Johnson, 2022).

The Pedagogy of Real Talk in Community College Classrooms: Not Just a Talk by Kradinova and Sharma provides readers with a description of work being done at a community college to foster engaging, relevant, and transformative experiences for students, especially those who may feel disconnected by conventional educational methods. Using the framework of *The Pedagogy of Real Talk* (Hernandez, 2021), the authors provide a description of the model and the process of supporting faculty in using this pedagogical strategy. Students enrolled in classes where this pedagogical strategy was utilized persisted at higher rates and felt a deeper sense of connection with classmates and the institution.

The use of linked-course learning communities called Small Communities of Science and Mathematics (MicroCOSMs), to support the success of diverse students in STEM majors at a four-year public regional comprehensive university is the focus of *Creating a Communal Culture with Linked-Course Communities* by Ramsey and Kling. The project integrates students' academic growth with a sense of belonging, addressing the cultural mismatch that often disadvantage students from interdependent, communal cultures (Diekman et al., 2010; Stephens et al., 2019). The authors discuss the design and implementation of

MicroCOSMs, and the positive effects of these communities on student retention and success in STEM fields.

INFUSING HIGH IMPACT PRACTICES WITH EQUITY-MINDEDNESS

High-Impact Practices (HIPs) are educational experiences that have shown significant evidence in enhancing student engagement, retention, and career readiness (AAC&U, 2023). Traditionally, HIPs have included activities like undergraduate research, internships, and study abroad programs. Authors in two chapters in this section emphasize the importance of using an equity-minded approach and centralizing racially equitable practices into all components of high impact practices.

Undergraduate Research Practices That Drive Equity by Shanahan, et al., presents recommendations for centering racial equity in Undergraduate Research and Creative Scholarship (URCS). It highlights the pronounced benefits of URCS for racially marginalized students and the need for equitable access, which has historically favored White students (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2019; Zilvinskis et al., 2022). Shanahan and her colleagues, who serve at a four-year public institution, advocate for redesigning URCS program structures and mentoring practices to effectively change participation rates and success of Students of Color and their White peers.

Traditionally, deciding who belongs in honors programs has hinged on narrow considerations of academic merit, such as standardized test scores and the reputation and competitive ranking of the applicant's high school. These practices have benefitted White, socio-economically privileged, and continuing-generation students (Davis, 2018; Walters et al., 2019). To address these inequities,

An Honors Paradigm Shift to Center Equity and Inclusion: A Replicable, High-Impact Model for Honors Programs and Colleges by Solemn et al., presents strategies being utilized at a public four-year campus and a two-year campus aimed at centering racial equity and social justice in their honors programs.

ADVANCING GRADUATE STUDENT SUCCESS THROUGH RACIALLY EQUITABLE PRACTICES

Graduate Students of Color face significant barriers in their educational journey, including pervasive racism, racial microaggressions, loneliness, and a reduced sense of belonging (Briscoe et. al., 2022). *Strategies that Support Racially Equitable Graduate Education* by Boehm et al., offers practical ideas for reducing racial institutional performance gaps (Bensimon & Spiva, 2022) in graduate education. The authors emphasize the importance of faculty support, skill-building courses offered to students at no charge, peer-to-peer support in writing and quantitative reasoning and making equity-minded changes to administrative processes in order to advance equity-minded systemic change in graduate education.

CONCLUSION

Villarreal, Liera and Desir (2024) in their chapter on faculty-led equity-minded systemic change in this volume state that “faculty are crucial to the success of institutional change efforts that are designed to disrupt racial inequities in higher education (Hughes et al., 2022; Kezar, 2013; Leira & Dowd, 2019)”. The truth of this contention is borne out by the practices that follow.

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LEVERAGING PERKINS FUNDS FOR EQUITY-MINDED INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEOS IN COLLEGE ACCOUNTING: A SCALABLE APPROACH FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS (ELS) AND MULTILINGUAL STUDENTS

By Yelenna Rondon

Keywords: Hybrid Learning, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Translanguaging, Noncredit to Credit, Universal Design, Dual Language

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores how equity-minded, asset-based principles may be applied in higher education, specifically in accounting education, and presents the results of an intervention. It highlights the value of recognizing language as a significant asset and explores how asset-based interventions can lead to new insights into equity-minded practices. The chapter challenges traditional views that English Learners (ELs) must fully master English before succeeding in college courses. Instead, it emphasizes the importance of harnessing students' linguistic diversity as a means to foster equity in higher education. By leveraging the varied linguistic backgrounds of students, the chapter suggests that higher education can create more inclusive and effective learning environments that support the success of all students.

North Shore Community College (NSCC) actively promotes and supports diversity, equity, and inclusion. A key initiative during 2023-2024 was the development of instructional videos for introductory accounting courses, specifically designed to support multilingual and bilingual students. The videos, which development was funded by a Perkins

grant, were enriched with AI-powered voice-overs, translations, and subtitles to meet the diverse language needs of multilingual and English Learner (EL) students in accounting programs.

The initiative is intended to serve a dual purpose. First, the videos can function as self-study tools, enabling students to earn college credits while improving their English proficiency. Second, they may be integrated into introductory accounting courses to deepen comprehension of the material. The scalable design of this project allows for easy adoption across different departments and institutions, encouraging equity-minded systemic change in higher education.

INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

North Shore Community College (NSCC) is a two-year public educational institution serving a diverse student population in Massachusetts. In fall 2023, NSCC reported enrollment of 4,833 students, positioning it as the fifth-largest community college in the Commonwealth. This marked a 10% increase in enrollment from the previous year, aligning with a broader trend observed by the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education (2023), which noted an 8% rise in community college enrollments statewide during the same period. This upturn followed a challenging period for higher education sectors due to the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly impacting community colleges. (Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, 2023).

Demographic trends in public higher education in Massachusetts have been shifting over the years. Since 2009, there has been a gradual decline in the number of White students, while the populations of Black and Latinx students were on the rise before the onset of COVID-19. However, this trend reversed during the pandemic (Massachusetts Department

of Higher Education, 2023). In addition, as reported by the National Center for Education Statistics (2023), 10.2% of students in the Massachusetts K-12 system identified as English Learners (ELs) as of fall 2020. This demographic data highlights the evolving diversity in Massachusetts' educational institutions.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in fall 2022, the student population at NSCC was diverse, with 5% identifying as Asian, 10% as Black or African American, 32% as Latinx students, 43% as White, and 10% as other. For comparison, the Census Bureau reports that only 12% of the surrounding area residents identify as Hispanic (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021), underscoring the institution's role in serving a higher proportion of Hispanic students compared to the regional population. As a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI), NSCC offers access to higher education and educational support to historically underrepresented communities. In terms of gender, 65% of students identified as females and 35% as males; information about nonbinary students was not provided. NSCC reported 28% of their students were full-time and 72% part-time. Finally, according to the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, as of fall 2022, 36% of NSCC students were Pell Grant recipients.

According to the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, Performance Measurement Reporting System (PMRS), in terms of educational success rates, the first-year retention rate at NSCC as of fall 2022 was 58%, higher than the national average for community colleges of 52%. The 6-year comprehensive student success rate was 64%, slightly higher than the Massachusetts community college average of 63%. However, disparities are evident in success rates among different races and ethnic groups

(Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, n.d.). As of fall 2022, retention of Latinx students after the first year stood at 54%, compared to that of White students at 63%, a gap that was more pronounced than at other community colleges in Massachusetts.

In contrast, at NSCC African American students had a higher retention rate than their White counterparts for several years, but both stand at 63% as of fall 2022. Furthermore, African American students have a higher six-year comprehensive success rate of 72%, compared to 68% for White students. In comparison, the Latinx students' rate was 61%, lower than that of African American and White students (Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, n.d.).

NSCC ACCOUNTING PROGRAMS

The NSCC Business Department offers three accounting programs designed to meet the demands of the local labor market:

1. The Certificate in Accounting: Prepares students for various entry-level accounting positions in small and medium-sized businesses. This program can be stacked with the Associate Degree in Accounting or the Business Administration Transfer Degree with an Accounting Pathway.
2. The Associate Degree in Accounting: A two-year terminal degree that equips students for entry-level accounting roles.
3. The Business Administration Transfer Degree with an Accounting Pathway: Structured for students planning to transfer to a four-year institution to pursue a bachelor's degree in accounting or related fields. This program is transferable under the MassTransfer agreement.

These programs align with local labor market needs by providing relevant skills and knowledge that are in demand. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment for accountants and auditors in the region is projected to grow by 4% from 2022 to 2032. While NSCC's accounting programs are positioned to address the needs of the community it serves, the statistics presented above show there is opportunity for improvement in serving Latinx students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents key findings from various studies on the impact of leveraging online learning resources, the effectiveness of educational videos in bolstering academic outcomes, and the role of translanguaging and multilingual resources in learning that informed the equity-minded innovation described in this chapter.

LEVERAGING ONLINE LEARNING RESOURCES FOR EQUITABLE STUDENT SUCCESS

The pandemic accelerated the adoption of online resources and Learning Management Systems (LMS) across educational institutions. Even in the post-pandemic landscape, a hybrid model of education persisted, characterized by a significant shift toward remote independent learning supported by video conferencing and the adoption of online learning tools (Quality Matters, 2021). The pandemic not only accelerated technology adoption but also prompted institutions to rethink their approaches to education.

Publishers have long provided numerous educational resources including “show me how” videos which often offer English captions and some translation. Educational publishers reported significant growth in their digital segments during the pandemic (Sieck, 2020). For example, Pearson saw a 14% growth in its

Global Online Learning segment and a 41% enrollment growth in Virtual Schools. Similarly, Cengage and McGraw-Hill observed increases in digital sales and all-inclusive subscriptions. However, this shift to digital learning posed unique challenges for English language learning students (University of Cincinnati, n.d.).

Despite the availability of these resources, the pandemic highlighted significant learning challenges for families of English-language (EL) learners, including a lack of access to digital devices, internet connectivity, and adequate online learning resources. Remote learning proved particularly challenging for these students, who often lacked the necessary technology at home, leading to delays in educational progress and widening academic gaps (University of Cincinnati, n.d.). Furthermore, adult ESL learners faced difficulties supporting their children with remote education due to language barriers, compounding the challenges faced by non-native English-speaking families (Abraham, 2021). While publishers made strides in digital education during the pandemic, the challenges faced by EL students and their families underscore the need for equitable digital resources to support EL learners.

EFFECTIVENESS OF EDUCATIONAL VIDEOS IN ENHANCING ACADEMIC OUTCOMES

As NSCC considered the development of multilingual educational videos to bolster student success in accounting courses, a review of relevant literature was conducted. Evaluating the effectiveness of instructional videos designed for multilingual and bilingual students in introductory accounting courses requires an understanding of their impact on academic outcomes, especially when these resources are utilized for self-paced studies and to enhance curriculum comprehension

within scheduled college courses. While Bettinger et al. (2017) report that online course delivery can negatively influence educational outcomes, other research suggests that the use of lecture videos has been shown to increase participation, positively impacting course completion (Hakala & Myllymäki, 2011). Zhu et al. (2022) show that the use of educational videos improves student engagement and academic performance, but their work highlights that video length matters. Furthermore, the use of instructor-generated video lectures in online mathematics courses has been found to improve student learning when coupled with guided note-taking activities and using publisher-generated learning aids as supplemental resources (Hegeman, 2015), suggesting the potential benefits of tailored educational videos in enhancing student outcomes.

TRANSLANGUAGING AND MULTILINGUAL RESOURCES

The use of multilingual instructional resources has been recognized as a valuable approach to support the language and academic needs of multilingual college students. Research has shown that leveraging multilingual resources, such as translanguaging, can create a more inclusive and effective learning environment for multilingual students, with the potential to shift educators' attitudes and perspectives (Menken & Sánchez, 2019).

Translanguaging is the ability to move fluidly between languages and a pedagogical approach to teaching in which teachers support this ability. In translanguaging, students are able to think in multiple languages simultaneously and use their home language as a vehicle to learn academic English (Najjarro, 2023).

Karlsson et al. (2019) find that the use of translanguaging enhances the continuity of learning and supports academic achievement by allowing students to express their understanding across languages. In addition, Tai and Wei (2021) emphasize the importance of considering students' diverse language resources and adopting a translanguaging approach to instruction, particularly leveraging technological devices like iPads.

Training educators in utilizing all available language resources is crucial for enhancing students' educational experiences, as highlighted by Meij et al. (2020). Finally, Rajendram et al. (2022) identify translanguaging as a valuable strategy for supporting multilingual learners' writing and literacy development, provided teachers are equipped with the necessary attitudes and skills. Nonetheless, Molle and Huang (2021) highlight the challenges associated with adopting and implementing multilingual instructional strategies in educational institutions, such as the need for interorganizational collaboration, resource allocation, and the development of multilingual educational resources.

The findings presented here suggest that the use of multilingual instructional resources, such as translanguaging and the inclusion of diverse language resources, has been associated with improved learning outcomes for multilingual college students. By embracing students' multilingualism and leveraging their diverse language repertoire, educators can create more inclusive and effective learning environments that support the success of multilingual college students.

DEVELOPING AN EQUITY-MINDED ASSET-BASED LINGUISTIC APPROACH TO SUPPORTING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

During the 2022-2023 academic year, the NSCC Business Department conducted a review of the accounting programs which led to the alignment of courses between the certificate, degree, and transfer programs to improve transferability of credits between programs, and to 4-year institutions. The program changes presented the opportunity to develop Basic Accounting I as a course tailored to the specific needs of EL students while enhancing learning for all students. As an equity-minded practice, this initiative enables EL students to earn college credits while learning English, without delaying degree attainment. The course is offered via the Center for Alternative Studies and Educational Testing as self-paced, allowing English Learners (ELs) to apply to receive credit for Basic Accounting I upon completion of the course. The credits earned may be used to fulfill an open elective at NSCC's accounting and other programs, and may be transferred to 4-year institutions via MassTransfer or the articulation agreements.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE COURSE

To develop the course, the NSCC Business Department applied for and received a Perkins grant. Following findings from the literature review, instructor-led educational videos were developed for each topic covered in Basic Accounting I. Recognizing the uniformity in introductory accounting course textbooks, the videos were methodically organized into modules corresponding to textbook chapters. Each module is comprised of one to three recordings, addressing the following:

1. A recording following a traditional classroom lecture format, focusing on theory. The timing of the lecture allows students to take

notes while watching the recording, but students can alter the speed of the video as desired. The decision to time the recordings to allow for note taking resulted from insights gained from Hegeman, (2015).

2. A second recording, or second part of the module video, bridges theory with practical application, addressing a common challenge for accounting students. The decision to split the material into separate theory and practice resulted from insights gained from Zhu et al. (2022), and program review.
3. Some modules include an additional video providing guidance on how to complete homework assignments using a publishers' platforms.

While many publishers of college accounting materials offer support for completing homework assignments through 'show-me-how' style videos and other resources, similar resources for instruction on theory and practical applications are often lacking. Theory is typically presented in text or PowerPoint format, with limited interaction or engaging opportunities. The recordings developed as part of the intervention presented in this chapter provide students with instructor-led educational content, aiding in the comprehension of both theory and its practical application. Furthermore, although the publishers provide some guidance and feedback to students as they complete homework on the publishers' platforms, often times students are not aware of these resources, how to find them, or how to use them. The additional videos developed for some modules is dedicated to assisting students in using the publishers' available resources.

Following a thorough assessment of various whiteboard applications, an interactive

video app was chosen for its user-friendliness and versatility to create instructor-led videos on an iPad. The editing of the recordings was done using an online video editor tool, which facilitated the addition of English subtitles. The subtitles were initially translated into Spanish using Google Translate which were meticulously verified by a Spanish-speaking accounting faculty member and reviewed by Spanish-speaking multilingual students for the first set of recordings. These recordings were used in a pilot during the fall 2023 semester. Subsequently, as additional AI tools emerged, other tools were used to translate, subtitle, and revoice the original and additional videos in English and Spanish, with the opportunity to revoice in other languages going forward. By the start of fall 2024, recordings for all modules required in Basic Accounting I will be available with voices and subtitles in English and Spanish for full implementation of the intervention. Accounting I students will have access to the recordings on Blackboard, and other students and the general public will have access to the recordings via [youtube.com/@YelennaRondon](https://www.youtube.com/@YelennaRondon). (Note to readers: All users must adhere to copyright laws. Any reproduction, modification, or redistribution of the videos without written permission is prohibited. However, sharing links to the videos with students is permissible provided that prior permission is obtained from the creator.)

THE FALL 2023 PILOT

A pilot of the materials was conducted by both multilingual and native English-speaking students in online and in-person hybrid financial accounting courses during the fall 2023 semester. Students offered constructive feedback, with both multilingual and native English-speaking students responding positively to the support provided. Additionally, data analysis indicated that the intervention significantly improved passing rates among participating students. **Table 1** provides highlights of the intervention.

Table 1: Key Highlights and Relation to Asset-Based Linguistic Approach

Key Findings	Relation to Asset-Based Linguistic Approach
<p>Positive student feedback on intervention, indicating its effectiveness in supporting both multilingual and native English-speaking students</p> <p>Statistically significant improvement in passing rates among students who participated in the intervention</p>	<p>Reflects the asset-based linguistic approach by valuing and leveraging students’ linguistic diversity to promote academic success and inclusivity</p>
<p>Multilingual office hours, with students opting to communicate in Spanish or English based on preference</p>	<p>Demonstrates the effectiveness of providing opportunities for translanguaging and accommodating students’ language preferences, aligning with the asset-based linguistic approach’s emphasis on recognizing language as a valuable asset</p>
<p>Plans for expanded language support and accessibility, including incorporation of more languages and utilization of emerging AI translation and revoicing tools</p>	<p>Illustrates a commitment to embracing students’ multilingualism and ensuring equitable access to resources, in line with the asset-based linguistic approach’s principle of leveraging diverse language resources for enhanced learning outcomes</p>

MULTILINGUAL OFFICE HOURS AND RECORDINGS

During office hours, students met with their multilingual instructor in groups and had the choice to speak with the instructor in either Spanish or English, with many opting to communicate in Spanish. The instructor facilitated understanding by translating for native English-speaking students. The number of students attending office hours varied by day and time, with the instructor serving between one and five students at a time. Informal feedback from students suggests that multilingual office hours were helpful, and that students were receptive to this inclusive approach as they continued participating in these multilingual office hour sessions throughout the semester. This interaction fostered a sense of camaraderie among students during the fall 2023 semester, encouraging the use of translanguageing in the classroom and enhancing the learning environment for all. This was evident in the interactions between EL, multilingual, and native English speakers observed during in-person classes. Informal feedback provided by students indicated that the videos were helpful, and that students wanted recordings for additional modules.

ACADEMIC OUTCOMES

Academic outcomes of students who participated in the intervention were compared to those that did not. The results show that the intervention improved passing rates across race and gender.

Data. To examine the impact of the intervention on the academic outcomes of accounting students, data from six full-term introductory accounting sections from fall 2023 were analyzed. Five of these sections had bilingual instructors fluent in English and Spanish, and two of these sections participated in the intervention.

The analysis utilized institutional cross-sectional student data, including section, pass rates (indicated by a grade of D or higher), gender, and race. A binary variable was added to indicate participation in the intervention. The demographic composition of the data was 46.03% Hispanic, 37.3% White, 8.73% Black or African American, and the remainder in other categories omitted here to protect the identity of students due to very small numbers in those categories.

Analysis. To analyze the impact of the intervention on academic outcomes, both multivariate and difference-in-proportion analyses were conducted. For the multivariate analysis, logistic regression was used with academic performance as the dependent variable, which includes three categories: passing with a D or better (reference category), failing, and withdrawing or receiving an incomplete grade (IP). The independent variables included gender, intervention participation, and an indicator for identifying as Student of Color. Results from the regression analysis indicate that students who participated in the intervention were less likely to fail, with the results being statistically significant at the .028 level.

To further explore the impact of the intervention on passing rates across different races, a difference-in-proportion analysis was performed for all students, and for Hispanic students enrolled in sections taught by bilingual instructors fluent in English and Spanish. For all students, the analysis revealed a statistically significant difference in passing rates at the 0.01 level (p-value 0.0085) between those who participated in the intervention and those who did not. For Hispanic students, the difference in proportional analysis showed a statistically significant difference at the 0.10 level (p-value 0.0878).

These results suggest that the intervention positively affected the passing rates of students who participated in the intervention.

Table 1 provides an overview of the key highlights of the intervention and how they relate to an asset-based linguistic approach supporting equity-minded systemic change.

FUTURE PROGRAM EVALUATION

While initial feedback from students suggests that this equity-minded intervention is beneficial, further evaluation of the intervention is needed moving forward. The intervention will be rolled out in fall 2024 to three distinct groups: students who previously failed or withdrew from introductory accounting courses between fall 2019 and spring 2023, multilingual students enrolled in noncredit ESL courses, and fall 2024 students enrolled in gateway or introductory accounting courses. Success will be assessed by monitoring the progress of students who have previously struggled in these courses. Reengagement of these students and increased enrollment of noncredit ESL students in the self-paced course will serve as initial indicators of the intervention's effectiveness. Furthermore, success will be measured by the successful completion of the course, especially for noncredit ESL students transitioning to credit. In addition to tracking, gathering feedback from students about their experiences with the intervention, along with collecting academic data, will be crucial in evaluating the intervention's broader impacts and guiding improvements to its scalability.

CONCLUSION

While the development and maintenance of multilingual instructional materials and support services can be resource-intensive, providing multilingual support promotes equitable student success by addressing various barriers to learning, while recognizing the diverse linguistic needs of English Learners (ELs). Although some limitations exist, such as

budget and staffing constraints, particularly for institutions with limited financial means, efforts are underway to mitigate these challenges by creating a repository where multilingual resources can be shared across institutions. (See Yelenna Rondon, PhD, MSIM, CFA. - YouTube)

The intervention presented in this chapter promotes equitable student success by addressing various barriers to learning faced by multilingual students and ELs. Institutions can implement the intervention by customizing their approach to suit the specific needs and contexts of their student populations. For institutions with substantial numbers of ELs or students from linguistically diverse backgrounds, establishing multilingual support promotes an equitable learning environment. This could entail offering multilingual office hours, tutoring sessions, or study groups where students can communicate in their preferred language. This approach ensures that language is seen as an asset, celebrating the multilingual capabilities of students. By acknowledging and addressing the diverse linguistic needs of students, institutions can foster inclusive, equity-minded learning environments that not only enhance academic success but also support the holistic development of all students.

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ACCESS AND OPPORTUNITY: PREPARING FUTURE TEACHERS FOR A RACIALLY DIVERSE AND MULTILINGUAL WORLD

By Nicole J. Glen, and Jeanne Carey Ingle

Keywords: *Teacher Preparation, Interdisciplinary, STEM, Multilingual*

INTRODUCTION

Through an interdisciplinary and strategically designed program, the Department of Elementary and Early Childhood Education at Bridgewater State University has found success combining the high impact practices of diversity and global learning, learning communities, internships, and community-based learning to improve the attitudes undergraduate education majors may have toward teaching multilingual learners and improve their self-efficacy toward STEM, particularly with minoritized populations. Using a cohort model, this program combined two courses, a teaching methodology course for multilingual education and a content course in the physical sciences. The professors/authors worked diligently to understand how their respective disciplines could be combined to provide a notably different and intentionally equity-minded learning experience compared to what education majors traditionally receive. The main goals of the program were to boost education majors' pedagogical content knowledge for teaching STEM and reduce their biases toward people who are racially and linguistically different from them. Additionally, education majors participated in a community-based internship to utilize their skills learned in these courses and to work with multilingual children. As this program evolved, the faculty successfully adjusted recruitment processes

to substantially increase representation of BIPOC and multilingual education majors in the program. This chapter will outline the program structure, share results of the associated research study, connect to the aforementioned high impact practices, and provide implications for equity-oriented teaching and learning.

INSTITUTIONAL AND COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Bridgewater State University (BSU), in southeastern Massachusetts (MA), was founded in 1840 by Horace Mann as the Bridgewater Normal School, one of the first academies for training teachers in the state and country. As the first secretary of education in Massachusetts, Mann is considered by many to be the “father of American education” (Turner, 2012). As such, BSU has a long history of training teachers, most of whom were raised in and stay in the regional area.

Southeastern Massachusetts hosts several gateway cities, defined as midsize urban centers that anchor the regional economy, and include Attleboro, Barnstable, Brockton, Fall River, New Bedford, and Taunton (MassINC, 2023). These urban school districts hire many graduates of BSU's teacher preparation programs. Thus, it is of utmost importance that our teacher candidates, meaning those students who are in a preparation program to become a licensed teacher, understand the populations who they will be serving. **Table 1** outlines the demographic data for the school districts of our regional gateway cities.

TABLE 1

**2023-2024 DEMOGRAPHIC DATA FOR SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN GATEWAY CITIES IN SE MA
(DESE, 2023A)**

Gateway City	% High Needs (students who would benefit from additional support and care from schools to succeed)	% Students of Color	% First Language not English
Attleboro	51.7%	39.6%	16.9%
Barnstable	67.4%	49.9%	35.7%
Brockton	84.0%	87.8%	48.9%
Fall River	86.0%	57.4%	27.0%
New Bedford	87.6%	65.8%	43.8%
Taunton	67.4%	46.4%	15.3%

Contrast this with the demographic data in **Table 2** below of the teachers in each of these school districts.

TABLE 2

2022-2023 DEMOGRAPHIC DATA OF TEACHERS IN SCHOOL DISTRICTS OF GATEWAY CITIES(DESE, 2023A)

Gateway City	% White Teachers	% Teachers of Color
Attleboro	92.5%	7.5%
Barnstable	93.3%	6.7%
Brockton	73.2%	26.8%
Fall River	89.2%	10.8%
New Bedford	82.8%	17.2%
Taunton	94.3%	5.7%

It is essential that efforts continue to increase number of Teachers of Color teaching in American schools in order to move towards racial justice and in view of the research that being taught by racially diverse teachers is correlated to a range of positive student success outcomes (Blazer, 2021). However parallel to this process and in view of the data presented in **Tables 1 and 2**, it becomes apparent why training our majority White teacher workforce to understand the needs of racially and ethnically diverse students is important. In each of these school districts, there is a great dissimilarity between the Students of Color they serve and the racial background of teachers working with those students.

Although this data is focused on regional urban centers, the suburban and rural school districts in Southeastern Massachusetts and across the U.S. are not immune to these contrarities.

According to the 2022 U.S. Census Bureau, in Massachusetts (MA), 25% of households use a language other than English at home (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). Over the past two decades, there has been a 20% increase in the linguistically and racially diverse learner population across rural areas of the U.S. (Coady et al., 2023). For instance, in the Bridgewater-Raynham Regional School District (BRRSD) — the suburban district where our university is situated — the student demographics are as follows: 40.4% are considered high needs (this refers to students who would benefit from additional support due to economic disadvantages, disabilities, or limited English proficiency); 26.2% are Students of Color; 6.6% are students for whom English is not the first language; the teaching staff is 96.3% White; and 3.7% are Teachers of Color (DESE, 2023a). Moreover, during the month this chapter was authored, the Bridgewater-Raynham Regional School District superintendent shared that 75 migrant families would be relocated to a local hotel, with many children joining our schools (R. Powers, email communication, December 8, 2023). Amidst widespread misinformation about the potential impact of these migrant families on the local community — such as job loss, strain on social systems, and rising crime rates (Lee, 2023; Verkuyten, 2021) — it is crucial for teacher education programs to prioritize equipping educators with the skills to address these misconceptions and biases through a lens of equity-mindedness, compassion, and empathy for families and children from diverse backgrounds.

THE NEED FOR EQUITY-ORIENTED PEDAGOGIES SUPPORTING MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS IN STEM

Multilingual learners are the fastest growing population in public schools in the U.S. (Quintero & Hansen, 2017; NCES, 2023). The National Education Association (2020)

predicts that nationally, one out of four students will be multilingual learners by 2025. In Massachusetts, in the past five years, the number of multilingual learners has grown from 9.5% to more than 12% statewide with growth in our Southeastern Massachusetts gateway cities ranging from +1.3% (Fall River) to +15.9% (Barnstable) (DESE, 2023a). Despite this growth in population, multilingual learners rarely reach academic parity with their peers for whom English is their first or only language (NAEP, 2022).

Additionally, STEM careers are currently among the most rapidly expanding fields for high school and college graduates, as reported by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics in 2022. However, there is a significant gap in STEM education for multilingual learners. This educational shortfall has far-reaching consequences within multilingual communities, where restricted access to scientific knowledge hinders entry into advanced STEM education and professional fields, as noted by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine in 2018.

Furthermore, People of Color are notably underrepresented in STEM bachelor's degree programs and the broader workforce, especially in areas such as physical sciences, computer sciences, and engineering, according to the National Science Foundation in 2022. This is compounded by the fact that the teaching and the teacher candidate population is predominantly White, middle-class, and monolingual, as highlighted by the National Council on Teacher Quality in 2021. For instance, at Bridgewater State University, only 16% of early childhood and elementary education majors are Students of Color, based on the 2023 BSU Factbook. Therefore, equipping teachers with skills in cultural responsiveness, particularly in STEM and other disciplines, is crucial, as emphasized by Galloway et al. in 2019.

Teacher education plays a vital role in the success of multilingual learners, yet the training in multilingual education is inconsistent, as observed by Alexander (2017) and Mari & Hayden (2023). Teachers often lack the necessary preparation, pedagogical resources, and understanding of how to apply general strategies for teaching multilingual learners to the STEM classroom (Buck et al., 2005). Moreover, elementary teachers often face constraints in dedicating time to teach science and engineering. Their readiness to instruct across all STEM disciplines and their grasp of effective teaching strategies that could enhance student engagement in STEM are generally inadequate. This limitation in teacher preparedness is a barrier to fostering student interest and participation in STEM fields (Plumley, 2019).

Nationwide, there are few initiatives aimed at enhancing the preparation of teacher candidates for instructing STEM subjects to multilingual learners. Those who have engaged in such specialized programs have demonstrated enduring benefits into educators' beginning years of teaching. These advantages include a heightened confidence in educating multilingual learners, refined skills in merging literacy with scientific instruction, and an expanded understanding of employing scientific methods to enrich multilingual learners' STEM education. This is supported by research from Shaw et al. (2014) and Stoddart & Mosqueda (2015).

Our intervention was based on the need to prepare future teachers to make STEM education accessible to all students, and to combat negative attitudes and biases teachers may have toward who can “do” STEM and toward those with life experiences different from them. Encouraging more people from a variety of language and racial backgrounds to enter STEM professions begins in K-12

education, which in turn begins with targeted teacher preparation to make STEM content accessible to multilingual children. As such, the authors created a two-course program paired with a community-based internship teaching STEM to multilingual learners. The program was called STEM-EL. It was funded by the National Science Foundation (DUE 2021338).

STEM-EL intentionally linked two courses in our teacher candidates' program of study that almost no programs across the country have thought to connect: a teaching methodology course for multilingual learners and a physical science content course. The multilingual learner course was a required course for our early childhood and elementary education majors at BSU. It also required a field placement of at least 10 hours working with children. The physical science content course counted towards teacher candidates' general education requirement for a non-laboratory science. Later in their program of study and after their participation in STEM-EL, participating college students took required teaching methodology courses for inclusive education, reading, social studies-integrated-language arts, mathematics, and science and engineering, all of which included a field experience in local schools.

EQUITY-ORIENTED STEM AND TEACHER EDUCATION

In today's educational landscape, where the student body is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse, the predominantly White teacher workforce faces a challenge. Their own cultural experiences, which have shaped their upbringing and educational journey, may not resonate with or adequately address the needs of their increasingly racially and ethnically diverse students. It is crucial for these educators to broaden their perspectives, embracing and implementing teaching

methods that are informed by and support a variety of cultural backgrounds — methods they might not have encountered in their own education.

In the realm of STEM education for multilingual learners, this adaptation is particularly important. Language support, which includes instructional resources in multiple languages, is a key area where teachers can make a significant impact. By offering such support, teachers demonstrate their commitment to the success of students who are proficient in other languages but may struggle with English, the primary language utilized in most American classrooms. This not only helps bridge the language gap but also fosters an inclusive environment where all students have the opportunity to thrive in STEM subjects.

As the demographics of U.S. classrooms change, so must the strategies of our educators. They are tasked with the vital role of re-evaluating their teaching approaches to ensure that they are inclusive, supportive, and relevant to the diverse needs of their students. Jackson et al. (2021) outlined an equity-oriented approach to STEM education that requires access to high-quality, integrated STEM learning experiences, through which minoritized students can develop identities, dispositions, empathy, and skills in critical thinking, problem solving, and empowerment toward STEM. At the same time, teachers must be engaged as learners in these skills of STEM to understand the opportunities they provide to their students. Examples of this as it pertains to STEM instruction with multilingual learners are a focus on the science and engineering practices, and integrated and real-world applications of STEM, together with role models of scientists, technologists, engineers, and mathematicians who share similar race, cultural, and language backgrounds as our diverse students.

Alongside prioritizing equity-oriented approaches to STEM education, in the pursuit of equitable STEM education, it is crucial to address the attitudes and biases of teachers. Research by Chin et al. (2020) indicates that teachers, including those who are White, with fewer biases towards Black students, tend to have students who perform better on standardized tests. This finding is significant because standardized test performance is often a hurdle to student success in STEM (Jackson et al., 2021). Therefore, teachers with less bias may enable their students to reach their full potential, influencing who may pursue further education and careers in STEM fields. Chin et al. (2020) also observed that teachers with lower implicit biases often work in areas with a higher population of Black students. Payne et al. (2017) suggest that an individual's level of implicit bias is influenced by their sociocultural environment, underscoring that implicit bias is not an individual trait but a “social phenomenon that passes through individual minds” (p. 236) and therefore is amenable to equity-minded change.

EQUITY-ORIENTED TEACHER PREPARATION FOR TEACHING STEM MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS

STEM-EL uniquely integrated two courses within the BSU teacher candidates' curriculum that are rarely connected in teacher preparation programs nationwide: a teaching methods course for multilingual learners and a physical science content course. The multilingual learner course, mandatory for early childhood and elementary education majors, included a minimum of 10 hours of fieldwork with children. The physical science course fulfilled a general education requirement for a non-laboratory science. Following their involvement in STEM-EL, teacher candidates took required teaching methodology courses for inclusive education, reading, social studies-integrated-language arts, mathematics, and

science and engineering, all of which included a field experience in local schools.

The 'Framework for K-12 Science Education' (NRC, 2012) identifies eight core practices essential for STEM learning. These practices are designed to deepen learners' understanding of scientific concepts and the development of engineering solutions; they should be the focal point of all STEM learning. These practices help learners understand how scientific knowledge and engineering problems and solutions develop. The practices include:

1. asking questions and defining problems;
2. **developing and using models;**
3. **planning and carrying out investigations;**
4. analyzing and interpreting data;
5. using mathematics and computational thinking;
6. **constructing explanations and developing solutions;**
7. engaging in argument from evidence; and
8. obtaining, evaluating, and communicating information.

While all eight practices could be found throughout BSU's STEM-EL program, it focused more extensively on those in bold: developing and using models, planning and carrying out investigations, and constructing explanations and developing solutions. Jackson et al. (2021) argued that the science and engineering practices provide a partial framework for equity-oriented STEM education, therefore educators should ensure

that all students have access to a curriculum that prioritizes these practices in real-world contexts, rather than a traditional focus on memorization of scientific facts.

The STEM-EL program stood out in the national landscape for its unique integration of a teaching methodology course for multilingual learners with a physical science content course. The program's community-based internship enabled teacher candidates to practice inclusive teaching methods in diverse settings, challenging their preconceived biases about who can excel in STEM.

The STEM-EL program was structured around three core elements within its educational community. Detailed information about these three elements, their alignment with research-based strategies for multilingual learners' STEM learning, and their role in promoting racial equity in education is shared below.

MULTILINGUAL LEARNER METHODS COURSE

Since July 2014, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) has required that all "educators applying for their first initial license (specifically core academic teachers of [English learners] and principals/assistant principals and supervisors/directors who supervise or evaluate such teachers) must obtain the SEI (Sheltered English Immersion) endorsement" (DESE, 2023b). Given this requirement, the BSU teacher preparation programs provide a course, Sheltered English Immersion (SEI), that satisfies the state mandated endorsement. The course provides a theoretical foundation and strategy practice in SEI in order to qualify as an endorsement course for licensure. The course also addresses current research in second language acquisition in the content areas using cognitive and cross-cultural perspectives of learning that

help teacher candidates connect to children's cultural and linguistic experiences (Lee & Buxton, 2013).

A key component of the STEM-EL program was the mandatory Sheltered English Immersion endorsement course. This course provided the instructional methodology for teaching multilingual learners. However, the SEI model has been critiqued for its emphasis on monolingualism (Werblow et al., 2019; Chang-Bacon, 2020; Johnson & Fine, 2016). Monolingualism, or conducting activities in only one language, contrasts with multilingualism, or conducting activities in multiple languages. It refers to individuals who speak a single language, or texts and conversations conducted in one language; it is often assumed to be the norm, especially among speakers of globally dominant languages like English (Romain, 1995).

In contrast, the SEI course within STEM-EL adopted a comprehensive theoretical framework that extended beyond traditional SEI strategies to encompass contemporary theories and best practices in second language acquisition. This framework included an exploration of the relationship between bilingualism and cognitive development (Gupta, 2019), the implementation of translanguaging strategies in the classroom (Kleyn & Garcia, 2019), the integration of multicultural and multilingual teaching methods (Takeuchi, 2015), and the appreciation of multilingualism through an asset-based perspective (Cummins, 2018; de Jong, 2019).

More specifically, the Multilingual Learner Course within STEM-EL was designed to incorporate content and equity-minded strategies aligned with the MA DESE SEI endorsement requirements and also embraced current research-based best practices for second language acquisition, ensuring that

teacher candidates were well-prepared to educate multilingual learners. The course further distinguished itself by integrating technology resources that have been demonstrated to enhance STEM education for multilingual learners. This included the use of translation apps and scaffolding tools, as well as video resources with subtitles in multiple languages such as Spanish, Portuguese, and Mandarin, to facilitate a better understanding of science content (Ingle & Pacheco-Guffrey, 2020). Co-author Jeanne Carey Ingle taught this course. Additionally, the course required teacher candidates to contribute to the educational community by creating a website with a curated collection of STEM technology and literacy resources, which was made publicly available to educators everywhere.

PHYSICAL SCIENCE CONTENT COURSE

The STEM-EL learning community equipped teacher candidates with an affirming environment to grasp multilingual learning theories and best practices for second language acquisition. This was achieved through a physical science content course and a community-based internship. The course, referred to as PHYS, was the second of three core components of this learning community. PHYS aimed to transform the teacher candidates' diverse knowledge — encompassing subject matter, pedagogy, and context — into effective teaching strategies known as pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) (Abell, 2008). PCK is not static; it begins during teacher preparation and evolves continually.

STEM-EL adopted a pedagogical content knowledge model that underscored the significance of topic-specific professional knowledge (Gess-Newsome, 2015). This model encompassed knowledge of instructional strategies, content, STEM practices, and

cognitive habits. Traditional college science courses that focus solely on content rarely enhance teacher candidates' understanding of scientific concepts or their confidence in teaching science (Avery & Meyer, 2012). In contrast, STEM-EL offered a specialized content course designed to merge the understanding of scientific concepts with practical science and engineering tasks, thereby reflecting the real-world application of STEM. It also demonstrated effective teaching methods for STEM education and the acquisition of content-specific vocabulary for multilingual learners. Research indicates that content courses employing evidence-based STEM teaching methods can significantly increase pedagogical content knowledge, self-efficacy, and outcome expectancy among teachers (Chichekian & Shore, 2016).

PHYS incorporated numerous equity-minded teaching and learning strategies to foster an inclusive and supportive learning environment. These strategies were pivotal in ensuring that all students, particularly those underrepresented in STEM fields, had equitable opportunities to succeed (Artze-Vega et al., 2023). Integrated learning was at the core of the PHYS course, where best practices in STEM were modeled for multilingual learners. Each class session was structured around a distinct science and engineering practice, paired with essential language acquisition strategies that teacher candidates were learning in their SEI course. This deliberate approach enabled participants to understand the significance of these strategies, comprehend their underlying rationale, and practice them before implementing them with children.

The course featured assessments with authentic STEM applications, such as elucidating the chemical transformations of a “bath bomb” during use. Students were

given a choice in how they documented their assessment responses, including options like drawing, writing, photographs, or video. The structure of the course promoted continuous learning and improvement, with the professor providing feedback and students being able to revise and resubmit their work multiple times to attain their preferred grade. Transparency was a key component, with assignments accompanied by clear rationales, examples modeled by the professor, relevance to the practiced content, and rubrics shared well in advance.

In recognizing the educational value of specialized STEM courses for educators, the Department of Physics, Photonics, and Optical Engineering at BSU had previously established a laboratory science course tailored for education majors. The PHYS course, which received the physics department chair's approval, was designed to meet the general education requirements for non-laboratory science and quantitative reasoning. This course underwent a transformation that not only made the material more relevant but also enhanced the motivation and success rates among the teacher candidates. This was particularly significant for those typically underrepresented in STEM fields, such as the predominantly female teacher cohort and Students of Color within the program.

The curriculum covered a range of topics, including force, motion, the properties and states of matter, engineering design, robotics, and computer-aided design (CAD), all woven together with science and engineering practices. Theoretical science concepts were taught at BSU in a dedicated STEM teaching classroom, while practical skills in robotics and CAD were imparted at STARBASE, the site of our community-based internship (described in the next section) by the director and staff. This dual approach not only facilitated a

smooth transition for teacher candidates into the STARBASE environment but also provided them with valuable hands-on experience prior to their internship with children.

INTEGRATED LEARNING

The culminating element of the STEM-EL learning community was a community-based internship, conducted at STARBASE — a STEM enrichment initiative for middle-schoolers funded by the U.S. Department of Defense and located on military bases nationwide. Participation in STARBASE afforded our teacher candidates essential hands-on STEM experience, collaborating with multilingual learners within a proven and operational STEM environment.

In STARBASE, the teacher candidates facilitated multilingual learners' engagement in scientific inquiries and model development, problem-solving, and the communication of ideas through both linguistic and visual means, such as charts, graphs, and simulations. These activities took place during individual and small group sessions, establishing a robust framework where multilingual learners applied language integrally with STEM learning, as opposed to treating it as a separate entity (Lee et al., 2019). Moreover, it exposed teacher candidates to non-traditional educational settings where multilingual learners can thrive in STEM, enhancing their recognition of the need for equitable opportunities that spur multilingual learners' interest and drive in STEM. This exposure may inspire teacher candidates to create strategies that overcome the frequent shortfall of STEM resources and curricula for multilingual learners in their future educational environments (Adams, 2020; Jackson et al., 2021). The internship spanned five days, totaling 20 hours, and allowed teacher candidates to build rapport and learn about multilingual learners. This interaction deepened their appreciation for

the cultural diversity each student contributes to the learning space, aligning with Jackson et al. (2021) equity-focused STEM education framework. We anticipated that the STEM-EL program has equipped the participants with the necessary skills to critically assess the STEM educational prospects available to their prospective students and has inspired some to consider teaching in districts with linguistically diverse populations.

Teacher candidates led interactive STEM read-aloud sessions for small groups of multilingual learners at STARBASE. These read-alouds, recognized as a rigorous and engaging educational strategy, provided meaningful learning opportunities, as evidenced by previous research (Christ & Cho, 2021; Viesca et al., 2012). As a pivotal activity of the participants' internship, it highlighted the importance of targeted and scaffolded lesson planning. It also served to present models of BIPOC and multilingual STEM professionals, as all the read-alouds were biographies. During PHYS, teacher candidates explored and discussed the 'habits of mind' that these professionals had adopted to advance their careers, and they demonstrated these habits while reading to the children. The integration of STEM and literacy was deeply embodied in the biographical read-alouds, exemplifying this blend for the novice educators.

PROGRAM GOALS AND APPLICATION PROCESS

STEM-EL was an integral part of the BSU teacher preparation program, specifically designed for early childhood and elementary education majors. The research study it facilitated was grounded in design-based research methodologies, as outlined by Brown (1992) and the Design Based Research Collective (2003). This approach allowed for the dual objectives of creating effective learning environments and utilizing these

environments to study teaching and learning processes, as described by Sandoval & Bell (2004). Below we outline the program goals, process, evaluation, and findings.

The program hypothesized that STEM-EL would lead to enhanced STEM knowledge among teacher candidates, increased strategies for teaching STEM to multilingual learners, improved attitudes toward teaching linguistically diverse students, and a deeper understanding of multicultural populations. Entry to STEM-EL was competitive, requiring an application process that involved active recruitment and support for prospective students, emphasizing the program's openness to applicants without prior experience in science or multilingual education. To enhance the recruitment process for the STEM-EL program, we undertook several strategies. We initiated our efforts by visiting every introductory course section within our major to directly engage with students. Our graduate assistant played a pivotal role by holding office hours to assist with application completion and meeting with students upon request. We also provided examples to guide applicants through the open-ended questions, clarifying that we sought interest over experience in science or multilingual education.

In our second year we enhanced our outreach efforts to include sending personalized emails to all Students of Color in our major; hiring students from the first-year cohort to discuss their STEM-EL experiences, and increased our email communication efforts to all students in the major. With more applicants than available spots, the program employed a rubric to evaluate applications, focusing on diversity in racial, gender, and socioeconomic status, as well as the authenticity of responses to open-ended questions. The program team, consisting of two researchers and a graduate assistant, independently scored applications using the rubric.

DESCRIPTION OF TEACHER CANDIDATES PARTICIPATING IN PROJECT

In the inaugural STEM-EL cohort in 2022, 20% of our teacher candidates were Students of Color, a figure marginally above the department's average. We had hoped this number would be higher. Potential factors include doubts about acceptance into a selective program, the program's demanding nature during a period when students might need to work (notably, it was a summer program), and possible "belonging uncertainty" racially minoritized students too often experience due to their experiences with racism in their educational histories (Artzie-Vega et al., 2023).

For the second cohort in 2023, we proactively consulted Faculty of Color to refine our recruitment strategies. We engaged Students of Color via personalized emails, leveraging data from Institutional Research, and by visiting classes and student organizations. We also incentivized first-cohort participants to share their positive experiences and the benefits of teaching multilingual learners during class visits. These initiatives resulted in 43% of the second cohort's teacher candidates being Students of Color.

While direct recruitment proved effective, we recognized that the program's intensity deterred economically disadvantaged students. The four-week commitment required full-day on-campus presence, significant homework, and a week-long internship from 8:30 AM to 4:30 PM daily. Despite grant-covered tuition, fees, and materials, the financial burden was still too great for many. Consequently, some teacher candidates withdrew prior to beginning. Given that summer is a crucial earning period, our program conflicted with their financial needs. As discussed in the chapter's conclusion, moving forward, we

secured funding that offers free housing and compensates students for their internship time.

The teacher candidates in this intervention all participated in the three main components of the program: (a) the three-credit, non-laboratory PHYS course, which focused on physical science, technology, and engineering, taught in the context of the STARBASE curriculum; (b) the three-credit Sheltered English Immersion pedagogical course for teaching multilingual learners, taught using concepts from the STARBASE curriculum; and (c) the five-day, 20-hour internship at STARBASE, when they had classes visiting with large populations of multilingual learners. Teacher candidates participated in the three components simultaneously, receiving three weeks of intensive multilingual learner and STEM content and pedagogy ahead of their participation at STARBASE for one week. During their internship, teacher candidates were observed during the day, given coaching by onsite faculty, and debriefed daily on their learning experiences. During the second year of the program, former program participants, working as undergraduate program assistants, were also available for feedback and programmatic clarification.

The learning community that STEM-EL provided fostered a sense of belonging for the teacher candidates. This was important for them within STEM, whereby our mostly female teacher-learners are often marginalized. This was likely compounded for the racially diverse teacher candidates; Artze-Vega et al. (2023) reminds us, a sense of social and academic belonging matter to the long-term engagement, motivation, and achievement of Students of Color. Given that we specifically recruited and were able to accept more Students of Color into STEM-EL by the second year, it was important to us that everyone felt included and flourished. Previous research on Teacher

Candidates of Color in predominantly White teacher preparation programs have found that they experience alienation, are acutely aware of their underrepresentation in the curriculum, and feel “negatively judged and misinterpreted by White peers and instructors” (Chávez-Moreno, Villegas, Cochran-Smith, 2022, p. 169). We worked to combat this through community gatherings and orientation sessions ahead of STEM-EL beginning, learning about each other’s backgrounds and stories, and giving the participants time during their course and internship experience to simply be together as a social group without the faculty and directors involved. The content and equity-minded strategies described below also lent themselves to building connections among teacher candidates and between them and the relevant coursework they were engaged in (Artze-Vega et al., 2023), all of which were necessary for the success of our program.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study received IRB approval from Bridgewater State University. To assess the program’s impact, pre- and post-test surveys were administered, and semi-structured group interviews were conducted. Teacher candidates also kept daily journals of their classroom experiences and wrote reflections related to teaching assignments. These methods aimed to detect changes in teacher candidates’ pedagogical content knowledge, self-efficacy in STEM, and attitudes toward multilingual learners in the classroom. The results, which include descriptive statistics from the surveys, provide insights into the shifts in self-efficacy and attitudes.

Three survey tools were utilized to gauge the transformations experienced by our teacher candidates in STEM-EL. The Teaching Engineering Self-Efficacy Scale (TESS) (Yoon et al., 2012) was chosen because most teachers have not experienced engineering,

or participated in engineering pedagogical development, while learning to become or while a teacher (Cunningham & Carlsen, 2014). For teachers to want to implement engineering, it is critical that they have a positive attitude toward engineering, intrinsic motivation to continue with a long-term project, and a desire to experiment with different ways of teaching and learning for students (Bagiati & Evangelou, 2015).

The Science Instructional Practices Survey (SIPS) (Hayes et al., 2016) documents shifts in science instruction toward the goals of the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) and broader science education reform. This survey data serves to help educators understand teachers' struggles and progress in implementing NGSS science and engineering practices and the progress they are making toward integrating opportunities for students to engage in the practices.

To better understand the participants' attitudes toward teaching multilingual learners, the researchers used the Social Justice-Inclusion Survey (SJ-IS) (Boivin et al., 2022) a modified version of Shippen et al. (2005) Preservice Inclusion Survey. Both of these previous studies used the survey to present a scenario of a racially-rich and disability-rich classroom, respectively, and sought to explore teacher candidates' attitudes and reactions to these classrooms. Below we report the quantitative results of two cohorts of STEM-EL, with more specific details from each survey outlined for the first cohort.

FINDINGS

The Teaching Engineering Self-Efficacy Scale (TESS) (Yoon et al., 2012) showed improved positive self-efficacy in engineering for the participants in STEM-EL. The mean pre-test score was 4.85 and post-test score was 5.39 on a Likert scale of 1-6, with 1 being

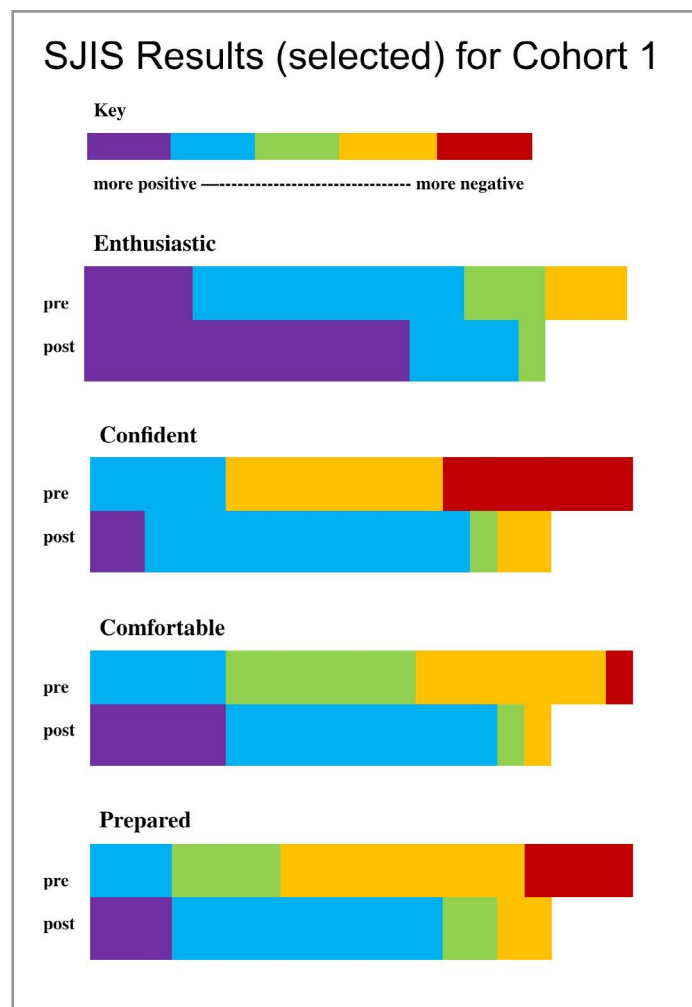
“strongly disagree” and 6 being “strongly agree,” for two cohorts of STEM-EL. Greatest gains were teacher candidates' more positive feelings about spending the time necessary to plan engineering for their class (question #3), guiding students' solution development using the engineering design process (#7), and effectively employing engineering activities (#4). The participants showed improved understanding of the engineering discipline (#2), feeling more confident discussing how criteria can affect the outcome of a project (#6), and knowing how engineering is connected to our daily lives (#1). See [Appendix 1](#) for an overview of all of the results for cohort 1 on the TESS.

The Science Instructional Practices Survey (SIPS) (Hayes et al., 2016) showed that the teacher candidates in STEM-EL were likely to have their students carry out practices of scientists. This was true on both the pre- and post-test surveys for two cohorts of STEM-EL. The mean pre-test score was 4.03 and post-test score was 4.40 on a Likert scale of 1-5, with 1 being “never” and 5 being “daily or almost daily.” STEM-EL focused heavily on three practices, although all eight were present in various ways: developing and using models, planning and carrying out investigations, and constructing explanations and developing solutions. As can be seen in [Appendix 2](#), the questions pertaining to planning and carrying out investigations (#2, 3, 4, 7) and developing and using models (#15, 16, 17) had the highest pre- to post-test gains. This indicates the participants were less likely to do these practices often in their classrooms prior to STEM-EL, and our program helped them better understand what those practices might look like in a classroom and how they might enact them more often than initially thought. Interestingly, those pertaining to constructing explanations (#10, 12, 13, 14) had a loss or no gains from pre- to post-test. There could be

several explanations for this, one likely being that because these activities had the highest means on the pre-test, the teacher candidates came to realize that doing science and getting to the point where students could construct explanations required more practices ahead of time. Thus, as other practices increased in use, it logically meant that others, like constructing explanations, must decrease to fit the new practices in.

The Social Justice-Inclusion Survey (SJ-IS) (Boivin et al., 2022; Shippen et al., 2005) showed significant improvements in attitudes and feelings about teaching multilingual learners. The questions on the survey asked participants to rank their level of enthusiasm, fear, anxiety, comfort, anger, willingness, interest, confidence, nervousness, pleasure, power, annoyance, acceptance, preparedness, resistance, happiness, and optimism toward teaching multilingual learners. The ranking system used a range of feelings for each construct. For example, participants could choose from the following rankings under optimism: optimistic, somewhat optimistic, neutral, somewhat pessimistic, pessimistic. We analyzed these results differently than the surveys above by tallying and then visually showcasing the number of participants who expressed certain feelings from pre- to post-test. The greatest changes were that more participants felt enthusiastic, confident, comfortable, and prepared in their ability to work successfully in a classroom composed of majority multilingual learners. These selected results are shown in **Figure 1** for cohort 1.

FIGURE 1: THE SOCIAL JUSTICE-INCLUSION SURVEY (SJ-IS) RESULTS



While the results of the Social Justice-Inclusion Survey are promising and show a change in attitude of the teacher candidates who participated in the project, using this survey as the only point of information on implicit or explicit biases our teachers may have toward multilingual and minoritized populations would be ill-founded. Future publications by our team will be able to triangulate qualitative interview and reflection data with the Social Justice-Inclusion Survey. Given that both attitudes and biases are socially constructed (Payne et al., 2017; Smith & Hogg, 2008), we can hypothesize that their attitude changes combined with the social setting and internship of STEM-EL may lead to changes in bias, hopefully in a positive way. Additionally, individual attitudes can result in transformative collective action when in a social group of people with similar attitudes (Smith & Hogg, 2008). Thus, if our future teachers find themselves again in a learning community focused on multilingual learners, they may be more easily moved toward prioritizing students' assets and strengths and enacting equity-oriented pedagogies.

LESSONS LEARNED

Our hope is that by uncovering teacher candidates' attitudes and efficacy about teaching STEM and multilingual learners, we can provide educators a starting point to re-envisioning programs with a more explicit focus on equity. We consider our program a success, but that was not without much time, effort, careful planning, and considerations for how to improve the program from the first to second cohorts. And there is, of course, more that we can improve upon still.

As co-principal investigators and colleagues who wrote the NSF grant together, we were aware of what each other hoped to gain from the program on behalf of the participating teacher candidates, department, and personal

research agendas. It helped tremendously that we knew something about each other's discipline — Nicole, as the STEM educator, had done much work in language, literacy, and subject integration, and Jeanne, as a multilingual educator, had done much work in science and technology. Despite this, one of the smartest things we did when obtaining the grant was plan for the entire first year to be a planning year. That enabled us to truly dig into each other's disciplines, talk together about each of our courses, and plan for as much integration as possible in the content we were teaching. It also allowed us to learn from each other and establish additional research questions beyond what our grant proposal had outlined. For example, Nicole learned from Jeanne the current culturally appropriate use of terms, such as multilingual learner, and Jeanne learned from Nicole the importance of making STEM content and methodology accessible to our teacher candidates through hands-on activities and practical application. In addition, the development of a multi-layered STEM biographical read-aloud assignment allowed us to bring together our two fields of study in an engaging and challenging way.

While we are proud of the STEM-EL program and received excellent feedback from our participants, we must acknowledge the limitations of both our program and our study. This was a program that centered the understanding of the experience of linguistically diverse learners and recognized the contributions of racially and linguistically diverse STEM scientists, inventors, and researchers. We are White educators who were teaching primarily (especially in year one) White students. While we made every effort to present our content with humility and respect, we acknowledge that our lived experience is more privileged than the children and scientists we were focused on.

There were limitations in the curriculum and materials that were used at STARBASE. Their STEM curriculum was not one that we could change. Although it fulfilled some elements of Jackson et al. (2021) equity-oriented STEM framework, such as real-world applications that involved problem solving, critical thinking, and some forms of STEM identity development, many science education researchers advocate for curriculum topics and concepts to be focused on societal needs and problems most relevant to the students being taught in order to truly fulfill STEM equity needs (Atwater, 2022). However, the STARBASE curriculum was similar enough to, and in many ways better than what teacher candidates will find in a typical school district curriculum. As such, we sought to change and emphasize what we could control and what teacher candidates may be allowed to strategize about in their future curriculum options — use of language, strategies, and role models.

We did not collect data on the children the program participants worked with in their internship and therefore cannot report on the students' learning or their experience. Although demographic data was not collected on the multilingual children served by the teacher candidates, many of the children self-reported heritage languages from immigrant groups historically marginalized by the U.S. education system, including those from the nations of Brazil, Venezuela, Cape Verde, China, Haiti, Costa Rica, and Syria. Finally, while the study explored bias through the attitudes expressed in the SJ-IS survey, we did not administer a quantitative survey about bias. Our hope is the triangulation of the qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews, participant journals, and lesson reflections along with the SJ-IS will provide insight into teacher candidate bias that will be reported in future publications.

NEXT STEPS

On a micro level, participation in the STEM-EL program had positive results for the teacher candidates, and these findings suggest critical insights for centering equity and multiculturalism as a key component of teacher preparation in STEM and multilingual education. The integrated approach of this program where multiculturalism and equity are taught within content areas while simultaneously being put into practice created a uniquely meaningful experience for teacher candidates.

The findings of this study were consistent with the research on providing teacher candidates the skills to effectively and confidently teach STEM content in a diverse community. Teachers with higher self-efficacy for science tend to employ effective STEM teaching practices (Friedrichsen et al., 2011). Development of their pedagogical content knowledge and positive achievement in STEM content learning for themselves and the multilingual learners they teach is expected to increase their motivation for teaching and learning STEM (Demir, 2008; McCormick et al., 2002).

Bias factors into the attitudes and cultural history every teacher brings to a classroom. It was the purpose of this program to determine if both equity-oriented experiences and a meaningful professional experience working with multilingual learners would impact the cultural biases, fears, attitudes, and anxieties of teacher candidates as they consider working with multilingual learners in their future classrooms.

The pre- and post-test Social Justice-Inclusion Survey showed significant changes in teacher candidates' attitudes and feelings about teaching multilingual learners. On the post-test, more teacher candidates reported more

positive feelings than on the pre-test across all constructs, although many still reported feeling nervous about teaching multilingual learners. This is understandable and means they are thinking critically about what it takes to successfully educate students with diverse linguistic assets and needs. It was our hope that STEM-EL provided a broader understanding among the participants not only of the needs of multilingual learners but more critically of the assets multilingual children bring to a classroom.

At the time of writing this chapter, the authors of this study were beginning a third and final cohort of the NSF funded STEM-EL program. This cohort was purposefully selected from students in our university's undergraduate teacher preparation program. The design of this final cohort was based on lessons learned from the previous cohorts and offers insight to practitioners who may want to replicate or adapt our model to their own teacher preparation programs.

Our selection process was to invite students participating in our early childhood and elementary methods courses who were recommended by professors and identified as linguistically, racially, and gender diverse. We had learned from our previous cohorts to be purposeful in our recruitment rather than provide a blanket opportunity to all elementary and early childhood majors. Our experience in Cohort 1 (overwhelmingly monolingual, White, and female) had shown that targeted recruitment, resulting in a much more diverse Cohort 2, was a successful practice. However, we also noted during Cohort 2 that many of our linguistically, racially, and economically diverse students declined our invitation or withdrew before the program started because of the financial burden of participating in a time intensive program during the summer. As we previously noted, this is a peak earning time for

our students who are majority first-generation college students and working class.

Cohort 3 of STEM-EL was a six-week, five-day per week intensive academic and internship program that required teacher candidates to be available from 8 AM to 5 PM almost every day. To address participants' financial needs, we used grant funding to provide free on-campus housing for the participants who requested it at our encouragement. We also worked with our university's internship office to provide stipends for teacher candidates as they participated in their four-week internship. These resources provided some of the supports teacher candidates needed and made our STEM-EL program accessible to a larger population of participants.

As we looked to create a sustainable STEM-EL program, we decided to collaborate with the Brockton Public Schools, a school district close to campus and at schools in this system with large numbers of multilingual students. BSU works with the Brockton Public Schools through our existing Professional Development School partnership. This partnership provides BSU student teachers and pre-practicum students an opportunity to work in the highly diverse schools of the Brockton system and supports the Brockton schools through professional development opportunities and access to faculty expertise. Building off this existing partnership, we were able to create opportunities for our STEM-EL Cohort 3 teacher candidates to practice and learn in the Brockton schools and provide the children in these schools a highly enriched STEM curriculum. At the same time, our partnership with STARBASE continued as they became our teaching support for computer science. Cohort 3 was able to experience STARBASE and also bring robotics and computer science concepts into the Brockton Public Schools.

CONCLUSION

With creativity and determination, STEM-EL is a replicable program. The goal was to educate teacher candidates to provide linguistically and culturally diverse students with access to all that STEM has to offer. Teacher preparation programs must be purposeful in giving their teacher candidates access and opportunity to work with multilingual and multicultural students in academically meaningful ways. Educational access and opportunity are made available by seeking ways to bring our candidates into classrooms where they must actively bridge linguistic and cultural divides to provide active learning opportunities for themselves and the children they teach.

Based on our work, we recommend that teacher educators look at their programs for opportunities to teach content through an immersive and integrative pedagogy that offers experiential learning in a translanguageing atmosphere. Content is experienced and learned through hands-on activities and by providing children an opportunity to think about the content in both their heritage languages and English. Simultaneously, teacher candidates experience multilingual students as learners who bring funds of knowledge and experience to their classrooms. We believe that teacher preparation programs must embed anti-bias and anti-racist education within their methods and content courses with the goal of creating teachers who value and welcome multilingual and racially diverse learners to their classrooms.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the 38 teacher candidates who wholeheartedly jumped into this new program with enthusiasm and an eagerness to learn from us and with us. We hope it was as rewarding an experience for you as it was for us! We would also like to thank the many more teacher candidates who

applied but who we did not have room for in the program, for putting your interest in STEM and/or multilingual learner education out there into the world. Our hope for you all is that you continue to pursue your passions in teaching and education.

We are incredibly thankful to STARBASE, our off-campus internship site. Author Nicole Glen has been partnering with them in various ways for 10 years now and loves every moment she gets to spend on the air force base, in the classroom, and with the students and teachers there. To the STARBASE director, Dr. Peter Holden, who also took a chance with us and our new program, we are grateful for his calm demeanor in listening to and contemplating our plans, and when teaching us all to code robots and maneuver around CAD. And to the STARBASE teachers for letting us “take over” your space and your teaching for two summers, thank you for lending your thoughtful advice to our teacher candidates.

We are blessed to have such an understanding and supportive academic department, Elementary and Early Childhood Education, at BSU. The STEM-EL program disrupted the “traditional” pathways through the major of those teacher candidates who participated. However, our colleagues recruited for us and allowed us into their classrooms to share the opportunity with as many students as we could get ourselves in front of.

STEM-EL would not have existed without the extraordinary graduate and undergraduate assistants who supported this program and our research. Emily Montour, our first graduate assistant, got us started, establishing programs, procedures, and a website to manage the application process and recruitment of students. She answered endless questions from students, faculty, and us with professionalism and boundless energy.

Geoff O'Brien flawlessly picked up from Emily, serving as our year two graduate assistant, organizing our research, and overseeing the administration of pre- and post-tests as well as supporting us in our work to code and analyze piles of qualitative data. Both Emily and Geoff have gone off to their own elementary classrooms where lucky students get to learn every day from these two brilliant teachers. Ashley Schepis and Rhiannon Leslie, our undergraduate assistants, served as both teaching assistants for our classes, creating materials, distributing information, and serving as student mentors to our year two cohort. We can't thank you both enough — helping to organize two very busy professors was no small task and they did it beautifully! Thank you, Emily, Geoff, Ashley and Rhi, very much — you were a pleasure to work with. We are so happy you have decided to share your intellectual (and organizational) gifts with the world of education.

Finally, we were overjoyed when we learned that the National Science Foundation's Improving Undergraduate STEM Education directorate was willing to fund our idea and are honored to have received a grant. As such, any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation. NSF IUSE Grant Award: DUE 2021338

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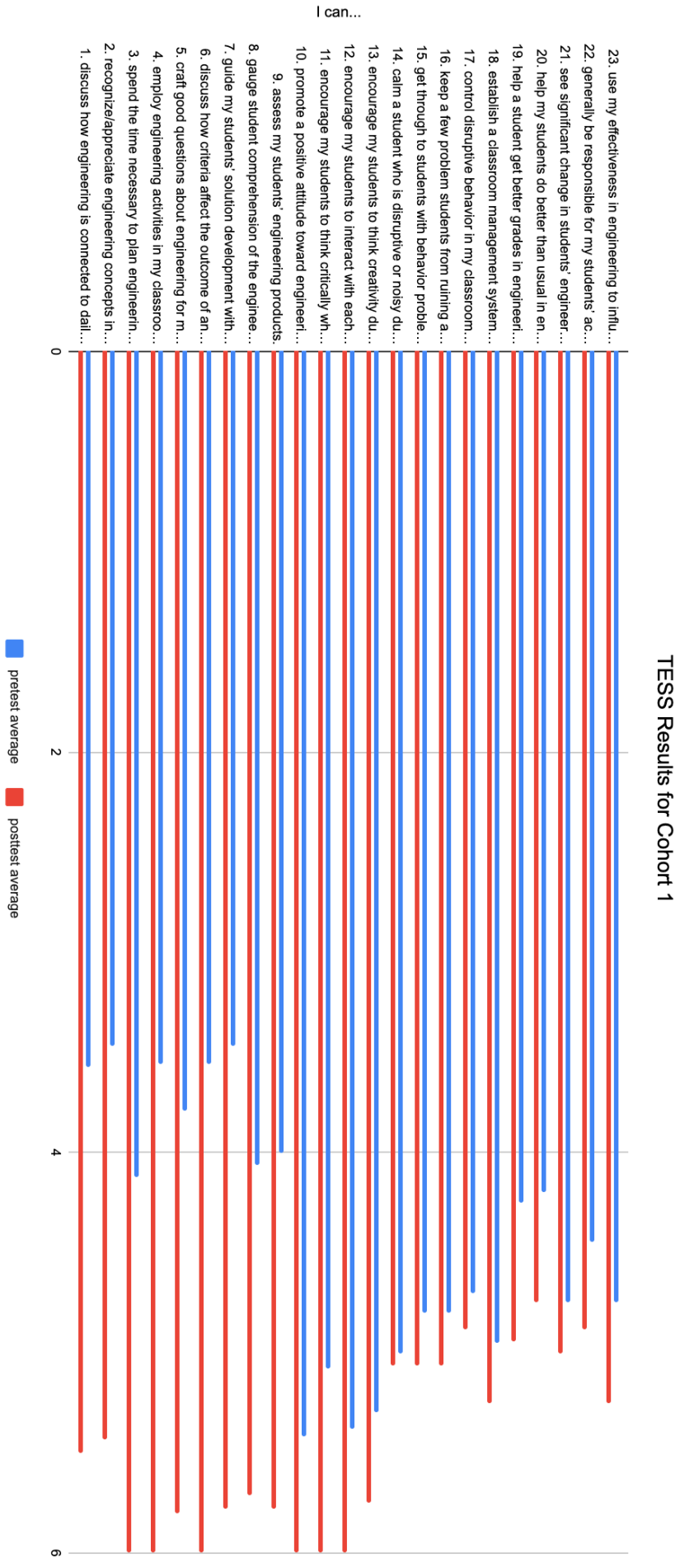
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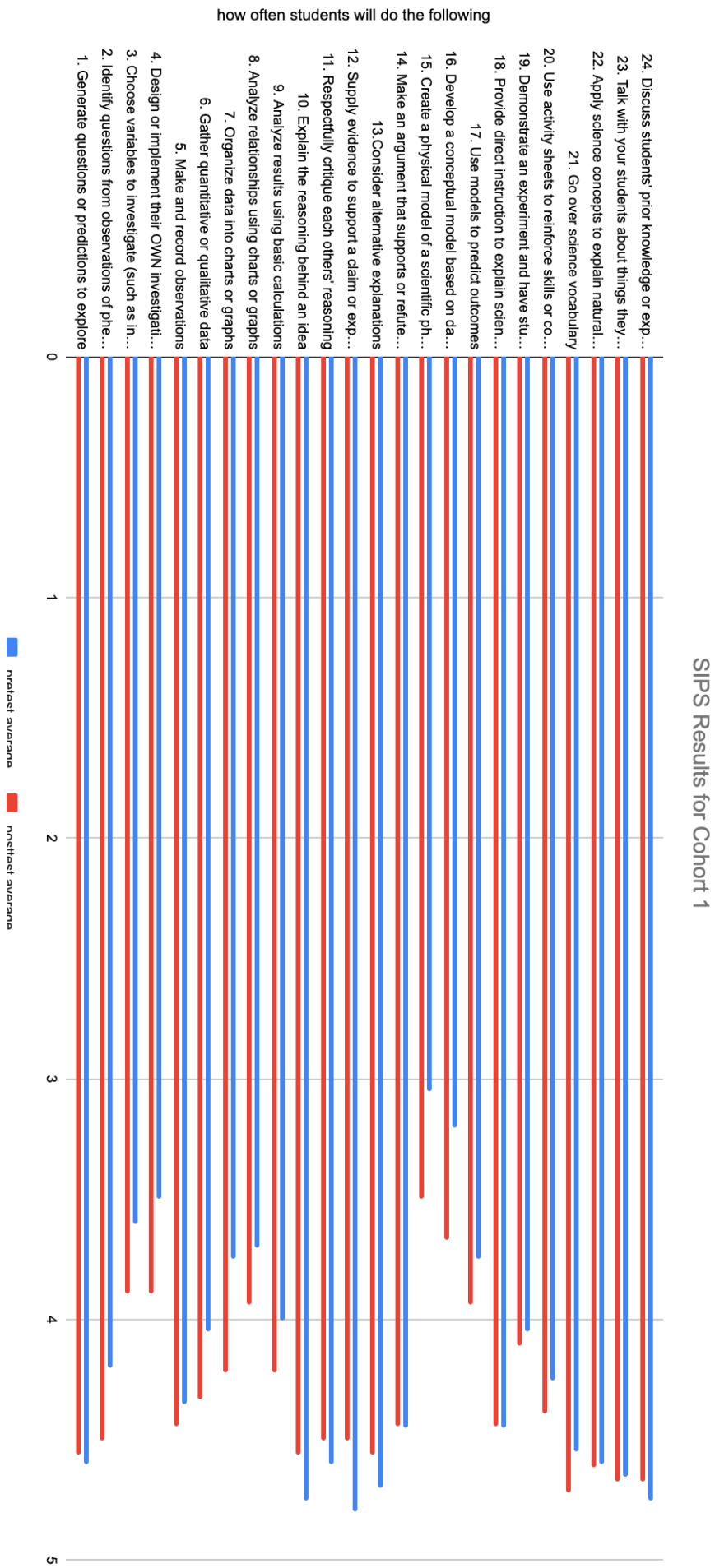
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APPENDIX 1: TEACHING ENGINEERING SELF-EFFICACY SCALE (TESS) RESULTS
("I can..." statements from the survey have been modified slightly to fit on the graph.)



[Appendix 1: in table format](#)

APPENDIX 2: THE SCIENCE INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES SURVEY (SIPS) RESULTS



[Appendix 2: in table format](#)

THE PEDAGOGY OF REAL TALK IN COMMUNITY COLLEGE CLASSROOMS: NOT JUST A TALK

By Lara Kradinova and Vikram Sharma

Keywords: *Pedagogy, Belonging, Interventions, Culturally Responsive*

INTRODUCTION

Middlesex Community College (MCC), with its campuses in Lowell and Bedford, Massachusetts, is recognized for serving Asian American, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, and Hispanic communities. The college is dedicated to creating a fair and inclusive environment for all students, actively addressing equity gaps and engaging with networks like the Racial Equity & Justice Institute, Achieving the Dream, and the AAC&U Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation initiative to reinforce its commitment to inclusivity.

MCC understood that in order to address the persistent disparities faced by racially-minoritized student groups served by the campus, institutional transformation needed to occur. Simultaneously, the COVID-19 pandemic left students and faculty feeling isolated and adrift, prompting a re-evaluation of long-established pedagogical practices. The realization dawned that the essence of college education extends beyond academics, grades, and test-taking abilities. Many sought new methods of teaching, learning, and being.

In response to our institutional desire to advance equity on behalf of the students we serve, MCC's administration supported the

launching of the Faculty Academy in spring 2021. The academy was created in partnership with Dr. Paul Hernandez, equity leader and author of the book *The Pedagogy of Real Talk: Engaging, Teaching and Connecting Students At-Promise*. The program, now in its fourth year, focuses on fostering interdisciplinary connections, instilling a sense of student belonging, enhancing academic relevance, and strengthening faculty-student relationships for students at promise and from minoritized backgrounds by promoting a culture of belonging and equitable teaching practices.

EQUITY-MINDED STUDENT SUCCESS THROUGH REAL TALK

"Know who your students are and will be" is a key driver of equitable student success and institutional transformation (AAC&U, 2015). Students' success is significantly influenced by their sense of belonging and personal connections with instructors and staff. Equity-minded teaching is characterized by an emphasis on professors building authentic, culturally responsive and trusting relationships with their students (Artze-Vega et al., 2023; McNair et al., 2016). It is essential for educational institutions to cultivate a culture that supports these values, particularly to enhance the achievements of Students of Color. Institutions should foster inclusive environments where faculty and staff are dedicated to nurturing every student's individual growth (Chambers & Huggins, 2014).

Research consistently links student success to a sense of belonging, which is a critical predictor of achievement from high school through to undergraduate and graduate levels, both nationally and internationally (Han et al., 2022; Bueno, 2023; Chambers & Huggins, 2014). An extensive body of research

underscores the significance of belonging for the academic motivation and success of marginalized student groups (Han et al., 2022). While most studies on belonging focus on four-year institutions, there are notable exceptions that explore two-year colleges (Gopalan & Brady, 2020).

The pedagogy of real talk (PRT), as defined in Hernandez's 2021 book, is a teaching approach that fosters engaging, relevant, and transformative experiences for students who may feel disconnected or undervalued by conventional educational methods. PRT's goal is to establish trust and a sense of belonging within the classroom and the educational institution at large, ultimately integrating students into a community of engaged individuals who actively share opinions and experiences. The effectiveness of the Pedagogy of Real Talk (PRT) extends beyond the insights of Dr. Paul Hernandez in his 2021 publication. It has been embraced by educators nationwide, as evidenced by Keyser et al. (2022), who applied PRT across more than 30 courses at a regional comprehensive university in the United States. Their findings revealed that students engaged in these courses experienced a heightened sense of belonging compared to the broader university student body. Keyser et al. (2022) further delved into the impact of PRT through case studies, discovering that real talks fostered a more humanized view of professors and strengthened student connections. Alternative lessons reinforced students' value and sense of place within the academic setting. The authors advocate for PRT as a promising strategy to cultivate belonging in university students, suggesting that real talks and alternative lessons can deepen connections with professors, peers, and course content. PRT emerges as a potent tool for fostering a more inclusive and equitable educational atmosphere in higher education. To this end, PRT practitioners exemplify transparency, resilience, authenticity, and creativity. These qualities are

reinforced through several key practices that are vital to PRT's success.

REAL TALKS

Using the pedagogy of real talk, instructors lead discussions on topics like identity, family, relationships, and community, sharing personal narratives to inspire students to do the same, thereby fostering mutual learning. Developing a real talk (RT) involves introspection into one's personal life story, identifying a resonant event, and reflecting on the emotions and responses it elicited. The key is to extract a universal theme — such as happiness, failure, success, loss, confusion, or helplessness — that students can relate to, even if they haven't experienced the exact event. By sharing this narrative and inviting students to recount their own related experiences, a profound connection is established within the classroom.

Real Talks are a critical component of the Pedagogy of Real Talk and must be approached with care. Professors should ensure that while RTs draw from their personal journeys, they are not sessions for venting or lengthy reminiscences. Instead, RTs should conclude on a hopeful note, as suggested by Hernandez (2021), demonstrating resolution or a positive outcome to impart optimism and highlight the silver lining, even if the story doesn't have a traditional 'happy ending.' The essence of RTs is to foster a reciprocal exchange, inviting students to share their experiences related to the universal theme presented.

Professors may employ various engagement methods and can reference previous RTs throughout the semester to reinforce the message and maintain student involvement. Timing for RTs is flexible; some professors introduce their first RT on the first day of classes, while others wait until later in the semester. Effective RTs can bridge the gap

between students and faculty, conveying to students that their professors are invested in their well-being and experiences. This connection is vital for students at risk of failing or dropping out, who may otherwise hesitate to seek help. PRT aims to engage all students, including those who excel academically yet feel a sense of alienation, by fostering a sense of belonging and empathy.

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING THROUGH ALTERNATIVE LESSONS

Educators integrate culturally relevant content and viewpoints into their lessons, allowing students to see their own experiences reflected in the curriculum and feel more engaged in the learning process. Culturally responsive teaching and creative learning activities form the foundation of “alternative lessons.” Instructors tailor course concepts to be relevant to students’ lives, aspirations, and goals, moving beyond the conventional curriculum coverage model. This approach not only makes the content more engaging and pertinent for students but also strengthens the connection between instructors and students. Students recognize the value of the content and appreciate the efforts made by instructors to understand and address their needs.

Developing an Alternative Lesson (AL) begins with truly understanding your students, which extends beyond superficial methods like index cards or introductory posts. It involves delving into the students’ lives, struggles, aspirations, and goals, and then integrating this knowledge into the course modules. ALs serve as a bridge, connecting instructors and course material with the current generation of students, making the learning experience more relevant and impactful. For example, Composition I students studying the elements of the argument/persuasion were asked to bring a personal picture/picture that meant

a lot to them and, based on it, make a claim about themselves, their life, and interests, using the elements from the “source” (the selected picture). The instructor modeled this activity herself allowing the students a glimpse at her background while teaching the students about written arguments/persuasive pieces and their elements. This activity allowed students to share their backgrounds and build trust in the classroom.

CREATIVE LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Instructors design innovative and pertinent activities, such as having students produce videos, podcasts, or creative writing on subjects of interest to them. Many instructors participating in the program modeled how to be creative by developing videos and podcasts; students were instructed on the platforms that can be used to produce these artifacts. For example, for the Psychology of Success course, the students were asked to create a resiliency ad campaign based on the materials covered in class. The “ad” could be a PowerPoint, TikTok, skit, song, or poem. Such activities allow students to be creative and have fun while demonstrating acquisition of the required skills.

FACULTY DEVELOPMENT FOCUSED ON THE PEDAGOGY OF REAL TALK

It is crucial to note that PRT is not intended as a do-it-yourself toolkit. Instead, PRT is operationalized through the establishment of a Faculty Academy — a cohort of faculty members participating in a professional development program, collaborating over a three-year period. At MCC, the program commences with a four-day training session in June, often led by Dr. Paul Hernandez with a consortium of colleges. During the four-day training, participants engage intensively with colleagues from their own and other colleges. Two days are dedicated to Real Talks (RTs) and the remaining two to Alternative Lessons

(ALs). Dr. Hernandez, alongside guest speakers with practical experience in PRT, guide faculty members through the nuances of crafting RTs and ALs. Participants then develop their own RTs and ALs, presenting them to small groups for feedback from peers, facilitators, and guest speakers. By the end of the training, most participants have created at least one RT and one AL, ranging from initial drafts to final versions ready for student engagement in the fall semester.

The faculty cohort's progression includes a one-day retreat in August, held exclusively within their own college. This day is reserved for practicing RTs and ALs among peers, allowing for feedback and refinement to ensure readiness for student engagement. At MCC, the cohort convenes for three monthly virtual meetings during the fall and spring semesters to exchange experiences and to discuss equity-related research and classroom practices. Many cohorts used the meetings to discuss other equity-related initiatives that they participated in (such as decolonizing the curriculum, redesigning the syllabus, taking equity courses from other institutions); these discussions provided the participants with additional resources and allowed them to see connections between the Faculty Academy and other important practices.

It's important to note that this format is unique to MCC, and other institutions may have different approaches for these gatherings. Additionally, a one-day virtual retreat in January brings the consortium together to share RTs and ALs, a feature distinctive to the consortium experience and possibly not present in non-consortium schools.

With administrative support, MCC participants receive compensation and backing for their involvement in the academy, which facilitated the formation of an initial, self-selected

group of dedicated part-time and full-time faculty. The program's credibility grew as these early adopters began to share their successful practices and outcomes during college-wide gatherings. Initially introduced by the administration, the intervention quickly evolved into a faculty-driven endeavor, with each cohort appointing a leader and actively shaping the application of the intervention. This initiative unites instructors from diverse fields, fostering collegiality and inspiring creativity as they discover versatile applications of 'Real Talks' and 'Alternative Lessons' across various disciplines. Faculty cohorts from different years have the opportunity to witness each other's development and exchange insights, not only within the college but also on state and national levels through conferences and annual Faculty Academy retreats involving multiple Massachusetts institutions.

The Pedagogy of Real Talk (PRT) not only aims to foster equity within the classroom and support student development, but it also significantly enhances collaboration among faculty members across different disciplines. The three-year Faculty Academy experience dismantles traditional academic silos, fostering a collaborative and supportive environment where faculty members can share their challenges and successes. Through the practice of Real Talks (RTs), faculty members at MCC, including both full-time and part-time professors, develop deep empathy and provide constructive feedback to one another. This process cultivates a strong community network within the institution, enabling the identification of resources and institutional equity gaps from diverse perspectives.

In order to foster these diverse perspectives and deepen the representation of those utilizing this teaching strategy, we examined the identities of those utilizing PRT. The first two faculty cohorts to utilize PRT had a

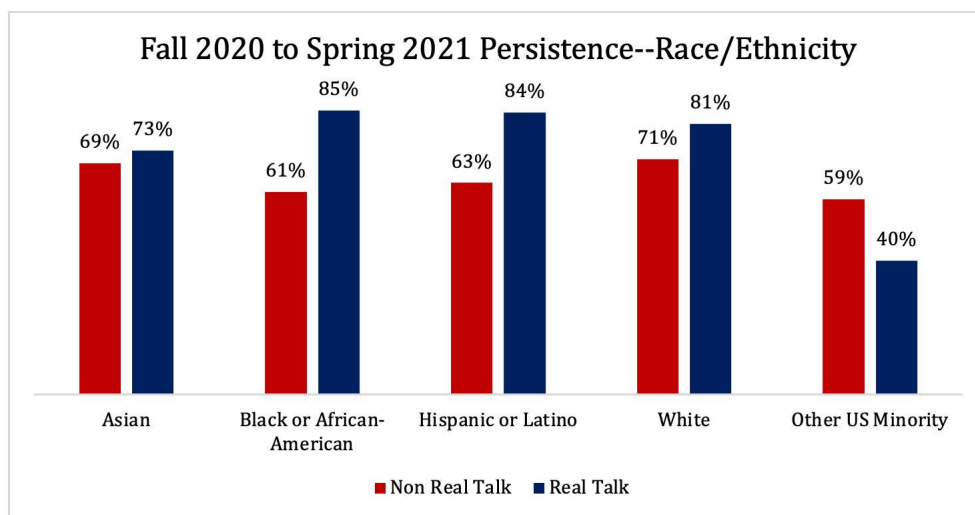
gender and racial composition that mirrors the broader faculty demographics at MCC, with a higher proportion of female (71%) and White faculty members (68%). In order to increase racial and ethnic diversity targeted recruitment efforts are underway. Similarly, as few part-time (adjunct) faculty have participated in the infusion of PRT in their courses, efforts are underway to encourage these colleagues to join the Faculty Academy as well.

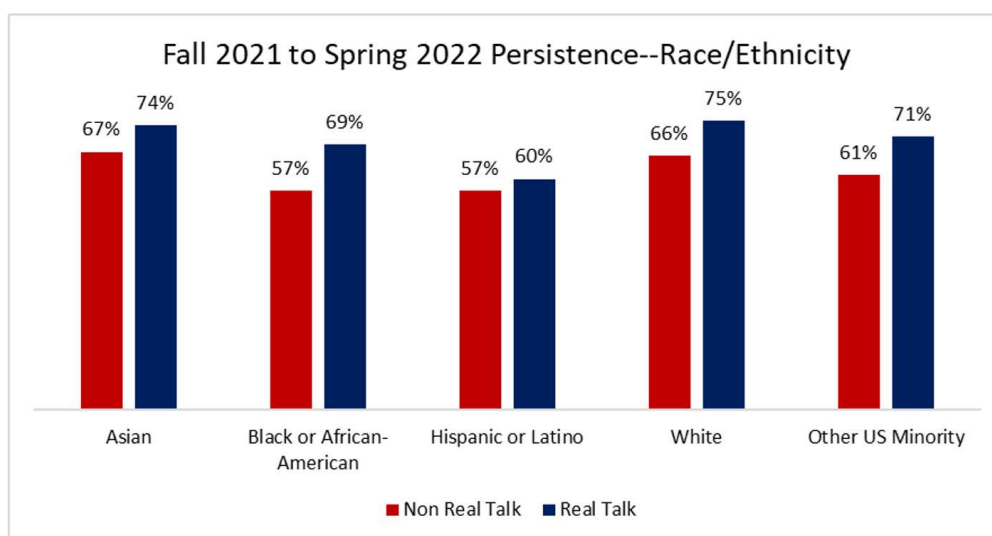
ASSESSING OUR EFFORTS

At MCC, each cohort collects intervention data comprising both qualitative and quantitative elements. These results compare the performance and persistence of students in Real Talk (RT) sections versus non-RT sections of the same courses. The data is disaggregated, allowing cohort members and administration to monitor and analyze trends, making inequalities visible. This disaggregation is crucial for identifying practices that support groups facing institutional equity gaps and for modifying or replacing practices that exacerbate these gaps (Baxter, 2020; Dowd, & Elmore, 2020). The process of refining high-level indicators to detailed quantitative measures and qualitative data is central to practitioner learning and change, as noted by McNair et al., 2020.

Over the last several years, the data clearly indicate that students participating in introductory courses including biology, business, chemistry, economics, English, law, math, and psychology classes that utilized the pedagogy of real talk, typically persisted at substantially higher rates than peers that engaged in the same classes but that did not use this pedagogical innovation. It should be noted that this was true across diverse identities including students of diverse gender, race/ethnicities, Pell status, first generation students, new/returning student status, full-time and part-time enrollment, and ages. Overall, in year one of the program, students that were engaged in courses using the pedagogy of real talk persisted at rates 8-11% higher than their comparable peers who were not engaged in courses utilizing PRT. As shown in the tables that follow, data disaggregated by race and ethnicity for this time period show that in the vast majority of cases, Students of Color appear to benefit from the use of the PRT as compared to their peers who did not experience this pedagogical support. This trend has been replicated over the years in all PRT cohorts at MCC.

RACE AND ETHNICITY DATA FOCUSED ON STUDENT PERSISTENCE AND THE USE OF THE PEDAGOGY OF REAL TALK AT MCC





Although quantitative data over the years of the program validate the intervention’s success in boosting student persistence, Faculty Academy (FA) practitioners also explored its influence on students’ sense of belonging. In spring 2023, participating faculty and MCC’s Office of Institutional Research crafted and deployed an anonymous student survey. This survey yielded both quantitative and qualitative data, with the latter providing nuanced insights focused on students’ sense of belonging and the effectiveness of Real Talks (RTs). The student survey, distributed anonymously during the last two weeks of the semester, included topics such as the instructor’s use of personal stories in learning activities, the impact of sharing on learning and connection, and students’ feelings of welcome, understanding, and motivation in the course. The survey also inquired about moments of connection or struggle, and the instructor’s role in addressing challenges. The responses provided valuable insights, highlighting the importance of instructor-student engagement and the effectiveness of the course material in fostering a sense of belonging in the academic enterprise. (The survey questions are shared with readers in the article appendix.)

The majority of the students noted that the inclusion of instructor’s personal stories and experiences were an integral part of the course. When asked if there “was ... a time in this course when you felt a connection to either the material, classmates, or the instructor?” 85% of the students replied in the affirmative. Nearly two-thirds of the students surveyed went on to share qualitative data on this issue. A few exemplars are noted below.

“Multiple times over the semester. I was apprehensive due to some warnings from my classmates about how challenging the material would be. However, Professor [instructor name] lectures on [course topic] were presented with excellence. In addition, the stories shared about [his/her] life were striking moments that made me connect with my classmates and feel proud to be in the MCC community.”

“Professor [instructor name] has incorporated [course topic] into [his/her] course. Despite all of us came from different backgrounds with different mindsets, we can all agree that we could be happier incorporating [course topic] into our lives. I came out of this class learning more than just how to write essays and I became a generally positive person in general.”

The survey results indicate that 61% of respondents experienced challenges academically or personally during the course, and 83% of those who faced challenges felt supported by their instructors. This suggests that instructors were not only accessible but also that students were more inclined to share their difficulties and seek assistance. Many students noted that the delivery of the material not only helped them connect with the course content but also facilitated connections with their peers and the broader MCC community. This underscores the value of interactive and relatable teaching methods in enhancing an equitable educational experience and fostering a sense of community within the institution. The insights gained from the survey have prompted instructors engaged in the project to consider conducting surveys at both the beginning and end of the semester to track changes in student perceptions.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CAMPUSES INTERESTED IN THE PEDAGOGY OF REAL TALK

Implementing the pedagogy of real talk requires careful planning and consideration of various steps and stakeholders. The recruitment of Faculty Academy members is a critical first step and should commence as early as possible, ideally between October and November, especially for institutions new to this approach. Hosting a keynote speaker during a college-wide event, such as a Professional Day, can be an effective strategy. It's crucial to clearly communicate the time commitment and deliverables expected of candidates, akin to a syllabus provided to students. This transparency helps manage expectations and reduces complaints about additional workload. Additionally, it's essential to ensure that Faculty Academy members receive adequate compensation for their participation.

Experience at MCC shows that cohort sizes can vary, with the first cohort of 10 members achieving a 100% success rate over three years. In contrast, the third cohort began with four members and has since reduced in size to three faculty members. Based on this experience, a cohort size of 6-10 members is deemed ideal, allowing for effectiveness even if some members depart. Cohorts larger than 10 members may face logistical challenges during monthly meetings, which typically last 60-75 minutes, as not everyone may have the opportunity to present their RTs and ALs.

Monthly meetings are vital, providing a space for support and sharing of challenges and successes. It's normal for some RTs and ALs to not work as expected, and faculty should use the cohort for supportive brainstorming and practice. If issues arise beyond the cohort's scope, assistance from senior cohorts or consortium leaders should be sought. Flexibility is key, and cohorts should address their specific needs, exploring effective engagement methods. Allowing faculty input in shaping meetings and the program structure can significantly motivate and engage members.

Data collection is essential for assessing the program's success and ensuring its sustainability. Faculty members should be encouraged to survey students, and Institutional Research staff should collect data to evaluate the program's efficacy by comparing metrics in courses with and without PRT implementation. These findings should be discussed within cohorts and college-wide, ensuring data is anonymized.

For the successful adoption of the Pedagogy of Real Talk (PRT) across an educational institution, unwavering support from the administration is crucial. The Faculty Academy, a three-year program, requires a strong

commitment from administrators to ensure adequate funding and resources. Faculty members, who are undertaking this extensive professional training beyond a typical one-day conference, should be appropriately compensated for their participation. Moreover, their efforts should be publicly acknowledged throughout the institution. Without ongoing support from the president, provost, and deans, implementing this pedagogy institution-wide would be nearly impossible.

A potential pitfall of PRT is that incorrect usage can disrupt the learning environment. For example, if an instructor overshares personal issues, it may turn into a “venting” session, overwhelming students. To prevent this, it’s imperative that instructors complete Faculty Academy training before implementing their RTs and ALs.

From the faculty’s standpoint, there’s a concern that PRT might hinder completing the syllabus, especially in programs with Accreditation Standards and professional certification exams. The performance of students in these programs is critical for their licensure and serves as a benchmark for faculty and program evaluation. Therefore, balancing PRT with syllabus completion is a significant consideration for faculty members. To address concerns, faculty are designing “mini” Real Talks (RTs) that build trust without taking too much class time. Contrary to the belief that this pedagogy is only for face-to-face settings, MCC instructors have successfully implemented RTs and ALs in all modalities, including online asynchronous courses, using videos and discussion posts. This approach ensures that the pedagogy adapts to various teaching environments and student needs.

CONCLUSION

The Pedagogy of Real Talk (PRT) is a strategic approach for institutions aiming for greater equity and inclusion. It demands a long-term commitment from both faculty and administration, as well as thorough planning. Equity and inclusion are long-term objectives, and PRT’s long-term intervention aligns with these goals.

The encouraging initial results of PRT among faculty led MCC, in partnership with Dr. Paul Hernandez, to expand PRT’s scope. A staff-only cohort was established to explore PRT’s application beyond the classroom, yielding promising outcomes. MCC now has two staff-only PRT cohorts alongside the faculty cohorts. The vision is to continue expanding the academies to include non-unit personnel and student leaders, embedding PRT into the college’s daily interactions and demonstrating a commitment to equity at a personal level.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors would like to acknowledge the generous and continuous support of Dr. Paul Hernandez, MCC’s President Phil Sisson, Provost Arlene Rodríguez, and MCC’s Institutional Research and Analytics. Their support made the intervention successful.

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APPENDIX: SURVEY FOCUSED ON THE STUDENT'S EXPERIENCE IN COURSES USING THE PEDAGOGY OF REAL TALK

1. The instructor provided learning activities that included sharing his/her personal stories. Multiple choice: Yes/No
2. How much do you feel that sharing helps with learning or connecting to your instructor and peers? Multiple choice: A great deal/A lot/A moderate amount/A little/Not at all
3. Please rate the following statements based on your course experience this semester. Likert-scale: Strongly agree/Agree/Neither agree or disagree/disagree/Strongly disagree
 - a. My experience in this course made me feel like I was welcome and belonged in this class
 - b. I feel like this instructor really wants to help students learn the material
 - c. The instructor helped me better understand the material
 - d. I feel more confident about engaging in future coursework at this college
 - e. My experience in this course made me feel motivated
 - f. My experience in this course made me feel like I was welcome and belonged in this class.
4. Was there a time in this course when you felt a connection to either the material, classmates, or the instructor? Multiple choice: Yes/No
 - a. Open ended: If yes, please explain your answer.
5. Was there a time in this course when you struggled or were challenged by something either academically or personally? Multiple choice: Yes/No
 - a. Open ended: If yes, did the instructor help you to deal with your situation?
6. Please share anything about how the instructor was able to assist you in dealing with your situation. Open ended.
7. Please feel free to share any additional comments with us. Open ended.

CREATING A COMMUNAL CULTURE WITH LINKED-COURSE COMMUNITIES

By Laura R. Ramsey & Thomas Kling

Keywords: Linked Course Communities, First-Year Experience, Student Success, STEM

INTRODUCTION

It has been well established that higher education needs to improve in our work with Students of Color, first-generation students and female-identifying students majoring in STEM fields in order to support their student success (Diekman et al., 2010; Hatfield et al., 2022; Kezar & Holcombe, 2017; Riegle-Crumb et al., 2019). This chapter shares the results to date of a two-year project utilizing linked-course learning communities as a strategy to support the success of students from a range of diverse identities enrolled in STEM majors at Bridgewater State University.

The strategy described in this chapter integrates attention to students' academic growth and academic sense of belonging — both key to the success of students attending our campuses (Healey & Stroman, 2021). Cultural mismatch theory helps to inform this intervention. This theory purports that colleges and universities foster a culture of independence, which disadvantages students from more interdependent, communal cultures (Stephens et al., 2019). For example, when students first begin college, they are typically expected to choose a major based on their own preferences with little input from others. They then choose a slate of classes for their first semester, often from a long list of varied

options, again prioritizing their own personal preferences. Traditional college classes then expect students to learn mostly on their own, in the many unstructured hours outside of class, with only a few hours of class time each week. First-semester students rarely know any peers in their classes, and each class is a wholly new set of peers with a different professor. While acclimating to a college culture can be challenging for all students, the independent norms fostered in higher education by the emphasis on personal preferences are consistent with the socialization of upper-class, White men. Meanwhile, other students, such as Students of Color, first-generation college students, and women, are often socialized in interdependent, communal cultures (Boucher et al., 2017; Diekman et al., 2010; Guiffreda et al., 2012; Stephens et al., 2012), and thus a cultural mismatch emerges.

Previous research provides strong evidence of this cultural mismatch and its negative impact on equitable student outcomes (Diekman et al., 2017; Phillips, 2020; Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012; Stephens, Townsend et al., 2012). For example, first-generation college students are more likely to identify interdependent motives for pursuing a college degree (e.g., “give back to my community”) whereas continuing-generation students were more likely to endorse independent motives (e.g., “expand my knowledge of the world” Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012; Phillips, 2020). Women are more likely to identify communal goals for pursuing STEM fields compared to men (Diekman et al., 2017). Further, students who endorse interdependent or communal motives report a decreased sense of belonging and motivation at universities (Phillips et al., 2020) and particularly in STEM (Diekman et al., 2012), which in turn relates to poorer academic performance (e.g., Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012; Stephens, Townsend et al., 2012).

MICROSCOSMS – A STRATEGY FOR EQUITABLE STUDENT SUCCESS

MicroCOSMs (small Communities Of Science and Mathematics) are linked-course learning communities wherein first-semester students take a first-year seminar that emphasizes the social relevance of STEM alongside two other courses with the same group of peers. While linked-course learning communities have previously been used in a variety of ways at a large number of institutions (Fosnacht & Graham, 2022; Stassen, 2003), we designed MicroCOSMs specifically for the Bartlett College of Science and Mathematics (COSM) at Bridgewater State University (BSU), a medium-sized Master's Comprehensive public university serving southeastern Massachusetts. We chose a classroom-based model in order to be inclusive of commuter students, who constitute about a third of our first-time, first-year students. We also aimed to create stronger connections for first-year students with the College of Science and Math enhancing their sense of academic belonging (Healey & Stroman, 2021), as about half of our incoming students are ineligible for courses in their chosen major due to their math placement scores.

These communities offer a shift in the curriculum and registration processes of first-semester students toward a more communal culture of STEM, as a way of shifting the culture of the university to be more similar to the cultures of students from minoritized populations, including first-generation students (e.g., Stephens et al., 2012), women (Diekman et al., 2010), and Students of Color (Guiffrida et al., 2012). Importantly, we conducted a randomized controlled trial of these microCOSMs wherein we randomly assigned incoming STEM majors to a microCOSM or a control group with comparable unlinked courses. To our knowledge, no other linked-learning communities have been subjected

to a randomized controlled trial to determine their efficacy beyond selection effects. Prior to recruiting any participants, the BSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved this project.

Prior to starting microcosm, low-income students enrolled in the introductory STEM courses were retained into junior-year STEM studies at a rate 5.0% points lower than non-low income students, and Students of Color were retained 9.6% points lower than White students. A 2017 analysis found that at BSU, 41% of all college freshmen were Students of Color, but the percentage of college sophomore Students of Color was only 29%. Focus groups conducted in spring 2015 found that college Students of Color felt alienated by faculty and their peers. Further, women in the college were overrepresented in low-income and first-generation populations, pointing to an intersectionality of class and gender issues prevalent in STEM fields. Interestingly, a 2019 Graduating Senior Survey conducted by our Office of Institutional Research showed that only 67% of respondents indicated that they had made important friendships at BSU, with even lower percentages for first-generation, commuter, and transfer students. These concerns all point to the need to develop a more inclusive community.

By creating a more communal culture, our linked-learning communities bridge students' home communities with their new academic environment while building an inclusive community in the classroom. This is especially powerful for students from underserved groups, such as first-generation students and Students of Color, who are both more likely to have fewer social connections and lowered sense of belonging on many campuses (e.g., Good et al., 2012; Johnson et al., 2007; Rubin, 2012). The communal framing can draw these students in by correcting the cultural mismatch that occurs in college environments

that are too individualistic for underserved students who are more likely to come from interdependent and communal cultures (Diekman et al., 2017; Stephens et al., 2019; Yosso, 2005).

Classroom-based interventions that develop and utilize faculty member's cultural sensitivity have been shown to create more equitable and inclusive STEM environments, as have using high-impact practices such as first-year seminars (Duncan et al., 2023; Ives et al., 2023). These linked-course learning communities are a key mechanism for reshaping the college to meet the needs of these students, rather than requiring students to assimilate to a curriculum structure that was originally designed by and for upper-middle class White men (Cabrera et al., 2017). Thus, these communities can drive structural and transformational change in higher education.

Students in each microCOSM take three courses together. The central hub of the microCOSMs is a three-credit First Year Seminar (FYS) that engages students in inquiry-based learning related to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. These wide-ranging goals address everything from eliminating poverty to ensuring access to quality education, while also including more explicitly STEM-focused goals, such as access to clean water and care for life below water and life on land. These goals make explicit the connection between scientific work and critical social problems facing our world today, and thus they offer a communal orientation to academic work connected to this clear vision from the UN. The goals are broad enough to capture the expertise of our faculty in a wide variety of ways, while still being unified around social themes that offer motivating weight to projects developed around one or more of these themes. Across

two years of microCOSMs, four different FYSES have been offered: Clean Water, A Basic Human Right; Math for Social Dynamics; HIV: Knowing is Everything; Sustainable Nanotechnologies.

The other two courses in the linked-course community depend on a student's math placement test score prior to starting at BSU. One course is a math course, ranging from intermediate algebra (a non-credit-bearing course for students needing support prior to taking a college-level math course) to single-variable calculus. For students whose math placement makes them eligible to start their major right away, the other course is an introductory STEM course, such as General Biology I or Computer Science I. For students whose math placement does not allow them to start their major courses, the other course is a general education requirement, such as Introduction to Public Speaking.

Therefore, while everyone in the First Year Seminars is part of microCOSM, the other linked courses contain both microCOSM students and non-microCOSM students. Importantly though, each of the microCOSM students has peers from their First Year Seminar course in the other two courses. In this way, microCOSM students are seeing familiar faces amongst their peers in multiple courses, as opposed to the typical first-semester student experience of having a different set of peers in each course.

Setting up the microCOSMs this way required relatively few alterations to the typical college schedule, as the communities were mostly built out of courses that already existed rather than requiring new courses to be created for this program, with the exception of the First Year Seminars. We did need to coordinate with the registrar's office to reserve seats in certain course sections for microCOSM students, and

the First Year Seminars were enrolled by special permission only.

We worked closely with Academic Advising to offer the microCOSM schedule to eligible students by sending them emails with instructions on how to register and recommendations for the exact course sections in which to register. This style of more proactive advising has been shown effective by other equity-minded practitioners (e.g., Watson, 2019), but it was a departure from BSU's previous advising protocols, which relied on recommending certain courses or even groups of courses and then students had to find and enroll in the exact sections they wanted. In this way, a hidden benefit of microCOSM was revealed: there was less room for error in first-semester student registration, and thus more students were placed into the courses they really needed to take to be on track for their major.

With support from an NSF-IUSE (National Science Foundation – Improving Undergraduate STEM Education) grant, we conducted a randomized controlled trial to test whether the linked-learning communities impacted student success. Data from the first two cohorts (N=201) clearly shows that the microCOSMs are effective in promoting STEM retention, especially for Students of Color, first-generation students, and academically underprepared students (i.e., students who did not score high enough on the math placement test to meet the co-requisite requirement for the first course in their major).

In **Table 1**, we see the impact of participating in a linked-course community. Overall, students who participated in the community were retained at the university within STEM in the spring semester at higher rates across all groups. We see statistically significant

differences in spring STEM retention for multiple groups, including for Students of Color, first-generation students, and academically underprepared students.

Community members also seemed to be retained at the university (not just in STEM) at higher rates and earn higher overall grades with a higher percentage of their credits resulting in A or B grades (Fall AB Rate) and a lower percentage of their credits resulting in D, F, or W grades (Fall DFW Rate) in the fall semester. However, these differences did not reach statistical significance, perhaps due to statistical power. Regardless, it does not seem to be the case that the students retained by the communities performed worse than the control group, which would have put them at greater risk for lower retention later on.

Table 1: Fall to Spring Retention and Grades of Students in MicroCOSMs and Control Students

	Spring Retention	Spring STEM Retention	Fall AB Rate	Fall DFW Rate
Overall				
Community (n=86)	93.9%	91.5%	.67(.35)	.18(.27)
Control (n=115)	87.9%	78.5%	.59(.35)	.25(.35)
Students of Color				
Community (n=34)	97.1%	97.1%	.64(.34)	.22(.29)
Control (n=43)	86.0%	67.4%	.57(.33)	.29(.36)
First Gen Students				
Community (n=32)	96.9%	90.6%	.65(.35)	.17(.23)
Control (n=53)	83.0%	67.9%	.56(.35)	.31(.39)
Low Income Students				
Community (n=26)	92.3%	88.5%	.58(.34)	.28(.30)
Control (n=33)	87.9%	69.7%	.56(.32)	.27(.33)
Academically Underprepared				
Community (n=33)	97.0%	93.9%	.61(.33)	.20(.25)
Control (n=33)	87.9%	75.8%	.49(.33)	.33(.39)
Commuter Students				
Community (n=28)	92.9%	92.9%	.77(.33)	.14(.30)
Control (n=40)	85.0%	80.0%	.55(.38)	.27(.37)
Women				
Community (n=32)	96.9%	93.8%	.77(.31)	.09(.22)
Control (n=45)	88.9%	82.2%	.66(.31)	.20(.31)

Note. Student success outcomes in the first two cohorts of microCOSM students, comparing success for students randomly assigned to community or control group schedules. Statistically significant differences at the $p < 0.05$ level are marked in bold print. AB Rate and DFW Rate refers to the percentage of credits attempted that resulted in grades of A or B and D, F, or W. The standard deviation of the grade rates are provided in parentheses.

To analyze the connections between students, we utilized Social Network Analysis (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). Connections were analyzed based on course registrations; a student was considered connected to a peer if they were in the same section of a class together. Based on initial work studying the connections between students prior to the introduction of communities (Ramsey et al., 2023), it was determined that the best variables to analyze were the number of peer

connections a student has made through registration in shared classes (which would be called “degree” in the parlance of social network analysis) and the number of repeated connections (the number of times a student has had classes with another student a second or more time). MicroCOSM strongly impacted these variables, showing that students in the communities had significantly more connections and repeated connections than students in the control group, as intended.

Table 2: Number of Connections with Peers of Students in MicroCOSMs and Control Students

	Fall Connections	Fall Total Repeated Connections
Community	26.3(8.0)	16.3(8.7)
Control	18.0(5.8)	7.52(5.2)

Note. Fall Connections (also known as “degree” in the parlance of social network analysis) refers to the average number of fellow STEM first-year students that students saw in their first-semester classes. Fall Total Repeated Connections refers to the average number of times students in each group saw a peer in one class that they had already seen in another class. The differences in both variables are statistically significant at the $p<0.05$ level, showing that the creation of linked-course communities increased both the connections (degree) and number of times a student was in multiple classes with the same peers (total repeated connections).

Altogether, we conclude that the microCOSMs enabled students to connect with more fellow STEM majors in their courses and, importantly, repeat more of those connections so that students saw familiar faces in each class. Thus, we were able to create a more communal STEM culture for microCOSM participants, via both the curriculum in the first-year seminar and increased connections with peers. Furthermore, the microCOSMs positively impacted STEM retention, especially for Students of Color, first-generation students, and underprepared students. These groups likely come from more communal cultures, so this increased retention could be due to a better match between their home culture and the culture they encountered in their first semester in the College of Science and Math at BSU. The use of a randomized controlled trial allows confidence in these conclusions, as the rigor of the methodology allows us to eliminate alternative explanations for our findings, such as preexisting differences between the community and control groups.

LESSONS LEARNED

One lesson learned while implementing microCOSM focused on the challenges associated with placement testing. Eligibility for both the math and major courses relied on math placement test scores, and so we found

ourselves carefully tracking math placement test taking prior to new student registration. What became alarmingly clear is that there is a clear equity issue in the timing of students completing placement testing. Students of Color and first-generation students are much more likely to delay taking their math placement until late June and throughout July, whereas nearly all White and continuing generation students complete placement testing by mid-June. Because students cannot register for courses until completing the placement testing, this puts Students of Color and first-generation students at a significant disadvantage when securing seats in needed courses at preferred times. This has not been a problem with microCOSM thus far because the linked-course communities have been offered in the context of a randomized controlled trial, in which enrollment in microCOSM was tightly monitored and controlled to ensure equitable participation in the community and control groups. However, as the randomized controlled trial ends and we move toward a more open enrollment in future microCOSMs, we are concerned that microCOSM seats will be filled at the start of registration, thus making equitable enrollment impossible. Campuses that wish to implement a similar linked-course community model should work closely with the registrar’s office to guard against inequitable

enrollment in the communities, as it is critical that the students who will benefit from the communities the most have a chance to enroll.

A great advantage of our model of linked-course learning communities is that they were made up of courses that were already required by the general education requirements or the student's major. No courses were created outside of the existing curriculum, which means that students were not taking anything extra from what they should have been taking anyway, and no new courses had to move through academic governance or other kinds of approval. In this way, the communities are a structure that can contain an existing curriculum, and thus can be implemented relatively quickly with some attention to the scheduling of courses and student registration processes. This also means that the communities can accommodate future equity-minded, systemic changes to the curriculum. For example, some readers may be familiar with debates regarding the use of non-credit-bearing, developmental mathematics courses for students with low placement test scores (Brathwaite et al., 2020). While BSU still utilizes this system to support students through the mathematics curriculum, it may evolve in the future, in which case the linked-course learning communities could be set up with co-requisite mathematics courses or some other model of increased support for these students. Additionally, the costs of running this program were very low. Grant funding was used to execute the randomized controlled trial, but now the communities are becoming institutionalized with some administrative work but no additional costs to the university.

DESCRIPTION OF LIMITATIONS

One limitation to the microCOSM model is that we did not fully link the courses, meaning there were some students in the math and introductory major courses that were not part of the linked-course communities. We also did not arrange for the instructors to coordinate assignments, activities, or content across linked courses, as is sometimes done in linked-course learning communities (Fosnacht & Graham, 2022; Stassen, 2003). On the one hand, these choices made it easy for us to set up the communities while maintaining professors' autonomy and little interference with the typical process for scheduling courses. On the other hand, the communities — and thus their impact — may have been significantly stronger if the linkages were more complete and more deeply integrated across all three courses. Campuses implementing this strategy will need to weigh out the pros and cons of different levels of community integration.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, universities create additional barriers for underserved students when they solely embrace independent norms (Stephens, Fryberg et al., 2012), and thus it is up to universities to implement systemic changes to break down these barriers and create a welcoming culture for all of the students we seek to serve. Linked-course learning communities are one such mechanism for a culture change. While these communities transform the registration process and first-semester experience of first-year students, they can be implemented without much, if any, cost or disruption to the current curriculum requirements or schedule. The linked-course learning communities that we utilized and assessed are but one way to encourage

community in the classroom; this project could inspire other strategies for creating community that better matches the cultural backgrounds of students who have traditionally been underserved in higher education, including Students of Color, women, and first-generation students. More broadly, finding ways to create connections among peers in the classroom could be an important strategy for equity-minded systemic change

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UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH PRACTICES THAT DRIVE EQUITY

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Keywords: Undergraduate Research and Creative Scholarship, High-Impact Practices, Faculty Mentoring, United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

INTRODUCTION

This chapter offers evidence-based recommendations for overhauling Undergraduate Research and Creative Scholarship (URCS) to center racial equity. For more than 15 years, research has shown that the benefits of URCS are most pronounced for racially minoritized students (Carpi et al., 2017; Kuh, 2008; Kuh & O'Donnell, 2013; Lopatto, 2007, 2010; National Academies, 2019; O'Donnell et al., 2015), yet access continues to favor White students with socioeconomic advantages and family legacies of higher education (National Academies, 2019; Zilvinskis et al., 2022). Biased assumptions about research readiness often determine who gets opportunities. Typically, students with the highest GPAs who signal enthusiasm for research are invited to participate, but selecting students based on their previous successes and eager affects reifies privilege and perpetuates inequity (Pierszalowski et al., 2021; Shanahan, 2018). Efforts to diversify URCS have mainly focused on alternative programs for BIPOC students or watered-down “all students” approaches that leave minoritized

students out of high-impact opportunities (Finley & McNair 2013).

The student, faculty, and staff authors of this chapter call for wholly redesigning URCS for racial equity. Our survey and focus-group research, conducted by and with BIPOC students at Bridgewater State University (BSU), show that insufficient time and money are often insurmountable barriers to URCS. Equity-minded faculty mentors who intentionally invite minoritized students into research provide the most significant motivation for UR. This chapter focuses on effective changes to program structures and mentoring practices that have positively affected minoritized students' rates of URCS participation and success.

INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

Bridgewater State University (BSU) in southeastern Massachusetts is a public, regional, comprehensive institution that serves more than 8,000 undergraduate and more than 1,400 graduate students, about half of whom are first-generation and about one-third of whom identify as part of a racially or ethnically minoritized group. Creating a student-centered and inclusive community is part of BSU's mission. The university's “Vision Statement” (Bridgewater State University, 2023) begins with the aspiration that “all students, regardless of socioeconomic background, have full and equal access to the educational opportunities and social experiences that best prepare and inspire them to build purposeful lives of their choosing.”

A notable means of creating student-centered, inclusive, and accessible educational opportunities has been the institution's robust offerings of “high-impact practices,” known as HIPs. HIPs are teaching and learning practices for which data show “significant educational benefits for students who participate in them — including and especially those from demographic groups historically underserved

by higher education” (AAC&U, 2023). Commitments to racial and social justice at BSU include equitable student success in HIPs, with a keen focus on inclusive and successful participation by minoritized students. Among the most significant high-impact practices identified by the American Association of Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) and affirmed by BSU’s institutional research, are Study Abroad, Internships, and, the focus of this chapter, Undergraduate Research.

The concept and power of Undergraduate Research goes far beyond students completing laboratory assignments and research papers. The practice refers to “a *mentored* investigation or creative inquiry conducted by undergraduates that seeks to make a scholarly or artistic contribution to knowledge” (CUR, 2023, emphasis added). Myriad studies have concluded that the benefits of Undergraduate Research, across academic disciplines and institution types, depend on the quality of the faculty mentorship¹ students receive (Shanahan et al., 2015; Vandermaas-Peeler et al., 2018). As Undergraduate Research offerings have expanded beyond the natural and physical sciences (where the practice originated), so has the term “research,” which does not apply as well to scholarly work in the arts and other fields of study. At BSU and in this chapter, we use the term Undergraduate Research and Creative Scholarship (URCS) to refer to faculty-mentored work that seeks to discover or create knowledge in and/or across any discipline.

BSU’s dedication to equity and student success in URCS featured prominently in the selection of BSU for the 2019 Award for Undergraduate Research Achievement (AURA) from the national Council on Undergraduate Research. URCS and other HIPs have been prominent in the university’s and Academic

Affairs Division’s strategic plans, and they were further bolstered by BSU’s Special Presidential Task Force on Racial Justice, whose consequential 2021 report addressed the importance of racial equity and social justice in HIPs.

To support comprehensive scholarly work across the curriculum and co-curriculum, the URCS program at BSU offers several types of grant funding, presentation and publication opportunities, and professional development for students and faculty mentors. More than 1,200 BSU students, about 14% of our undergraduates, participate in the URCS program annually.

Several years of institutional research data and URCS student surveys have indicated that participation in URCS is transformative for students. Since 2017, first-year students who participated in URCS have persisted to their second year at BSU at 15 percentage points higher than first-year students who did not (85.4% first-to-second-year persistence for URCS participants compared to 70.5% of non-participants). In survey responses, URCS participants have reported gaining confidence and skills that are important for attaining long-term goals. The gains in all measures are highest for racially and ethnically minoritized and Pell-eligible students.

HIGH-IMPACT PRACTICES TOO OFTEN FAVOR WHITE STUDENTS

BSU’s data align with decades of evidence from large-scale, multi-institutional research studies indicating significant benefits for students who participate in mentored scholarly work (Kuh & O’Donnell, 2013; Lopatto, 2007, 2010). Those benefits include significantly higher rates of persistence and degree-completion, engagement in other high-impact educational programs, grade point average

¹At BSU and other primarily undergraduate institutions (PUIs), faculty members mentor undergraduate researchers. At many research universities, post-doctoral fellows and graduate students also serve as mentors.

and other markers of academic achievement, and a host of analytical, critical-thinking, and oral and written communication skills. Multiple studies have found that gains are most pronounced for students from racially and ethnically minoritized groups and for first-generation, Pell-eligible, and working-class students (Carpi et al., 2017; National Academies, 2019; Pierszalowski et al., 2021). Supportive relationships with mentors and the advantageous opportunities afforded by participation in authentic scholarly work have been shown to be especially transformative for students who have been underserved in higher education (Hernandez et al., 2018; Linn et al., 2015).

Yet, research continues to show that URCS opportunities disproportionately go to White and economically advantaged students with family legacies of higher education (Carpi et al., 2017; Finley & McNair, 2013; National Academies, 2019; Zilvinskis et al., 2022). Biased assumptions about research readiness often determine who gets opportunities. Typically, students with the highest GPAs who signal enthusiasm for research are invited to participate, but selecting students based on their previous successes and eager affects reifies privilege and perpetuates inequity.

Efforts to diversify Undergraduate Research (UR) have mainly focused on alternative programs for BIPOC students or watered-down “all students” approaches that leave minoritized students out of high-impact opportunities. The term “high-impact practices” refers to the educational experiences most consistently correlated with student success, including internships and study abroad, as well as undergraduate research (Kuh, 2008). Participating in high-impact opportunities is both expensive (in terms of the time invested and the earnings from paid employment sacrificed in order

to participate) and exclusive (as most either require competitive applications or depend on being selected) (Downing & Holtz, 2018; King, 2023). When we don’t fully acknowledge the inherent inequity in opportunities that are expensive and competitive, we imply that all students have the same access, despite the vast disparities in students’ financial capacities to take on additional, unpaid work (King, 2023). Truly broadening access in equitable ways requires investment of institutional resources as well as individual and collective efforts of faculty and administrators (Carpi et al. 2017; Downey & Holtz, 2018; Finley & McNair 2013; O’Donnell et al., 2015). Among those investments — and a significant area of focus in scholarship focused on strategies that will drive more equitable student participation in URCS — is culturally responsive mentoring (Byars-Winston et al., 2015; Haeger & Fresquez, 2016; National Academies, 2019; Shanahan, 2018).

A review of the recent literature on practices in undergraduate research and creative scholarship (URCS) that support diversity, equity, and inclusion revealed that such opportunities continue to favor White students who are continuing-generation and are not eligible for Pell grants. The literature also includes multiple examples of successful interventions that have resulted in more equitable URCS participation and student success. We identified five prominent themes that will be delineated in the following literature review:

- Compelling benefits of URCS for racially minoritized and low-income students
- Barriers minoritized students face in gaining access to URCS opportunities
- Changes to URCS practices that facilitate greater equity and inclusion

- Principles of equity-focused mentoring
- Potential for URCS to contribute to a sense of belonging in the college/university community for racially, ethnically, and socio-economically minoritized students

BENEFITS OF URCS, ESPECIALLY FOR RACIALLY AND ETHNICALLY MINORITIZED, FIRST-GENERATION, AND PELL-ELIGIBLE/WORKING-CLASS STUDENTS

As noted in the introduction, myriad studies have demonstrated the benefits of participating in undergraduate research and creative scholarship (URCS), which are especially significant for students from racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically minoritized groups (Battaglia et al., 2022; Fechheimer et al., 2011; Hernandez et al., 2018; Kuh & O'Donnell, 2013; Linn et al., 2015; Lopatto, 2007, 2010; Whittinghill et al., 2019). The benefits include quantifiable gains in rates of persistence and degree-completion, GPA, and pursuit of graduate study. Baron et al. (2020) and Battaglia et al. (2022) affirmed earlier studies showing that minoritized students had improved GPAs during and after URCS participation and accumulated more credits per semester. Awad and Brown (2021) likewise corroborated previous research that involvement in URCS was correlated with persistence of minoritized students in STEM disciplines and with overall retention rates. Stronger persistence of student-researchers has led to their higher graduation rates, a metric particularly significant for students who are underserved in higher education (Battaglia et al., 2022; Chastain et al., 2023; Haeger & Fresquez, 2016). URCS participation also increased the likelihood of minoritized students' enrollment in post-undergraduate academic pursuits (Baron et al. 2020; Battaglia et al., 2022; Chastain et al., 2023). Hernandez et al. (2018) conducted a longitudinal study of 1,420 African American, Black, Hispanic,

and Latinx science majors from 29 colleges and universities in the U.S., starting in the participants' junior year and continuing for 10 years. The researchers found that participation in undergraduate research "was beneficial to [the students'] academic performance, scientific baccalaureate attainment, acceptance into a scientific graduate program, and longer-term scientific-workforce participation" (p. 209).

Beyond the quantifiable gains, involvement in URCS has been shown to yield myriad benefits that significantly advance the personal and professional goals of minoritized students. The lessons learned from conducting URCS have developed students' self-efficacy and heightened their independence, self-reliance, and empowerment, all of which are invaluable in the "real-world" (Beals et al., 2021, p. 8). As a result, students from historically excluded groups who were mentored in research reported changes in self-concept, seeing themselves as researchers, scholars, and/or scientists for the first time (Luedke et al., 2019; Sims et al., 2012).

Studies have shown that undergraduate researchers improved their problem-solving abilities, data-analysis skills, technical proficiency, reading and writing proficiency, presentation skills, industry-specific competencies, and the development of their scholarly voice — and these gains were distinctive for students from racially, ethnically, and socio-economically minoritized groups (Beals et al., 2021; Luedke et al., 2019; Mendoza & Louis, 2018). Furthermore, proactive engagement in URCS helped minoritized students develop self-confidence and knowledge of their fields of study, increased their motivation to seek out additional research experiences, and overcome apprehension about applying for scholarships and other competitive awards — all of which in

turn can enrich internship and career prospects and excite them about other professional endeavors (Awad & Brown, 2021; Beals et al., 2021; Luedke et al., 2019; Mendoza & Louis, 2018).

BARRIERS TO URCS ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION, ESPECIALLY FOR MINORITIZED STUDENTS

Despite the extensive research indicating that URCS has been particularly beneficial for minoritized students, mentored research and other high-impact opportunities are still disproportionately going to White, economically advantaged students with family legacies of higher education (Carpi et al., 2017; National Academies, 2019; Zilvinskis et al., 2022). To understand the disparity, researchers have identified several barriers to equitable participation in URCS. Their findings can be summarized into three main areas: lack of knowledge of URCS opportunities and benefits; lack of time and money to participate; and a range of intra- and inter-personal difficulties, including experiencing a sense of isolation in mostly white spaces and dealing with racist assumptions of faculty, staff, and peers.

Although the benefits of URCS experience are well established in the literature, and most colleges and universities, regardless of institution type, offer research opportunities for undergraduate students (at least in STEM disciplines), many students are unaware of the advantages that come with participating. Several studies have found that students from minoritized backgrounds were least likely to hear about URCS opportunities and benefits; they reported not knowing that URCS was even an option and/or not knowing how to get started (Rodríguez Amaya et al., 2018; Khasawneh et al., 2021; Longmire-Avital, 2018; Pierszalowski et al., 2021; Vieyra et al., 2013). The lack of awareness of URCS and

the advantages it confers may be greater for students outside of STEM (Rodríguez Amaya et al., 2018; Haeger et al., 2020). Rodríguez Amaya et al. (2018) found that race and ethnicity were statistically significant predictors of interest in undergraduate research. At their Hispanic-serving institution, even though Latinx students showed higher-than-expected awareness of URCS, they expressed a lower level of interest and engagement in it. Longmire-Avital (2018) reflected that since faculty get reminders of URCS opportunities and many participated in undergraduate research themselves, they may not realize that many of their students are unaware of why it matters. This phenomenon is known as the “curse of knowledge,” the cognitive bias of assuming that others know what one knows. Faculty also may not be sure about how to approach minoritized students about URCS in equity-minded and inclusive ways (Ahmad et al., 2019; Peifer, 2019).

Researchers have found that even students open to URCS often struggle to meet the expected time commitment. The barrier of lack of time has been most often insurmountable for students from underserved and historically excluded groups. As Vieyra et al. (2013) put it in the title of their article, “I don’t know what it is, and I don’t have time for it anyway” (p. 27). There may not be enough immediate benefits to motivate Students of Color to participate in research (Longmire-Avital, 2018). The competing demands of coursework, family responsibilities, and, especially, paid employment take precedence, especially for students who are paying their own tuition and living expenses (Shanahan, 2018).

Minoritized students who are aware of URCS opportunities and able to participate in them still face major barriers. Being a racially minoritized student on a predominantly White campus can be an inherent barrier, as

such students face the unconscious bias of instructors, the microaggressions of peers, and/or the ignorance that permeates some campus communities (Longmire-Avital, 2018). Multiple studies have shown that White, male students are more likely to be invited and/or accepted to do mentored research (Ahmad et al., 2019). Researchers tend to choose collaborators with whom they perceive the smallest “social distance,” forming groups “fastest and easiest with people most like themselves. Deep-seated biases make them more trusting of those who look most like them, who think like them or with whom they have the most in common,” including race and ethnicity, gender, age, and religion (Wagner & Muller, 2009, p. 1). With a majority White professorate, White students often have an unfair advantage over Students of Color. Pierszalowski et al. (2021) found that a lack of representation and role models, as well as family and cultural barriers (e.g., conflicting identities) have been long-standing impediments to minoritized students’ participation in URCS.

Unconscious bias does not go unnoticed by Students of Color (Longmire-Avital, 2018). Seeing racial disparities can act as a deterrent to minoritized students, who may experience self-doubt and be reluctant to take the risk to inquire about URCS options (Castillo & Estudillo, 2015; Pierszalowski et al., 2021). Not seeing other People of Color conducting research and continuing to read research literature dominated by White male scholars can create a feedback loop that makes minoritized students hesitant to join URCS (Peifer 2019). Due to systemic racism and their prior experiences with racism, minoritized students have reported that imposter syndrome and stereotype threat undermine their interest in URCS (Beals et al, 2021; Medoza & Louis, 2018).

EQUITY-MINDED PRACTICES AND POLICIES THAT PROMOTE ACCESS TO AND SUCCESS IN URCS

Understanding and addressing racialized barriers is critical for building equitable and safe URCS experiences for minoritized and underserved students. Understanding and amplifying the factors that contribute to minoritized students’ positive URCS experiences is also vital for creating high-impact programs that set up students for success. Effective practices discussed in the literature include creating tailored, supportive cohorts of minoritized student-researchers; developing culturally responsive URCS programs; reducing financial barriers; and, especially, ensuring supportive mentoring relationships.

Beals et al. (2021) reported multiple positive outcomes for minoritized community college student-researchers who participated in communities of support and collaborative mentoring chains (groups of mutually supportive faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates). The researchers found that the social-emotional encouragement of the community led to students “developing and activating social capital, developing collaborative support systems, fostering confidence and self-efficacy, combatting imposter syndrome and stereotype threat, and embracing the importance of failure in the scientific process” (p. 1). Other URCS programs designed for minoritized students have reported similarly positive gains. Brown et al. (2020) wrote about a holistic summer research program at a Hispanic-serving institution that included equity-focused campus partners from student life, concluding, “student success can be maximized if an encompassing support program is tied to a research experience” (p. 61).

Integrating diverse cultural content into URCS has helped connect minoritized and underserved students to academic pursuits that might otherwise seem focused on white-centered questions and concerns (Luedke et al., 2019; Mendoza & Louis, 2018). Making those connections between diverse home communities and colleges/universities has been done successfully in various ways, from the very research questions students pursue (Manak & Shanahan, 2015; Mendoza & Louis, 2018) to the professional development and social events offered to URCS students (Ahmad et al., 2019; Brown et al., 2020). “Research has demonstrated that celebrating diversity and taking a multicultural, identity-affirming approach [in research labs] is more beneficial than taking a color-blind approach” (Ahmad et al., 2019, p. 3). Healey and Stroman’s (2021) research on “belonging-supportive learning environments” included the point that there is no such thing as “culturally neutral” teaching and learning (p. 12). They called for faculty to “welcome students’ uses of language, utilize more collaboration and exploration, and further communal goals [to] create cultural continuity for students who are disadvantaged by and may otherwise feel disengaged by practices that reflect the stereotypically masculine and Western values of independence and competition” (p. 13).

Researchers have also highlighted structural factors that promote the success of minoritized students in URCS. Programs that recognized and sought to eliminate financial barriers facilitated students’ academic persistence and flourishing (Chastain et al., 2023; Mendoza & Louis, 2018; Miller et al., 2023; Peifer, 2019). “Equitable access that addresses the issues of finances, time, and self-efficacy is critical to ensure that historically-excluded students can realize the greatest possible benefits from [undergraduate research experiences]” (Chastain et al., 2023, p. 4). Ahmad et al.

(2019) advocated for structuring URCS recruitment practices with DEI at the forefront, from including diverse representations in photos and flyers, to directly addressing working class students’ concerns about time and money, to talking openly about the commitment to DEI in the lab, group, and/or department. O’Donnell et al. (2015) found that building into URCS opportunities the Council on Undergraduate Research’s Characteristics of Excellence in Undergraduate Research (Hensel, 2012), which outlined 12 essential aspects of URCS that enhance the quality of the experience, were especially valuable for racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically minoritized students in the California State University system, the largest higher education consortium in the U.S.

EQUITY-MINDED MENTORING

Every study we read pointed to effective mentoring as the most salient factor in minoritized students’ success in URCS. DEI-related changes to policies and practices may get more diverse students in the door. The mentor relationship is what most significantly characterizes students’ experience as researchers. The quality of a student’s research experience is “overwhelmingly positively affected by high levels of mentor competency” (Monarrez et al., 2020, p. 9). The affirming qualities of mentors, such as availability, empathy, support, and encouragement, have been cited by students in multiple studies over many years as essential to a beneficial research experience (Beals et al., 2021; Shanahan et al., 2015). Effective, culturally responsive mentoring is especially pertinent for minoritized students, whose success in URCS has been consistently correlated with the quality and intercultural competence of the mentoring they have received (Castillo & Estudillo, 2015; Johanson et al., 2022; Kendricks et al., 2013; Miller et al., 2023; National Academies, 2019; Wilson et al., 2012).

While URCS has changed dramatically in the last 20 years — especially as it has spread beyond the natural and physical sciences to every academic discipline and has expanded from one-on-one and small-group mentoring to include course-based experiences — at least one facet has remained constant — effective mentoring is essential to its success (Shanahan et al., 2015; Vandermaas-Peeler et al., 2018). Previous research conducted at BSU posited that faculty mentors could make the most significant differences for successful participation by minoritized students in five key ways: (a) intentionally seeking out and recruiting student-researchers; (b) creating connections between students' home lives and academia to ease the disconnect between the two; (c) recognizing minoritized students' "racial battle fatigue" and isolation on campus and expressing direct support for them; (d) earning trust by committing to long-term work together and making themselves accessible and open to student needs; and (e) "sharing power" with undergraduate researchers through a sense of collegiality and shared ownership of the work (Shanahan, 2018).

According to a report by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2019), effective mentoring evolves through stages over time and is based on three critical qualities: intentionality, trust, and shared responsibility of the interactions between the mentor and the mentee. Culturally responsive mentors provide mentees with social, psychological, and moral support. Monarrez, et al. (2020) reported that research quality was "overwhelmingly positively affected by high levels of mentor competency" (p. 9).

Johanson, et al. (2022) contended that mentoring relationships were most successful for minoritized students when they had a mentor of the same gender identity and the same race as themselves, so they

recommended creating a diverse mentor pool to ensure that minoritized students have access to mentors who share similar identities. The researchers reported on a successful student-centered approach to pairing mentees with mentors, as opposed to the traditional research or mentor-centered approach to recruiting student-researchers. In other words, students were paired with mentors based on the students' identities, goals, and interests. Mentoring "ecosystems," in which diverse groups of mentors work with diverse groups of students, were also presented as a successful model by Mondisa et al. (2021).

No matter the mentor's identity, their cultural competence — and, even better, their cultural responsiveness — is essential to equitable student experiences (Healey & Stroman, 2021). Several researchers have called for mentor training in cultural competence/responsiveness (Ahmad et al., 2019; Mendoza & Louis, 2018; Mondisa et al., 2021; Pierszalowski et al., 2021; Wofford et al., 2023). The Equity-Minded Mentoring Toolkit (Wofford et al., 2023) was founded in the premise that equitable mentoring practices can and should be learned; it laid out a series of modules with activities and reading recommendations for mentors to proceed through at their own pace. The authors contended, "Without engaging in this work and investing necessary energy in equity-minded mentoring, our efforts to transform academic structures into more affirming, developmental spaces may fall short for decades to come" (p. 28).

Having a strong, culturally responsive mentor relationship can develop a sense of belonging in academia, an invaluable quality that has been too often elusive for minoritized students (Healey & Stroman, 2021; Johnson, 2022; Miller et al., 2023). Superficial diversity efforts have not succeeded; fundamental, systemic, and individual changes in how faculty and

staff engage with students are needed for true inclusion and equity (Johnson, 2022). Miller et al. (2023) wrote, “Faculty-student engagement and faculty validation significantly predict underrepresented students’ sense of belonging” (p. 5). Faculty mentors who center the voices and experiential knowledge of minoritized students contribute to that sense of belonging (Johnson, 2022).

As this literature review has laid out, URCS programs and opportunities must be overhauled to center equity, inclusion, and belonging for minoritized and historically excluded students. The distinct benefits of URCS for minoritized students, along with our institutional commitments to equity, make this issue a moral imperative.

REDESIGNING UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH AND CREATIVE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMS AND PRACTICES TO CENTER RACIAL EQUITY

BSU’s Undergraduate Research and Creative Scholarship (URCS) program offers the following opportunities to all BSU undergraduate students:

1. Grant Funding: (a) Semester Project Grants, which are non-competitive funds for URCS expenses (\$300/semester for individual students for supplies, equipment, texts, research incentives for human participants, travel to field sites, software, etc.); (b) Conference Travel Grants (usually \$1,500), which fund airfare, hotel, conference registration, and per diem for students accepted to present their scholarly work at academic conferences; (c) Adrian Tinsley Program (ATP) summer grants, which include \$5,000 student stipends for full-time summer (400-hour) URCS projects, faculty mentor stipends, and funding for expenses; and (d) United

Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) Summer Scholars, which awards \$1,000 student stipends for five-week, remote, part-time (50-hour) research collaborations with interdisciplinary team members, as well as faculty mentor stipends.

2. Presentation Opportunities on and off campus, for students to share the results of their URCS work in the form of academic posters, talks, art displays, or performances: (a) BSU’s Mid-Year Symposium each December, which was developed especially for first- and second-year students, though all levels of undergraduate students are welcome to participate; (b) BSU’s Student Arts & Research Symposium (StARS), each April, which includes more than 1,000 graduate and undergraduate presenters from any department or program; (c) BSU’s Adrian Tinsley Program (ATP) Symposium each fall during Homecoming, which is a showcase of summer, grant-funded URCS; (d) BSU’s UN SDGs Summer Scholars Conference in June, which shares scholars’ case studies on selected UN SDGs; (e) BSU’s various department/program events throughout the year that include student presentations (e.g., Black History Month showcase, sponsored by the African American Studies and African Studies programs; Sustainability Research Showcase, sponsored by the Sustainability Program); (f) local and regional undergraduate conferences to which BSU sends groups of presenters together (e.g., Undergraduate Literature Conference, among southeastern Massachusetts colleges and universities; MassURC, a statewide conference for students of any of Massachusetts’ public colleges and universities); and (g) national and larger regional conferences offered by myriad professional organizations and

academic institutions, for which BSU students receive Conference Travel Grant funding (see #1).

3. Publication Opportunity in BSU's faculty-reviewed journal of URCS, *The Undergraduate Review*, which is published annually in print and digitally.
4. Faculty Opportunities: (a) Course-Embedded URCS Grants (\$500 per course section) for expenses related to incorporating a research or creative scholarship assignment in a course (e.g., museum tickets, software licenses, research incentives, art supplies); and (b) professional development offerings throughout the academic year related to mentoring practices, embedding URCS in a course, publishing with students, etc.

The BSU campus culture has long supported inclusion in URCS, and program policies have reflected that commitment:

- There is no minimum GPA for participation or funding; "A" students have no distinct advantage over "C" students.
- Semester Project Grants, which fund URCS expenses (see #1) are non-competitive; every student with a faculty-approved project is funded.
- BSU's two large annual symposia of student research and creative scholarship (Mid-Year Symposium and StARS — see #2) welcome any student who wishes to present, in-person and/or online.
- Students from every major have equal access to funding and other URCS opportunities.

Because of those equity-minded practices, overall participation in BSU's URCS

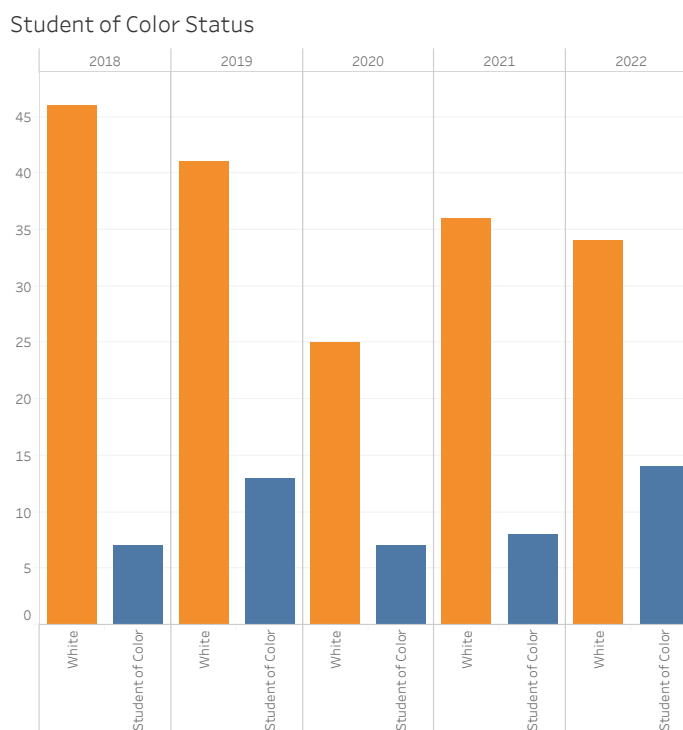
program nearly reflects the diversity of our undergraduate student body of more than 8,000 students; 27% of URCS overall participants and 30% of BSU undergraduates identify as members of racially or ethnically minoritized groups. "Overall" is a slippery term, though, as it refers to everything we offer as if everything is equal. For example, "overall participation" counts students presenting one poster at the Mid-Year Symposium the same as those earning \$5,000 for immersion in a full summer of mentored scholarship. Referring to overall participation represents a universalist approach, not an equity-minded one. Although "all students" presumably can participate in URCS at BSU, and "overall participation" has been fairly even across demographic groups, breaking down the data by each URCS offering reveals equity gaps.

The disparity is clear. In URCS that is embedded in the curriculum, for example, the percentage of racially minoritized participants has reflected the diversity of the overall student body. That is because course-based undergraduate research experiences (CUREs) are designed for equitable access; everyone enrolled in the course participates in an assigned, authentic research or scholarly project. The "everyone has access" mentality obscures the fact that students of minoritized groups are underserved by other, more consequential, individually mentored, and selective URCS opportunities — namely, honors theses/capstones and full-time summer research in the Adrian Tinsley Program (ATP). Such URCS options that involve significant commitments of time outside of required courses have been disproportionately accessed by White students and continuing-generation students.

Readers are reminded that the Adrian Tinsley Program (ATP) summer grants, include \$5,000 student stipends for full-time summer (400-

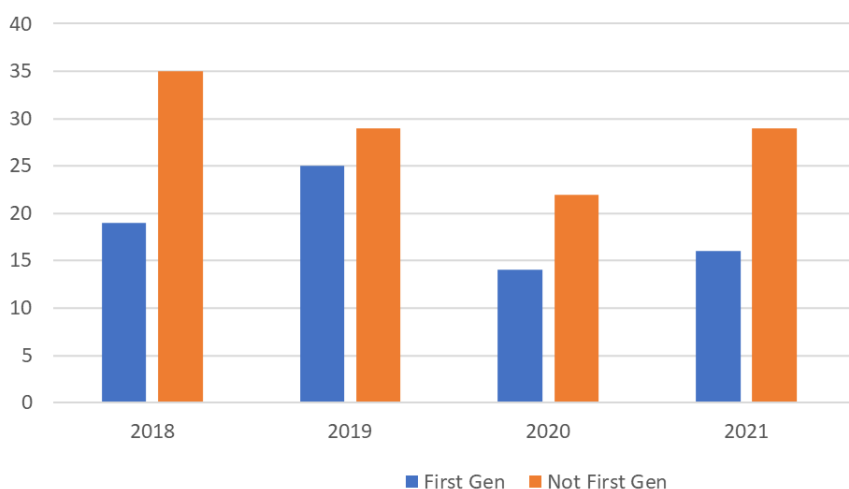
hour) URCS projects, faculty mentor stipends, and funding for expenses; it is the largest and most prestigious of our resources given to students in the URCS program at BSU. As shown in **Figure 1**, racially minoritized students comprised 19% of ATP summer grant awardees between 2018 and 2021, while racially minoritized students comprised 29% of the overall student body during that time. **Figure 2** shows that 39% of ATP summer researchers between 2018 and 2021 were first-generation students; during those same years, 53% of all BSU undergraduate students were first-generation.

Figure 1. Numbers of White students and Students of Color in the Adrian Tinsley Program for Undergraduate Research and Creative Scholarship, 2018-2022



[Figure 1 in table format](#)

Figure 2. Numbers of first-generation students and continuing-generation students in the Adrian Tinsley Program for Undergraduate Research and Creative Scholarship, 2018-2021



[Figure 2 in table format](#)

Several iterations of survey and focus-group research led by URCS administrators and faculty and student program leaders between 2017 and 2023 have revealed potential reasons for the disparities, as participants have identified barriers to participating in URCS at BSU. The top four obstacles to participation expressed by BSU students have been, in descending order, (a) not knowing about URCS, (b) not knowing how to get started in URCS, (c) not having time to participate, and (d) not having a faculty mentor they could work with. A fall 2023 survey conducted with 157 BSU students who have not participated in URCS showed a racialized difference in the non-participation reasons. Most of the 111 students from racially and ethnically minoritized groups who had not participated in URCS selected reasons of “lack”: lack of knowledge, lack of time, or lack of mentor. White students’ reasons were distributed more evenly across several categories, including those areas of “lack,” but also their own decisions, such as “I’m not interested” and “I don’t think research would benefit me.” For example, 29% of minoritized students said they had not heard of undergraduate research, whereas 21% of White students selected that response. In a larger research sample, Vieyra et al. (2013) found that racially minoritized women students in STEM were significantly less likely than White women and men to know about URCS opportunities.

Between the inequitable numbers of White and minoritized students in grant-funded URCS and racialized differences in survey responses that indicate that minoritized students may have less information about URCS opportunities at BSU, we co-authors and our colleagues on the Undergraduate Research Advisory Board (a group of 20 faculty members, two staff, and two students) committed to addressing the equity gaps through several program changes and through

additional URCS opportunities. Our hope has been that we can close the racial institutional equity gap in URCS participation at BSU and, in the meantime, make the program more accessible to other minoritized groups at BSU who are also underserved by URCS opportunities: first-generation, Pell-eligible, transfer, LGBTQIA+, and post-traditional students, and students with disabilities.

FRAMEWORK INFORMING THE EQUITY-MINDED PROGRAMMATIC CHANGES

Bandura’s (1977) social cognitive theory of self-efficacy is a guiding framework for the equity-minded undergraduate research and creative scholarship (URCS) initiatives identified within this chapter. Self-efficacy is the belief about one’s ability to successfully enact a task. This construct is relevant for efforts designed to foster racial equity because efficacy-building is an investment in the future; high self-efficacy can lead to increased choice of and participation in future challenging tasks (Pajares, 1996), thereby expanding students’ interest and preparation beyond the intentionally designed experiences such as URCS.

Bandura (1977) identified four sources of self-efficacy: *mastery experiences*, *vicarious experiences*, *social persuasions*, and *physiological/affective responses*. Mastery experiences are one’s first-hand experiences successfully enacting specific tasks, such as formulating an actionable research question or effectively utilizing laboratory instruments to collect needed data. An important component of mastery experiences is the encounter one has with the outcomes of this success. URCS opportunities at BSU are rich in mastery experiences for students. Much of the equity-focused efforts at BSU are designed to broaden participation to include minoritized students in these impactful experiences.

This section explains how students arrive at mastery in URCS, typically through the other sources of self-efficacy first: through vicarious experiences, social persuasions, and physiological/affective responses. *Vicarious experiences* involve observations of another person successfully enacting a task and experiencing the outcomes of the success, such as role modeling. A student observing their mentor deliver a well-received research talk and engage in lively and constructive discussion is a great example of this. Whether student- or faculty-directed, URCS at BSU affords students opportunities to observe their faculty mentors and student peers in enacting research tasks; campus-based conferences have been created to ensure student-researchers can engage in the important step of sharing their work and ideas, which ensures students not only participate but also observe their peers. *Social persuasions* are the perspectives and opinions shared with a person when they engage in a task; these can help build or undermine the development of one's self-efficacy. Praise from a supportive mentor about a mentee's insightful analysis of a dataset provides impactful information for the development of one's self-efficacy. Finally, *physiological/affective responses* cannot be ignored; lowering physiological arousal, such as embarrassment or confusion, is associated with improved performance (Bandura, 1991).

BSU's equity-minded initiatives strive to create safe spaces for students to embark upon journeys into the world of research. Opportunities for student efforts to be recognized and lauded by those in their research community and beyond are important components for broadening participation. Bandura's (1977) ideas about self-efficacy are exemplified throughout this chapter in the equity-focused approaches implemented within the undergraduate research programs at BSU. We offer examples of each component of self-efficacy, building to mastery.

VICARIOUS EXPERIENCES

The ways in which students initially learn about Undergraduate Research and Creative Scholarship (URCS) reflect the vicarious experiences described in Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory of self-efficacy. As noted repeatedly in the literature, the URCS equity institutional performance gap between minoritized students and those with privilege begins at least as early as when "standout" students form awareness of URCS opportunities, such as when they are invited to participate on a professor's research team. In our own research at BSU and in the broader literature, racially, ethnically, and socio-economically minoritized students have reported not knowing about URCS and not knowing how to get started — a gap in even observing what is possible (Rodríguez Amaya, et al., 2018; Khasawneh et al., 2021; Vieyra et al., 2013).

When minoritized and underserved students do learn about URCS, they have told researchers that it seems out of reach and/or designed for other students, who are "smarter," who have more free time, who are in the right majors, etc. Minoritized students have learned over many years in systemically racist educational systems that there are plenty of opportunities for certain other students deemed worthy of them. For themselves, however, research would be unattainable, time-consuming, and too difficult. For those reasons, we posit that the first equity-minded goals for URCS leaders and mentors are to broaden awareness and start to build research confidence among students of diverse identities, demographic groups, academic records, majors, and areas of interest — to facilitate their development of self-efficacy in URCS through initial vicarious experiences. Students need identifiable models — both among their peers and among relatable mentors — to help them start to see themselves as scholars. At BSU we have

sought to do so in the ways we tell students about URCS and the program's inclusive policies.

To make these programmatic changes to our structure, offerings, policies, and practices big and small, we have listened to the voices and experiences of minoritized students. Only by listening to their wisdom, in surveys, focus groups, and informal conversations, have we been able to tailor opportunities to the distinctive needs and assets of the students. For example, we have put into practice equity-minded marketing of URCS and its possibilities, including the following:

- Office hours, “snack chats,” and information sessions about URCS in the intercultural student success center, LGBTQIA+ pride center, at cultural club meetings, and in partnership with other campus programs also committed to equity, such as the center focused on social justice and civic engagement.
- Presentations and “tabling” about URCS that emphasize commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion — at every major event sponsored by Admissions, New Student Orientation, and Transfer Welcome.
- Print marketing, web pages, and social media content that tell diverse students' URCS stories and emphasize the program's values.
- Highlighting diverse student success stories in URCS on the university's and the program's internal and external websites, newsletters, and social media.
- Consistent and constructive feedback and encouragement to reinforce students' efforts and new learning. Provide recognition for students' unique contributions and achievements.
- Facilitation of culturally competent, safe, and brave collaborations among undergraduate researchers and artists. Working in groups — whether that's a tightknit lab group or a looser collaborative of students conducting summer scholarship — allows them to observe and learn from each other, fostering an environment that helps develop social and cognitive learning.
- Course-based undergraduate research experiences (CUREs), supported through grants and symposium presentations, so that students across the disciplines experience research and creative inquiry in a group of their peers.
- Showcases of students' URCS achievements in various modalities (online and in-person) and formats (lightning talks, posters, roundtable discussions, longer and more formal presentations).
- Making explicit for students how their developing research skills will benefit their other coursework as well as their career-readiness.

SOCIAL PERSUASIONS

In order to support students' forays into URCS, we who mentor student scholars and/or lead URCS initiatives in equity-minded ways have focused on the following interventions that build self-efficacy through what Bandura (1977) called social persuasions in a variety of ways:

Connecting URCS to the interests and aspirations of minoritized students, their families, and their communities, including the global community, is a powerful example of social persuasions, as well as a proven means of creating inclusive entries to research — building self-efficacy through physiological/ affective responses. Especially for minoritized

students, seeing the relevance of their contributions to the broader community can be a primary motivation for participating and persisting in URCS. Such connections between students' home communities and academic/scholarly work only come about in programs that intentionally listen to the voices and experiences of minoritized students and collaborate with them to root the research and creative work in racial equity and social justice. For example, the UN SDGs Summer Scholars develop their own case studies. Local challenges and issues are often identified early on, empowering students to make personal connections to the concerns of the global community.

PHYSIOLOGICAL/AFFECTIVE RESPONSES

Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory of self-efficacy includes physiological/affective responses that reduce stress and create safe and brave spaces for building self-efficacy. Several URCS policies were implemented to mitigate imposter syndrome and reduce other internal barriers to participation, especially for minoritized students in a predominantly White institution, who might otherwise see only roadblocks including:

- Offering non-competitive Semester Project Grants every semester, for every student in any field of study with a faculty-supported project, requiring only an abstract and rough budget.
- Open access to presenting at campus symposia – in-person and/or online – with no adjudicating about who can present (and with free poster printing).
- Adrian Tinsley Program (ATP) summer grants with no minimum GPA, as long as the applicant is in good academic standing.

- Simplified and streamlined application materials for grants.
- Flexible timeframes for summer research.

Experiences with racism or other forms of discrimination, isolation on a predominantly White campus, and internal barriers such as self-doubt, among other stressors, can prevent minoritized students from seeking out URCS opportunities, even with equity-minded adaptations to applications and marketing materials. To reduce the equity gap between students who have the social capital to pursue URCS and those who might not even know about or feel included in such opportunities, the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Summer Scholars Program invites student participants through faculty nominations. Solicitations of faculty nominations include clear language around recruiting minoritized students who are often excluded from undergraduate research, specifically BIPOC, low socio-economic, LGBTQIA+, transfer, and post-traditional students; students with disabilities; and students who are their family's head of household. Students are invited to participate, based on their professor's or advisor's nomination, and, if they accept, are connected with supportive faculty mentors in the program. Social networks are fostered in the program to support the development of peer-to-peer and student-faculty connections that can be critical to increasing students' sense of belonging in the research community.

MASTERY EXPERIENCES

Vicarious experiences, social persuasions, and physiological/affective responses are all facets of self-efficacy development. It is only with those facets in place that one experiences a sense of mastery — a powerful sense of one's competence and achievement. Students involved in URCS are successfully demonstrating mastery by exhibiting their learned cognition and skills, illuminating not

only the knowledge and competencies they attained, but also, and more importantly, their change in self-concept that can come with becoming a scholar.

Students demonstrate mastery in URCS in diverse ways. A hallmark of URCS is hands-on experience, which ensures that students are not only reproducing the research and artistic techniques carried out by their mentors but actually practicing authentic skills themselves, using specialized tools and equipment, writing about their findings, and discovering and/or creating something new. One of the criteria that makes undergraduate research a high-impact academic experience is that it must be shared or disseminated in some way — a practice that transforms inquiry into scholarship. Sharing of one's results or findings is a demonstration of mastery as well — mastery of the research itself, as well as of speaking and/or writing about it to an audience.

ATP students demonstrate mastery in a campus showcase during Homecoming weekend, sharing the results of their research and scholarship in presentations attended by their family members and friends, as well as faculty, staff, administrators, and alumni. Additionally, approximately 200 BSU students each year present their work off-campus at national and regional conferences, including disciplinary meetings of the top scholars in the field and undergraduate-only conferences. Their expenses are paid with non-competitive Conference Travel Grants of \$500 for local conferences, \$1,500 for those requiring airfare; the grants cover conference registration fees, travel expenses (e.g., airfare), hotel, and per diem for meals.

Students awarded Conference Travel Grants are asked to set up a meeting with a staff person in URCS who, along with the student's

faculty mentor, helps prepare them for travel and what to expect at the conference. Many BSU students, about half of whom are first-generation, have not traveled extensively; they might not have flown in an airplane or stayed in a hotel before receiving a Conference Travel Grant. The curriculum developed for the pre-travel meetings addresses a range of concerns, from Transportation Safety Administration (TSA) requirements to conference dress norms.

Mastery experiences, critical to the development of self-efficacy, also form the centerpiece of the UN SDGs Summer Scholars Program. Students are organized into interdisciplinary teams and tasked with building a case study around one of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals. During the course of the program, teams engage in a wide range of research tasks, such as formulating research questions based upon preliminary investigations, conducting literature reviews, building relevant background knowledge, producing scholarly writing (including accurate use of citations), collaborating with team members and articulating their ideas to each other, giving and receiving feedback, and presenting their findings in a research conference with diverse attendees. These first-hand experiences are vital to students' development of beliefs about their abilities to engage in research tasks in the future and influence their decisions to engage in research again in the future.

Reflective practices are built into URCS at BSU, from the report/survey of their experience completed by all Semester Project Grant recipients to the self-reflection essay (in addition to the final research report) submitted by ATP summer grant awardees. Reflection is key to informed action and identity development. Self-reflection is particularly emphasized in the UN SDGs Summer Scholars Program. Upon entry to the program, students

design individual asset maps highlighting their areas of strength and areas for growth. The teams of students and their faculty and peer mentors carefully review these asset maps early in the program. Each week, students self-organize to accomplish required research tasks based on their areas of strength and growth. At the midpoint of the program, they are asked to share their reflections about how their assets have come into play in the research process and how/whether they have made progress toward the goals they identified early-on. This step has been important in helping students recognize their progress and their growing expertise as researchers. At the program's end, students complete an exit survey in which they reflect on their academic learning and perceptions of themselves as researchers. That reflection serves an integral role in identity-development as scholars.

EQUITY-MINDED SYSTEMIC CHANGE IN UNDERGRADUATE AND CREATIVE SCHOLARSHIP AT BSU

The results of the many equity-minded changes described in this chapter are evident in the data about URCS participants, as well as in participants' survey and focus-group responses.

ADRIAN TINSLEY PROGRAM (ATP) OF SUMMER UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH & CREATIVE SCHOLARSHIP

Earlier in this chapter, and as shown in **Figure 1**, we reported that racially minoritized students comprised 19% of ATP summer grant awardees between 2018 and 2021, while racially minoritized students comprised 29% of the overall student body during that time. We also reported, as shown in **Figure 2**, that 39% of ATP summer researchers between 2018 and 2021 were first-generation students, versus 53% in the overall student body. After making several equity-minded changes to

ATP — simplifying the application form and rubric, adding a 200-hour grant option to the traditional 400-hour grant, offering flexible start and end dates for summer URCS, and hosting information sessions and application-writing workshops in the intercultural student success center, the program was more diverse in summer 2022 and summer 2023. Notably, in summer 2022, 29% of ATP students identified as students of color (compared to 30% of all BSU undergraduates), and 43% of ATP students were first-generation (compared to 50% of all BSU undergraduates).

UN SDGS SUMMER SCHOLARS PROGRAM

In summers 2021, 2022, and 2023, 19 students of the total 30 UN SDGs Summer Scholars identified as members of racially or ethnically minoritized groups. While 30% of the overall BSU undergraduate population identified as students of color, 63% of the UN SDGs Summer Scholars did (2021-2023). The program has had a promising retention rate, with only one student leaving the program after being accepted, and in that case only because he was offered another paid research opportunity directly related to his field of study. Two UN SDGs Summer Scholars were awarded Adrian Tinsley Program (ATP) grants, the most prestigious URCS opportunity at BSU, in the summer after their involvement in the UN SDGs Program.

SURVEY OF URCS STUDENTS

In fall 2023, BSU's URCS program conducted an IRB-approved survey and focus-group study of students who had participated and students who had not participated in URCS. The survey was completed by 266 students: 109 URCS participants, 157 non-participants. Of the 109 URCS students, 49 identified themselves as part of one or more racially or ethnically minoritized groups.

The 49 survey participants who identified as racially or ethnically minoritized students with experience in URCS indicated positive experiences conducting research/scholarship. Among the results:

- 93% answered “yes” to the question, “Has your research/scholarship experience been in a safe, inclusive, and positive environment?” Zero answered “no.” The remaining 7% were evenly split between “unsure” and “prefer not to answer.”
- 82% answered “yes” to the question, “Would you recommend undergraduate research to your friends?” Zero answered “no.” 18% said they were “unsure.”
- 79% answered “yes” to the question, “Has your faculty mentor provided you with adequate guidance and feedback?” The rest were evenly split among “no” (7%), “unsure” (7%), and “prefer not to answer” (7%).

Responses to those questions from White student-researchers are even more positive, however. A similar number of White students (n=48) with experience in URCS took the survey.

- 98% of White students answered “yes” to the question, “Has your research/scholarship experience been in a safe, inclusive, and positive environment?” Zero said “no.” Two percent selected “prefer not to answer.”
- 94% would recommend URCS to their friends. Zero said no. 6% selected “unsure.”
- 98% said their faculty mentor provided them with adequate guidance and feedback. Zero said “no.” Two percent selected “prefer not to answer.”

In open responses to a question about what they would like the researchers to know about their research/scholarship experience, the answers from racially and ethnically minoritized student-researchers were uniformly positive. They included the following:

- “It is a rewarding experience. I was able to focus on creating a thesis that was important and which I am passionate about.”
- “It needs to be emphasized more to students — both that it’s an available opportunity, and that they can do it! You don’t have to know everything to start research. It’s a learning experience [that’s] individualized based on your skill set and needs.”
- “Exciting and interesting experiences in developing my thesis on my own research and the opportunities to explore and learn about new technologies.”
- “I wish I had found out about this earlier in my journey. I just found out during the start of my senior year.”

FOCUS GROUPS OF URCS STUDENTS

Two experienced undergraduate researchers, both of whom identify as Students of Color, led four focus groups of students who had conducted URCS. The focus groups occurred in Zoom during Summer 2023. The researchers did not collect demographic or identity data about the focus group participants; however, when participants referenced their racial or ethnic identity, the focus group facilitators noted it.

While most of the focus group data is more directly pertinent to a different URCS study, one recurrent theme spoken by minoritized students in all four focus groups was the

critical role of faculty mentors inviting them, often repeatedly, into research. When asked how they learned about and first got involved in URCS, several minoritized students indicated that they would not be conducting research/scholarship if not for the strong encouragement, even insistence, of a faculty member. Their comments included the following:

- “If not for [professor] steering me toward this opportunity I wouldn’t know it existed.”
- “Lucky for me, my professor approached me about doing research, and if she never did that, I would never have done research.” The student went on to say that, in her case, research came about because “I had a professor I could relate to,” in terms of a shared identity.
- “I only learned about it by taking a class with [professor, who’s a Black man]. Otherwise, I would never have found out about it. [...] He gave me a chance to turn a class paper into a larger project and research opportunity. That was never mentioned in other classes.”

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EQUITY-MINDED CHANGE

Based on BSU’s ongoing work to center racially equitable practices in the Undergraduate Research and Creative Scholarship Program, we offer recommended equity practices in **Table 1**.

Table 1: Equity-minded Practices for Undergraduate Research and Creative Scholarship Programs

Equity Practice	Examples from BSU’s URCS Program	How/why it’s effective
Offer flexible scheduling for short-term research	400-hour & 200-hour summer grants Range of start & end dates UN SDG’s 5-hour/week online commitment	Students don’t have to quit their jobs to participate in summer research.
Finance researchers competitively	Increased student stipend to \$1,000 for 5-week, part-time (50 hours total) UN SDGs Summer Scholars Program Increased ATP student stipend to \$5,000 for 400-hour projects	Research involvement cannot compete with job income for minoritized students.
Build ownership and agency in research process and products	UN SDG Scholars conceive their own case study research topics and questions for investigation	Personalized connections to research topics increase relevance to students.

Equity Practice	Examples from BSU's URCS Program	How/why it's effective
Involve students' home communities.	<p>Students are encouraged to invite their family and friends to the UN SDGs Summer Scholars Research</p> <p>Conference held via Zoom at the end of the program, to the Mid-Year Symposium, Student Research & Arts Symposium (StARS), and the ATP Symposium</p>	This helps in the development of student identity as researchers because their community can embrace the value of their research.
Broaden participation with diverse modalities.	<p>UN SDGs Summer Scholars Program is 100% remote, including whole- and small- group online synchronous sessions, fully asynchronous collaborations and mentoring, and remote research presentations</p> <p>ATP summer researchers work with their faculty mentors to design the timeframe, in-person vs. remote work, and hours</p>	<p>Post-traditional and minoritized students often have out-of-school obligations that limit their ability to engage in traditional in-person undergraduate research. Enabling students to complete some or all of their research offsite can make research possible for more students.</p> <p>Offering students the chance to decide which hours, start and end dates, and balance between in-person and remote work makes a major research commitment more feasible with other responsibilities.</p>
Engage students in leadership opportunities within research	UN SDGs Summer Scholars Program recruits peer mentors from program alumni	This offers scholars the chance to work with peer mentors who have experienced the program firsthand and provides individual scholars with the opportunity to serve in a leadership role in the research process.

CHALLENGES TO ADDRESS WHEN INFUSING EQUITY-MINDEDNESS INTO UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH AND CREATIVE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMS

The work to dismantle inequity, unfair privilege, and white-centric assumptions in URCS requires strong willingness on the parts of individual faculty, staff, and administrators to examine and change practices that have been in place their entire careers — and for generations of academics before them. Beginning again — designing, building, and overhauling program structures and personal competencies — to center equity and promote a sense of belonging for all of our students, also requires resources. We must be committed and willing to restructure belief systems (e.g., about what constitutes academic merit), daily practices, long-term planning processes, budgets, and the way we spend our time.

Supporting students with funded research opportunities is extraordinarily expensive. To ensure that funding is budgeted in equitable ways for URCS, we need to make data-informed cases for investing in student success in this high-impact practice. URCS not only promotes persistence and degree-completion, but also self-efficacy, confidence, and myriad forms of post-graduation success. The funding is vital to its feasibility.

Even with funding, however — such as for summer research for which students receive stipends — we cannot readily dismantle the barrier of students' lack of time and personal contexts that may not be familiar with the benefits of URCS. Many students, especially those who are racially and ethnically minoritized, first-generation, and/or working class, work long hours outside of school. To give up a long-term job — even to request shorter shifts — is an impossibility. This challenge is often exacerbated by the fact that research and creative scholarship outside of coursework is not well understood beyond the academy; such activities can be seen as frivolous, especially because research often takes a long time before there is a result or product — and sometimes all that time leads to unexpected and even disappointing results!

As faculty mentorship is a defining feature of successful URCS, another challenge to address is the issue of faculty time and workload. Faculty at student-centered institutions, and especially those in large departments with heavy advising loads, have often been overwhelmed with untenable responsibilities in teaching, advising, and mentoring, in addition to their scholarship and service. Investing in faculty time and professional development to help them mentor effectively and in culturally responsive ways is essential to offering equitable URCS.

The disproportionately high percentage of White academics is a significant challenge in any DEI work in colleges and universities, and especially so in URCS, where the role of mentors is vitally important. Researchers have long demonstrated in many different contexts that representation matters. White students have an unfair, often-unacknowledged advantage every single day, as they encounter instructors, mentors, staff, and administrators who not only look like them, but who also have shared experiences, referents, and cultural norms from which to draw. Diversifying who participates successfully in URCS is key to diversifying higher education overall, as many academics get their start in scholarly interests as undergraduate researchers. While higher education institutions commit to more equity-minded hiring and faculty retention practices, it is essential that all faculty engaged in mentoring undergraduate research projects engage in professional development in equitable and culturally sensitive mentoring practices.

CONCLUSION

“Policies, practices, and norms that are steeped in racist, sexist, and classist narratives and beliefs about intelligence and merit systematically support the belonging of students from advantaged groups” (Healey & Stroman, 2021, p. 1). Nowhere in higher education has that been truer than with undergraduate research and creative scholarship. A high-impact practice that depends on plenty of resources, selective invitations to participate in singular or small-group opportunities, and competitive results for publication and presentation, URCS has been steeped in inequity. Even though mountains of evidence show that the benefits of URCS are most pronounced for racially minoritized students, access has continued to favor White students with socio-economic advantages and family legacies of higher education. Biased assumptions about research readiness still, too often determine who gets opportunities. Selecting students for transformative learning experiences based on narrow assessments of their previous successes and because of their eagerness and financial freedom to participate, has reified unfair privilege and perpetuated inequity.

Racial equity must be at the forefront of our work to design, implement, and assess URCS opportunities. We must make systemic and individual changes to the “ways we’ve always done things,” including and especially the ways that have brought unearned advantages and career success to many of us who are White. If we believe what we proclaim, at BSU and across the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, as well as in countless institutions far beyond this region, that “public higher education will enhance economic and social mobility for all citizens, but particularly for those that have historically been underserved and underrepresented, especially students of color, throughout all levels of education” (MA DHE,

2020), we have a fundamental responsibility to make radical changes for equity.

We have known for decades about the powerful benefits of URCS and the ways it enhances economic and social mobility, especially for those who have been underserved and historically excluded in all levels of education. We call for all faculty, staff, and administrators to listen and respond to the voices and experiences of their minoritized and most vulnerable students. Such attentiveness to students’ hopes, goals, insights, challenges, ideas, and learned wisdom from their cultures and communities (Yosso, 2005) can lead the way. Our students inspire us to advocate and work without ceasing for safe and brave sites of collaborative, world-changing, enriching, and transformative discoveries and creations.

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AN HONORS PARADIGM SHIFT TO CENTER EQUITY AND INCLUSION: A REPLICABLE, HIGH-IMPACT MODEL FOR HONORS PROGRAMS AND COLLEGES

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Keywords: Honors Equity, Honors Inclusion, Honors Curricula, Honors High Impact Practices, Honors Inclusive Teaching Models

INTRODUCTION

Disproportionately low numbers of racially minoritized, first-generation, and Pell-eligible students participate in honors programs and colleges because of deficit-minded policies and elitist notions of who is “qualified” and “deserving” of admission. Traditional honors applications and acceptance policies tend to favor students who are White, higher income, and continuing generation, with access to the “shadow education” of test-preparation and private tutoring and to expensive extra-curricular opportunities. By centering racial equity and social justice in honors programs, Bridgewater State University (BSU) and Middlesex Community College (MCC) are overturning decades of inequitable assumptions about honors students and closing racial and income-based opportunity gaps. Participation and success in honors by racially and socio-economically minoritized students have grown at MCC and BSU due to systemic program changes, driven by institutional data and student voices and experiences. The changes include responsive honors advising and support, interdisciplinary courses designed to engage diverse groups of students, and co-curricular offerings that promote racial and social justice. As a

result, the BSU and MCC honors student cohorts are the largest and most diverse in each institution’s histories. They are also the most successful in completing their degrees and graduating with honors. Readers of this chapter will acquire new knowledge and replicable models for redesigning honors opportunities that support and create a sense of belonging for racially, ethnically, and socio-economically minoritized students.

INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXTS

The Massachusetts Department of Higher Education’s (DHE) Equity Agenda commits to shifting its paradigm from a “focus on the question of whether students are college-ready, to ensuring that colleges and universities are student-ready” (2020). The DHE partners with “public institutions to usher in a cultural transformation that creates and sustains a welcoming and inclusive environment for all students” (2020). As public institutions in Massachusetts, Bridgewater State University and Middlesex Community College are dedicated to the DHE’s Equity Agenda. Our institutions aim to exemplify this educational ethos in myriad areas, notably including in our honors programs, which are focused on equity and belonging.

In keeping with the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) core principles, as well as the Massachusetts DHE Equity Agenda, we see honors education as an ideal site for fulfilling the commitment to “inclusive excellence” and even “expansive excellence.” As explained in the Massachusetts DHE’s (2022) *The New Undergraduate Experience*, “the term ‘inclusive’ presupposes a group with power and ownership over what defines excellence, thus reproducing existing privilege and hierarchy. Expansive excellence, by contrast, breaks down the notion of hierarchy and ownership of excellence to embrace the diversity of ways that excellence

can be defined” (p. 41). In this chapter, we offer evidence-based, replicable strategies for expansive excellence in honors education. By centering racial equity and social justice in Honors, BSU and MCC are working to close racial and income-based institutional performance gaps.

Bridgewater State University (BSU) was founded in 1840 by Horace Mann, the “father of American education,” driven by his belief in education as “the great equalizer” for all citizens. BSU has nearly 11,000 students and more than 75,000 alumni in all 50 states. One of the university’s central commitments is social justice, reflected in its inclusive engagement with communities in southeastern Massachusetts, across the Commonwealth, and around the world. Social justice has always been at the heart of BSU’s Honors Program, founded in 1968, and Undergraduate Research program, founded in 1999, as those high-impact educational opportunities are open to diverse groups of students across the disciplines.

Middlesex Community College (MCC) was founded in 1970 with a mission rooted in equity and inclusion as the foundation for excellence, innovation, and student success. MCC is an open-admission college, with more than 10,000 students, offering more than 80 degree programs to educate and support the evolving educational, cultural, economic, and workforce needs of the local and global communities.

Both BSU’s and MCC’s Honors Programs are committed to equity and to creating a sense of belonging in the honors community. “Students from marginalized groups are often expected to learn in exclusionary spaces where they are not valued or authentically included. In these spaces, it may be impossible for them to belong” (Healey & Stroman, 2021, p. 1). We aim to usher in a cultural transformation to

ensure racially minoritized, socio-economically disenfranchised, and first-generation students truly belong in honors programs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

At colleges and universities across the country, honors programs and colleges have long offered distinctive opportunities for select groups of students who graduate from high school with excellent GPAs and standardized test scores, successful completion of AP and honors courses, and robust resumés of extracurricular achievements and leadership roles. The exclusivity of honors has often been seen as the point. “A philosophy of exclusivity has been at the heart of honors education” (Raisanen, 2023, p. 347). The boundary between who “belongs” in honors and who does not is “intentional” (White, 2021, p. 27).

Deciding who belongs in honors has traditionally hinged on narrow considerations of academic merit, such as standardized test scores and the reputation and competitive ranking of the applicant’s high school. Many students accepted to honors have benefited from a “shadow education” of test preparation, tutoring, and other educational enhancements most often afforded only by high-income, college-educated parents (Park & Becks, 2015; Raisanen, 2023). Honors credentials are therefore most commonly accrued by White, socio-economically privileged, and continuing-generation students (Davis, 2018; Walters et. al, 2019). A disproportionately low percentage of students accepted to honors programs and colleges in the U.S. have been from racially, ethnically, and socio-economically minoritized groups. A 2023 study of honors colleges in the U.S. found that 70% of their students identified as White (Cognard-Black & Smith, 2023). Deficit-minded policies and incomplete and inaccurate notions of which students are “deserving” of honors have resulted in inequitable admissions decisions (Bowman

& Carver, 2018; Cognard-Black & Spisak, 2021; Davis, 2018; Macias, 2013; White, 2021). As Davis (2018) explained, high school opportunities, or lack thereof, shape students' academic identities in post-secondary institutions.

A review of the recent literature on equity and inclusion in honors education shows keen attention to the ways in which honors programs and colleges have excluded racially minoritized and low-income students and offers examples of changes in honors practices that have led to broader access. We have identified four prominent themes in the literature:

- Boundaries, barriers, and exclusion of honors programs and colleges, not only historically, but also reified today;
- Widespread changes to honors application requirements and admission practices, with the aim of broadening access to what had previously been rarefied honors opportunities;
- Moving beyond the point of access to honors opportunities to more comprehensive and equity-minded changes to curricula, co-curricular offerings, and program-wide policies and practices that render honors programs and colleges more just;
- Re-envisioning and remaking honors programs and colleges to advance racially inclusive student belonging as well as equity-minded systemic transformation by challenging and addressing inequities.

BOUNDARIES, BARRIERS, AND EXCLUSION IN HONORS

Honors has “long been associated with selectivity and the status conferred by providing access to some students while excluding most others from what is known

in the social sciences as a ‘positional good’: a desirable marketplace good that has value precisely because others cannot have it ...”(Cognard-Black & Spisak, 2021, p. 83) The barrier is about availability and exclusivity: who knows about and seeks out the opportunities, who has the relationships with faculty to facilitate participation, and who knows how to access otherwise-hidden opportunities (Johnson, 2022). The “positional good” of honors is as much about who’s out as who’s in. “Asking ‘Who belongs in honors?’ implies that some do not belong” (White, 2021, p. 27).

The inequity in who is accepted to honors programs as incoming first-year students reverberates for years to come. Participation in an honors program or college is correlated for students from all demographic groups with rates of persistence and four-year graduation as well as with college GPA, but those correlations are even greater for students from underserved groups (Bowman & Carver, 2018). The benefits of the high-impact practices embedded in honors programs, learning communities, capstone/thesis projects, and undergraduate research also accrue at the highest rates for racially minoritized students (Finley & McNair, 2013; Gipson & Mitchell, 2017; Sweat et al., 2013), yet honors opportunities continue to be more readily available to White, higher-income, and continuing-generation students.

The fact that selectivity in honors has often been racially constructed is evident in both national and institution-specific data about which students (in terms of identities and demographic groups) participate and succeed in honors. Admissions criteria have often privileged White and wealthier students, as honors administrators and faculty have drawn lines between who belongs and who doesn’t, couching White-centered preferences in terms such as “standards” and “rigor” (Cognard-Black & Spisak, 2021; Johnson, 2022; White,

2021). There is a great deal of energy “poured into the gatekeeping aspect of honors [and] questions such as who is admitted to honors, who graduates with honors, and whether honors should serve campus broadly or only an elite few (White, 2021, p. 27). Honors administrators “ignore the structural barriers that sometimes limit access to resources or social capital that might enhance [students’] ability to succeed” in honors (Davis, 2018, p. 63). Because those external influences aren’t acknowledged, students “may blame themselves for not achieving their full potential,” despite the systemic impediments (Davis, 2018, p. 63).

Even when racially minoritized students are admitted to honors programs and colleges — and especially if they attend predominantly White institutions — they have reported feeling they do not belong or would not be welcome in honors settings (Jones, 2017; Walters et. al, 2019; White, 2021). It is not only the policies, but also the climates, of honors programs and colleges that can be experienced as excluding minoritized students. Lindsey (2019) cited research published over nearly three decades indicating that even at community colleges, which typically enroll more racially and ethnically minoritized students than do four-year institutions, small numbers of Students of Color participate in honors programs. The limited diversity in community college honors programs has led minoritized honors students “to having feelings of isolation and the questioning of whether they belong in the program or in college” (Lindsey, 2019, p. 17). Some researchers have pointed out that our very language in higher education — terms that attempt to “capture a large swath of identifiers,” such as “underrepresented” or “minority” students — contribute to student isolation (Decker, et al., 2023, p. 306). Ticknor et al. (2020) found that Students of Color who qualified for honors but opted not to

participate perceived the program as stressful and not aligned with their professional goals.

Bahls (2018) focused on the particular barriers transfer students face in terms of participating in honors programs and colleges, such as inflexible course requirements, unrealistic GPA minimums, and time-consuming extra- and co-curricular expectations. Transfer students from community colleges often have more diverse identities than the student body of the baccalaureate-granting institution to which they transfer (American Association of Community Colleges, 2024). Equity-focused honors transfer policies can make a significant difference in diversifying the honors population.

EQUITY-MINDED CHANGES TO HONORS APPLICATION AND ADMISSIONS PRACTICES

More diverse and inclusive honors programs and colleges begin with intentionally equitable admissions practices. “To disrupt educational stratification and see all students as having potential, a program must do more than just accept those who already have a track record of academic success” (Engelen-Eigles & Milner, 2014, p. 97). The most notable way of making honors admissions more equitable is to drop standardized-test requirements. Several institutions’ data have shown a significant increase in racial and ethnic diversity in honors when the SAT/ACT threshold was lifted, suggesting that the “gatekeeping” of test scores was effectively barring minoritized students from honors opportunities (Radasanu & Barker, 2022, p. 31; Shanahan, 2021).

Equity-minded honors admissions changes also include the following, according to researchers: (a) revising applications to center student interests and community engagement rather than their awards and positions held and (b) admitting students to honors after their first semester, which allows them to make an

informed decision about honors once they are established at the institution (Davis, 2018; Radasanu & Barker, 2022; Tuttle et al., 2023; Walters et al., 2019). Recommendations for diversifying honors opportunities include using holistic admissions practices that take into account students' non-academic skills and life experiences, as well understanding that multiple variables can negatively affect test scores and résumés (Dinan et al., 2023; Mead, 2018). For example, Davis (2018) advocated for measuring students' contributions to their communities in addition to or instead of traditional achievements in academics, athletics, and the arts.

As previously noted, merely adding more "holistic" or "comprehensive" admissions criteria do not necessarily make honors programs and colleges more diverse, especially if the new standards privilege experiences that wealthier students are more likely to access (Park et al., 2023; Rosinger et al., 2021; Walters et al., 2019). Holistic admissions criteria must value students' diverse experiences beyond the extracurriculars that require significant commitments of time, parental involvement, and money. This is a constantly evolving process of appreciating applicants' community and cultural wealth, as articulated by Yosso (2005), and providing opportunities in the application process for students to highlight their diverse individual talents and skills. Review rubrics and standards should be frequently re-examined and revised in response to institutional data and student feedback to ensure that they encompass myriad student assets (Radasanu & Barker, 2022).

EQUITY BEYOND ADMISSIONS

Access is only the beginning. "More equitable gateways into honors programs must be accompanied by more equitable programs" (Radasanu & Barker, 2022, p. 44). While there

is less in the literature on practices beyond admissions that facilitate racially minoritized, low-socioeconomic, and first-generation students remaining and succeeding in honors, some notable recent studies report on successful, program-wide, equity initiatives. Those involve culturally responsive honors advising and teaching, shared-identities peer mentoring, culturally relevant curricular and co-curricular engagement, and funding (beyond tuition scholarships) for participating in other high-impact programs.

Culturally responsive honors advisors "help students to continue seeing themselves in honors, even when they struggle academically;" minoritized students "already face a series of structural barriers to feeling a sense of belonging in honors" (Badenhausen, 2023, p. 21). Most honors programs and colleges have dedicated honors advising, though it has often been geared toward traditional or stereotypical honors students: ambitious, heavily involved on campus, and perfectionist (Raisanen, 2023). Creating an inclusive honors community for diverse students requires culturally informed and responsive teaching and advising practices. Raisanen (2023) identified several studies in the literature demonstrating that "advising and mentoring play important roles in the support and retention of Latinx, Native American, Asian American, and Black students in higher education, especially at predominantly White institutions (PWIs), because careful advising on academic as well as co-curricular, preprofessional, and personal matters contributes to students' sense of belonging, as well as their development of self-confidence and purpose" (p. 350). Personalized advising has been shown to be particularly crucial for community college Students of Color, for their current success and for positive transfer outcomes (Fay et al., 2022). Tuttle et al. (2023) recommended that honors advisors participate

in professional development in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and be mindful about creating aesthetically inclusive and safe spaces for advising meetings.

In addition to culturally responsive advisors, DEI-informed peer mentors and student ambassadors of diverse identities have helped create a sense of belonging in honors programs and colleges for minoritized students (Bott-Knutsen et al., 2020; Johnson, 2022; Radasanu & Barker, 2022; Walters et al., 2019). Bott-Knutsen et al. (2020) assessed a First-Year Fellowship that engaged first-semester honors students in community-building focused on diversity, inclusion, equity, and access; they found that the program helped diverse groups of students create meaningful friendships, feel accepted at the university, and gain understanding of different perspectives. Another peer mentoring program described by Walters et al. (2019), Equity Ambassadors, connected upper-division peers from racially minoritized groups with new students from similar backgrounds. The mentors addressed social challenges and created welcoming spaces for minoritized students at a predominantly White institution.

Other major ways of building equity and inclusion in honors programs and colleges are related to honors curricular and co-curricular offerings. Chang et al. (2016) summarized key areas of curricular change for racially equitable honors education, including offering courses with diversity themes, recruiting talented and diverse faculty to teach honors courses, and promoting teaching methods that are responsive to the needs of minoritized students. Several researchers call for honors courses that include community engagement, interdisciplinarity, problem-based learning, and content from diverse cultures; courses that address issues of social justice directly affecting the lives and communities of

racially and socio-economically minoritized students have contributed to diverse student engagement in honors (Badenhausen, 2023; Bahls & Chapman, 2017; Dinan et al., 2023; Hilton & Jordan, 2021; Radasanu & Barker, 2022). In concert with diverse content, critical pedagogy, which directly engages the relationship between power and knowledge and fosters the agency of each learner, can empower students in new ways in classroom spaces and beyond (Stoller, 2017).

A culturally diverse and inclusive honors co-curriculum is just as important for contributing toward a sense of belonging for racially minoritized honors students. Hilton and Jordan's (2021) meta-analysis, "The recruitment and retention of diverse students in honors: What the last 20 years of scholarship say," found that honors connections to other campus offices and programs that are dedicated to DEI, global engagement, and accessibility, both help minoritized students feel included and help honors faculty and staff share equity efforts with supportive colleagues who have expertise in the work. Jones' (2017) research found that racially and socio-economically minoritized honors students were less likely than their White and wealthier peers to engage in co-curricular offerings, due to the additional cost of such programs and/or the required investment of time (during which they might otherwise be working for pay). Providing funding support for otherwise-costly high-impact practices, such as study abroad and unpaid internships is essential for equity (Radasanu & Barker, 2022).

HONORS AS A SITE OF BELONGING AND RESISTANCE TO INEQUITY

What we authors found most inspiring in the recent literature about honors are the calls for overhauling the whole idea of honors as selective, exclusive, or privileged and transforming honors opportunities to

intentionally, expansively inclusive sites of equity and belonging. We agree with the contentions of Coleman et al. (2017) and White (2021), who call for paradigm shifts in honors education. They have argued that honors programs should actively challenge social inequities — in higher education, in the local community, and around the world. This is a more powerful stance than calling for changes to existing programs and practices. Because of the history and structures of racism in higher education and especially in honors, making changes to current practices may not root out the inequity that has been built in for generations.

Such a position rejects the notion of honors as a kind of reward for high grades (West, 2017) or the higher education equivalent of “flying in first class” (Knudson, 2011). Instead, it recognizes a different kind of distinction for honors students, faculty, and staff, as scholars committed to expansive excellence — committed to using their knowledge, skills, and community and cultural wealth for the good of all. In honors, the values of diversity, equity and inclusion and social justice should be taught and practiced. As Coleman (2017) stated, “for social justice to exist, diversity, equity, and inclusion for all must become what we in honors are about, centrally, obsessively, perennially. This has to be our mission” (p. xiv).

Coleman (2017) explained that the concept of honors as sites of resistance to inequity makes sense because of the unique spaces honors programs and colleges occupy in our institutions. Honors offers a non-standard, often creatively and collaboratively designed curriculum. Honors courses focus on theory, ideas, critical thinking, and discourse across disciplinary boundaries; both the curriculum and the faculty are drawn from different disciplines. And meaningful relationships are fostered between honors students and faculty, which

facilitate personal growth and cutting-edge scholarship (Coleman, 2017).

The literature emphasizes the role of equity-minded practices in honors for community college students. Engelen-Eigles & Milner (2014) wrote that “honors programs can level the playing field between more privileged students and the typical community college student. [...] By creating a pipeline through which to move students from developmental classes into college-level and honors coursework and beyond that to transfer, the promise of honors can be fulfilled” (p. 97-98). Lindsey (2019) found that Black women in community college honors programs had increased rates of persistence, degree-completion, transfer, and successful transition to the workforce. Community college students, as well as working-class students at four-year institutions, work more hours than many of their peers, may not have family support for academic distinctions like honors, and often experience low expectations of success from others and within themselves (Engelen-Eigles & Milner, 2014; Moritz, 2011). Those who do not fit the stereotypical profile of traditional-age, academically successful honors students may have been deprived of honors and other academic opportunities to which they should be entitled. The small class sizes and professor and peer support of honors have significantly contributed to degree-completion for community college students (Honeycutt, 2019). Welcoming community college students into honors, regardless of previous academic experiences, contributes to the mission of community colleges as places of opportunity and egalitarianism (Treat & Barnard, 2012); it “can constitute a radical project of democratization, bringing the institution back to its roots as originally intended: a community-based, open-access institution” (Engelen-Eigles & Milner, 2014, p. 99).

EQUITY-MINDED TRANSFORMATIONS IN HONORS PROGRAMS AT MIDDLESEX COMMUNITY COLLEGE AND BRIDGEWATER STATE UNIVERSITY

In the Middlesex Community College (MCC) and Bridgewater State University (BSU) honors programs, we have adopted many of the practices advocated by the scholars we have cited here, such as inviting all students to enroll in honors courses, emphasizing the study of racial and social justice in the honors curriculum, and carrying out equity-focused recruitment and admissions practices. Most of all, with our colleagues and students, we are shifting the paradigm of honors education, working toward an inclusive sense of belonging in honors among minoritized students and establishing the foundations of expansive excellence. In what follows five areas of equity-minded systemic change will be discussed:

An equity-focused cultural transformation involves change in every facet of honors. We therefore are taking a wide view in this chapter as we share the equity-minded systemic change practices we are engaged in as we transform our honors programs. What follows is a description of our ongoing efforts in the following areas:

1. Mission, Marketing, and Recruitment – Being guided by inclusive honors mission statements and utilizing accessible marketing materials and recruitment activities, events, and messaging that are aligned with each institution’s values and vision.
2. Admissions, Eligibility, and Enrollment – Engaging in equity-minded admissions practices that address barriers to participation and demonstrate our commitments to broadening prospective honors students’ eligibility and enrollment.

3. Interdisciplinary and Innovative Curricula – Recruiting faculty from diverse backgrounds and disciplines; creation of innovative and interdisciplinary curricula reflecting culturally relevant themes and topics; and inclusive pathways for honors completion.
4. Advising and Academic Support – Utilizing holistic advising practices, intentional use of peer advisors, and collaboration with university programs and offices to increase access to resources that address the unique needs of minoritized students.
5. Co-Curricular Opportunities – Increasing co-curricular honors events (e.g., speaker series, concerts, museum trips) and honors Living Learning Communities to create a sense of belonging and community among students.

MISSION, MARKETING, AND RECRUITMENT

The BSU and MCC honors programs have re-created their core messages and values, marketing materials, and recruitment strategies with an intentional focus on equity and inclusion — the opposite of what typically occurs in honors programs that seek to distinguish themselves from the rest of the institution through boutique experiences. When the BSU and MCC honors programs were less diverse, the mission and messaging emphasized traditional honors focal points of academic excellence, leadership, and service. While those areas continue to be present in both programs, they are defined and exemplified differently. Communicating about honors in ways that set honors students apart as exceptional in terms of academics and leadership roles inadvertently conveyed exclusion. As part of our equity-minded change efforts, the BSU and MCC Honors Programs have redesigned their marketing materials and recruitment strategies with an intentional focus on equity and inclusion.

MIDDLESEX COMMUNITY COLLEGE

MCC's more intentional DEI focus in honors began with a new mission statement that makes those values explicit: *The Commonwealth Honors Program at Middlesex Community College provides an equitable space for intellectually curious and motivated students to develop their fullest potential and enrich their college experience. The Commonwealth Honors Program engages, supports, and mentors a diverse community of learners committed to academic achievement, critical and analytical thinking, creativity, professional development, community responsibility, and global citizenry* (Middlesex Community College, 2024).

In support of its new mission, MCC has adopted novel marketing strategies to enhance the visibility and accessibility of honors opportunities. Instead of counting on academically motivated students



Looking to level up your college experience?

Join MCC's Commonwealth Honors Program!



MCC's Commonwealth Honors Program is a community of learners committed to:

ENGAGEMENT • ENRICHMENT • EXCELLENCE

**MIDDLESEX**
Community College

www.middlesex.mass.edu/honors



Students who fulfill program requirements are recognized as **Commonwealth Honors Scholars** at MCC and within a network of Massachusetts colleges and universities.

Benefits Include:

- Guaranteed transfer to any Massachusetts Commonwealth Honors Program
- Recognition as a Commonwealth Honors Scholar at graduation
- Enhanced prospects of transfer to selective four-year colleges and universities
- Increased opportunities for scholarships
- Participation in seminars with small class sizes, special events and activities
- Rewarding opportunities for growth by showcasing work and participating in research conferences

Register for an MCC Honors course, regardless of your GPA, major, pathway, or previous experience in Honors courses.



Become a Commonwealth Honors Scholar today!

to seek out honors opportunities, MCC has increased the prominence and accessibility of the program by utilizing rack cards (postcard-sized information about honors and its benefits placed on display racks around campus). Information about the program is also shared at college-wide open house and other events to promote the program directly to potentially interested students, as well as slide presentations in Faculty Staff Association (FSA) meetings, and postings on the college's News Caster, Student News Caster, and MCC Mobile App. These materials highlight images of diverse student participants in MCC's honors program. Collaboration across departments at MCC has brought together academic departments, advising, enrollment, admissions, and dual-enrollment offices to engage in outreach practices to all students who could benefit from honors participation. Cross-college collaborations represent a novel approach to integrating honors in myriad areas.

BRIDGEWATER STATE UNIVERSITY

Similarly, honors leaders came to understand that BSU's framing of honors education was replicating forms of privilege, even at a state university with a majority of first-generation students. First-generation students who are White could see themselves in the BSU Honors Program, but, as evidenced by the numbers, BIPOC students with high GPAs and honors qualifications often could not. BSU made changes gradually, as faculty and staff in leadership roles came to understand structural problems that unintentionally but effectively left out the students who have been excluded from honors for generations: those who do not look like the students in the brochures and do not feel they "belong" in homogeneous spaces.

The pre-2017 BSU honors recruitment materials consisted of a paper brochure with photos and brief stories that were, as the program was, disproportionately about White

students. The brochure's invitation to apply was based on a presumption that students would want the imprimatur of honors. It required students to come to us.

Those assumptions — that the honors label would draw students, and that an invitation to apply would motivate diverse students — were overturned as we listened to the voices and experiences of the small numbers of minoritized students who had decided to give honors a try. They told us about imposter syndrome, stereotype threat, and worry that they would not be welcome. They opened up about the loneliness of being one of the only BIPOC students in their honors classes, and of the impossible trade-off between going to work and meeting honors requirements.

As we reflected on the voices of the Students of Color, we came to understand that prior to recruiting a more diverse group of students, we needed to make changes to the program so that it better reflected the realities of minoritized students' lives. For example, we understood that requiring honors students to engage in "community service" on Friday afternoons may have projected a sense of White saviorship, as a predominantly White honors student body provided intermittent help rather than working in sustained solidarity with minoritized communities and the organizations established there. Further, the timing of community engagement expectations on Friday afternoons was challenging for many working-class students who had retail and hospitality shifts at that time. In response, BSU honors changed some of the limiting structures (e.g., ending Friday afternoon requirements).

More comprehensively, we shifted the onus to honors faculty and staff to make the case that students of all identities and lived experiences were welcome and would find a true sense of belonging in honors. To counter generations of

exclusionary messages, a one-shot brochure, no matter how compelling, would not suffice. The BSU Honors Program collaborated with Undergraduate Admissions to create and disseminate 14 scheduled, tailored messages for students who qualify for honors admission. Messages are short, compelling, and often include a photo or a video with alt text to keep content accessible and readers engaged. This stream of communication over the course of four months allows prospective students to learn from a diverse group of honors students, graduates, faculty, and staff about innovative, multicultural courses taught by BIPOC professors, the benefits and impacts of honors, how to get involved on campus, and the benefits of participating in an honors living learning community. Honors faculty share why they love working with and teaching honors students and speak honestly and compassionately about imposter syndrome and our program's commitment to creating an inclusive, racially equitable community. By creating content focused on diverse identities, student confidence, the impact of honors, and the value of lifelong friendships, and by showcasing mentoring, advising, and individual support services, we hope that racially and ethnically minoritized students can see themselves in honors and at BSU.

To engage and support prospective and newly admitted students, a diverse group of BSU honors students, staff, and faculty are actively involved in all admissions and orientation events. They encourage prospective and new students to ask current honors students and professors candid questions about the campus experience for BIPOC students at a predominantly White institution, the workload in honors courses, how to successfully transition to college, and other concerns. At Admitted Student Days, students and their families are invited to an honors dinner where they connect one-on-one with a diverse

group of honors faculty and students, building connections before the fall semester begins.

ADMISSIONS, ELIGIBILITY, ENROLLMENT

As the literature review explains, selective honors admissions requirements have narrowed student access to and enrollment in honors programs and colleges. Low-income, racially, and ethnically minoritized, and first-generation students have all reported forms of imposter syndrome as they encountered honors eligibility criteria that seem intended to exclude them. Students who sense elitism in honors — especially when it seems intended for others — simply do not enroll or participate.

To mitigate these enrollment barriers, BSU and MCC devised new equity-minded admissions practices. Institutional research data show that equity-minded admissions, eligibility, and enrollment practices have yielded more diverse cohorts of honors students while also increasing honors persistence and completion.

BRIDGEWATER STATE UNIVERSITY

Honors Program admissions at BSU formerly depended on standardized test scores along with high school GPA, a common practice in honors programs and colleges across the country. BSU's own institutional research data show that the SAT is a poor predictor of academic success at the institution. The goal of inclusive honors program admissions at BSU is to admit and retain students from minoritized groups in each honors cohort at rates similar to or higher than the overall student cohort. As shown in **Figures 1-2** on the next page, our data in 2017 showed that BSU had an institutional performance gap in this regard as the percentage of Students of Color in our first-time, full-time cohort was substantively larger than that participating in our honors program.

Figure 1. All of BSU’s First-year Students by Race and Ethnicity in Fall 2017

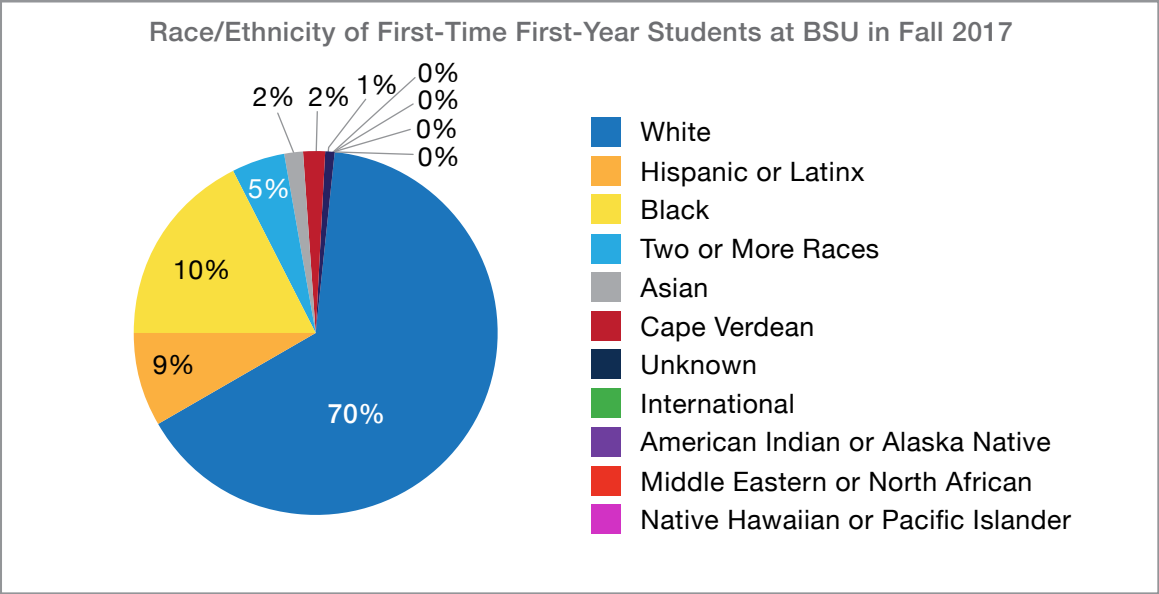
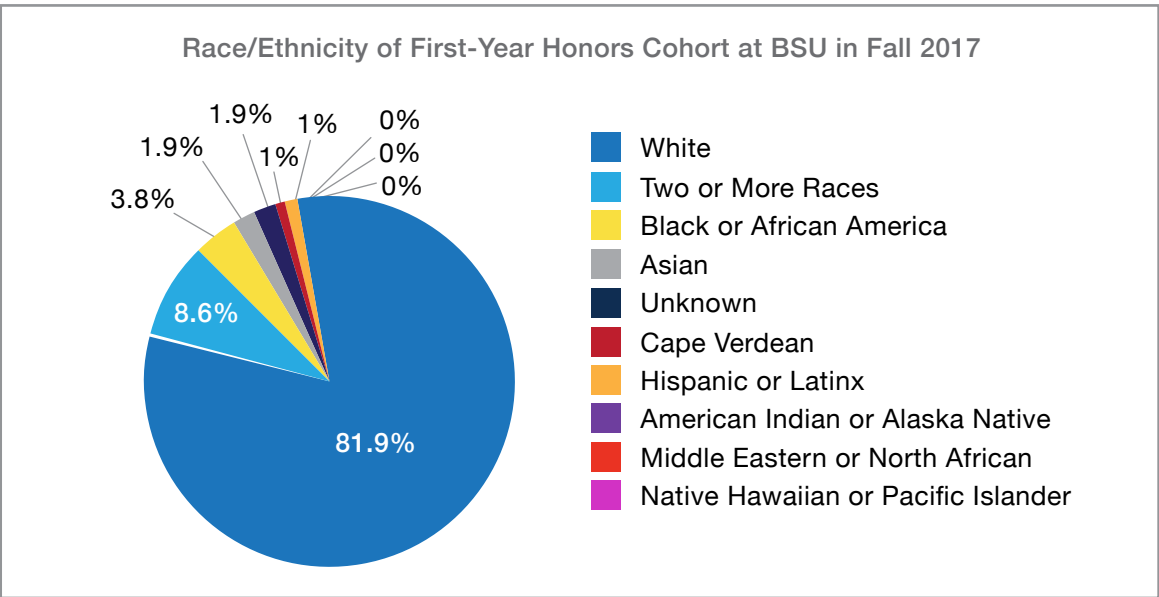


Figure 2. BSU’s First-year Honors Students by Race and Ethnicity in Fall 2017



In 2018, we made a change to base admission on high school GPA or SAT/ACT, plus an honors application essay. We changed the essay prompt from one about leadership to one that emphasized students’ community and cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). Those changes were important but insufficient. We saw honors participation of students from racially and ethnically minoritized groups increase from 16% to 23%. However, White students were twice as likely as BIPOC students to apply for honors. Inspired by McNair, Bensimon & Malcom-Piqueux’s (2020) *From Equity Talk to Equity Walk* and BSU’s Racial Justice Task Force recommendations to center racial equity in curricula and co-curricular work with students, we made more substantial and foundational transformations.

We talked with BIPOC students about the barriers they saw in joining honors at BSU and made several changes in response to their ideas. They asked why a separate honors application was necessary; hadn't they already demonstrated their readiness and qualifications for honors through their university application and essay? So, we eliminated the need for an honors application for any student with a high school GPA of 3.3 or higher. For students with a lower GPA but interest in honors, we offered two alternatives: a moderate standardized test score (SAT score of 1170 or ACT score of 24) or submission of already-completed high school work of which they were especially proud (e.g., essay, video, artwork).

With the entrance of BSU's fall 2022 honors cohort, students were accepted to the Honors Program based on their high school GPA (or, in some cases, their SAT/ACT score), with their acceptance letter from BSU — no separate honors application required. For the first time, the first-year honors students were similar to the overall first-year cohort: racially and ethnically minoritized students comprised 31% of the incoming honors students, as compared to 33% of the overall incoming class. Since BSU's equity-minded changes began in 2017, the Honors Program has grown from 450 to more than 1,100 students. Our first-year honors cohorts have quadrupled in size, from around 100 to more than 400 students.

Most importantly, those first-year honors cohorts are now matching the racial and ethnic diversity of the overall first-year class at BSU. In fall 2023, the first-year honors cohort is composed of 33% students from racially and ethnically minoritized groups — just one percentage point lower than the overall first-year student body. See **Figures 3-4** below and on the next page.

Figure 3. All of BSU's First-year Students by Race and Ethnicity in Fall 2023

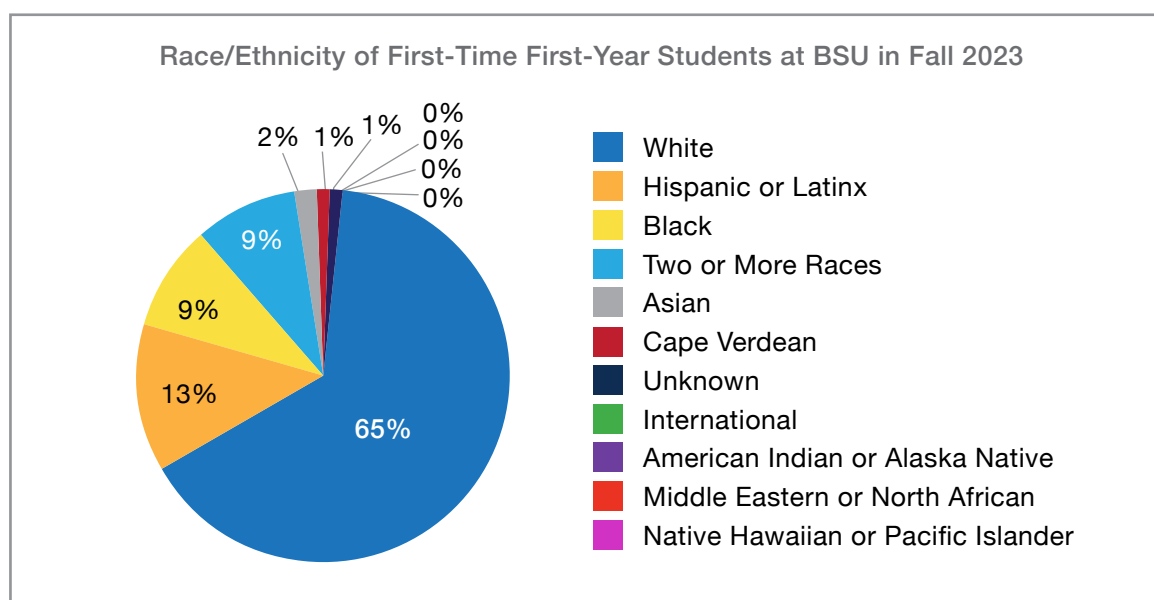
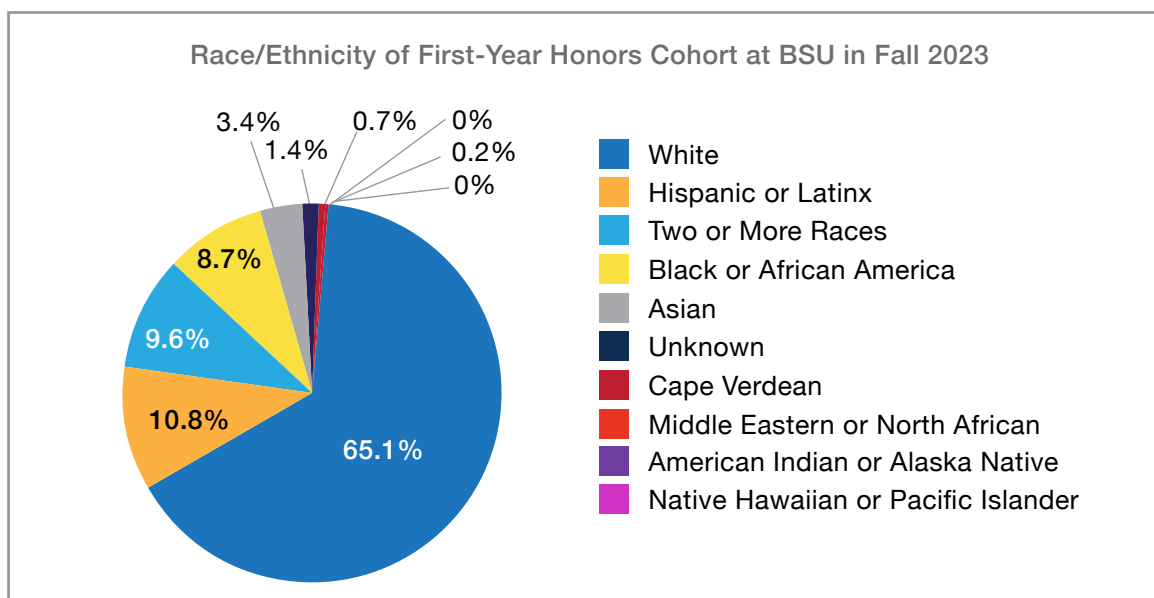
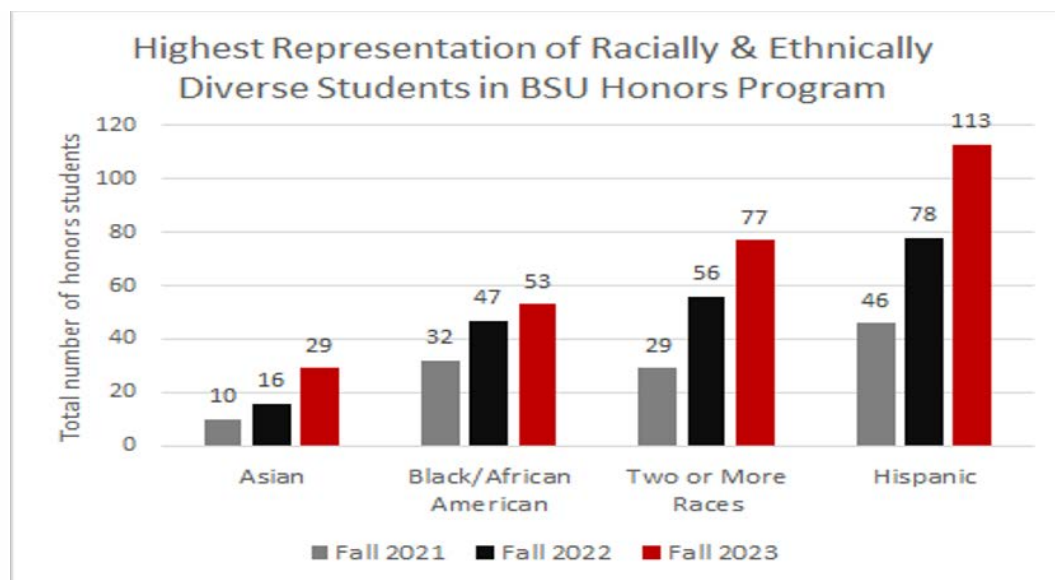


Figure 4. BSU's First-year Honors Students by Race and Ethnicity in Fall 2023



In disaggregating the data, one can see that the number of students who identify as Black/African American increased by 65.6% (32 to 53 students) from fall 2021 to fall 2023. For students who identify as Hispanic, Two or More Races, or Asian, there were even larger increases over the two-year time frame; representation grew 145.7% (46 to 113 students), 165.5% (29 to 77 students), and 190% (10 to 29 students), respectively. See **Figure 5** below.

Figure 5. Representation of Racially and Ethnically Diverse Honors Students at BSU in Fall 2021, 2022, and 2023



[Figure 5 in table format](#)

The data show that participation in honors has made a significant difference in retention, especially for minoritized students. Matched-group comparisons from 2017 to 2021 show that honors students were retained from their first to second year at 17-23% higher rates than their peers with high GPAs who were also invited to apply to honors but did not. (i.e., Both groups of students qualified for honors based on high school GPA. Those who participated in honors were retained at significantly higher rates.) The biggest differences were for matched groups of low-income and BIPOC students; low-income students who joined honors were retained at 23% higher rates, Students of Color at 21% higher rates than peers with matched high school records.

Those strong rates of retention have continued to improve. As BSU's honors program has become more diverse, the overall rate of first- to second-year retention of honors students (across all identities and demographic groups) has increased from 83% to 94%. Although some critics of diversity, equity and inclusion practices in higher education have claimed that greater diversity threatens excellence (Smith, 2020, p. 79), BSU honors data show the opposite: more diverse cohorts have higher rates of retention.

MIDDLESEX COMMUNITY COLLEGE

At MCC, students were required to have completed 12 college credits with a GPA of 3.2 or better in order to be eligible to take honors courses. As is common in honors programs and colleges, the policy required students to prove their readiness for honors based on previous success. The drawback to such policies is that students' future aspirations are dependent on the past. Now MCC encourages students to see honors as an opportunity for a new academic start. In 2020 these barriers were removed, when the Honors Program instituted an open admissions strategy, making honors courses accessible to all students who wish to engage in enriched academic experiences regardless of their GPA, degree, pathway, or previous experience.

MCC's and BSU's trends are similar, as summarized in **Figures 6-7** below. Most notably, race and ethnicity data show that in 2021-2022 MCC's Commonwealth Honors Program (CHP) had a similar representation of minoritized groups as were in the institution overall.

Figure 6. All of MCC's students by Race and Ethnicity in AY 2021-2022

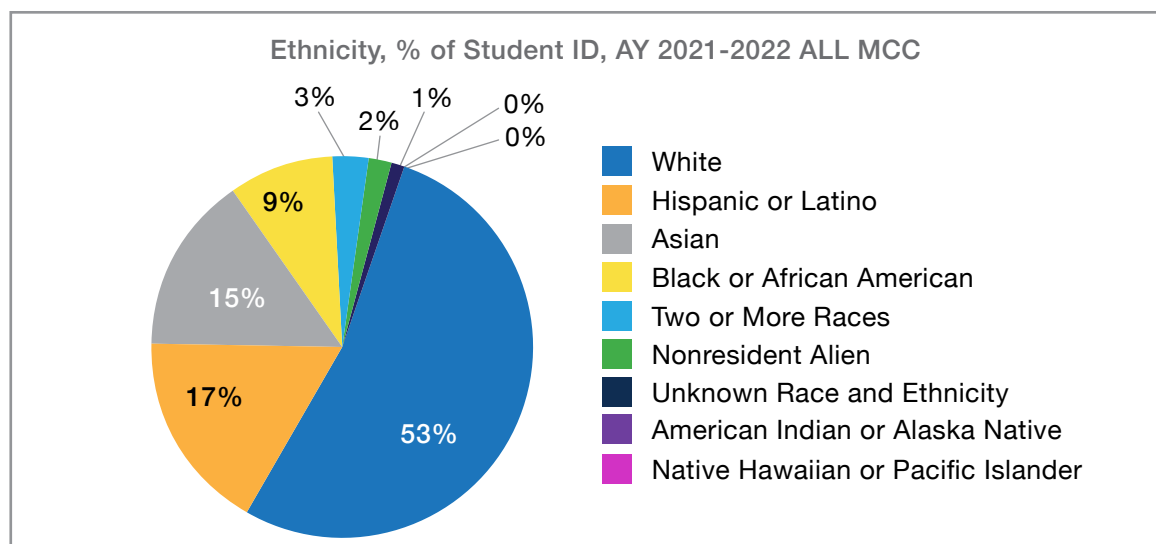
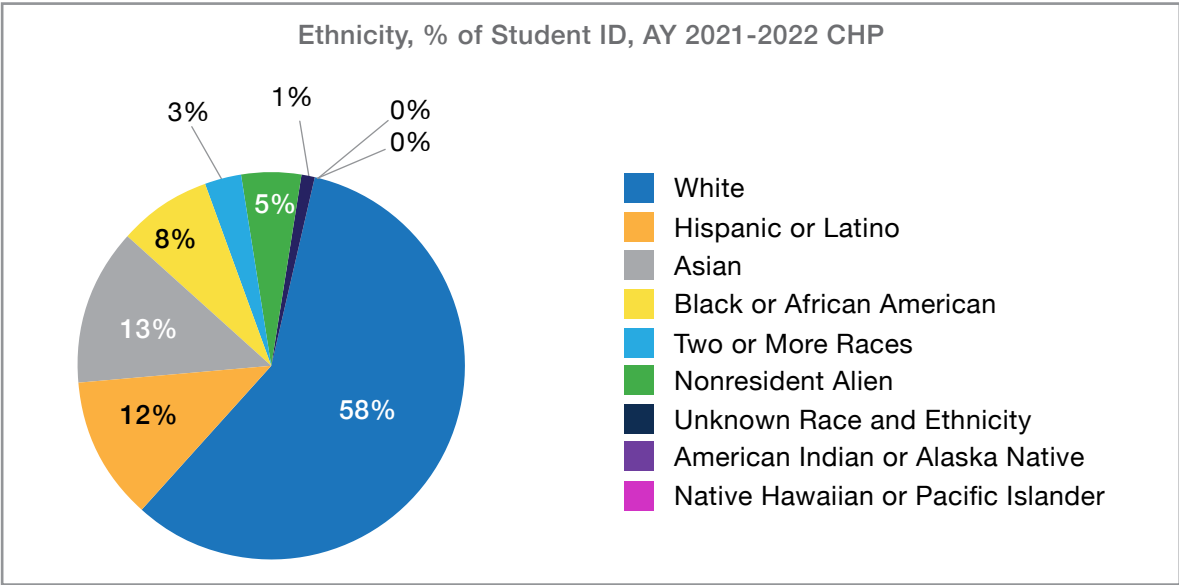


Figure 7. MCC’s Commonwealth Honors Program Students by Race and Ethnicity in AY 2021-2022



By fall 2023, MCC saw a major increase in the Latinx population in the Honors Program from 12% to 22% and the Black or African American population from 8% to 11%. Honors at MCC has seen a recent decrease in its Asian population from 13% to 8%, even as Asian students made up a larger part of the overall college in 2023. The Honors Program is committed to improving access for Asian students and is currently working on strategies to make the program more accessible to Asian students and developing an Asian Studies honors course. See **Figures 8-9**.

Figure 8. All of MCC’s Students by Race and Ethnicity in Fall 2023

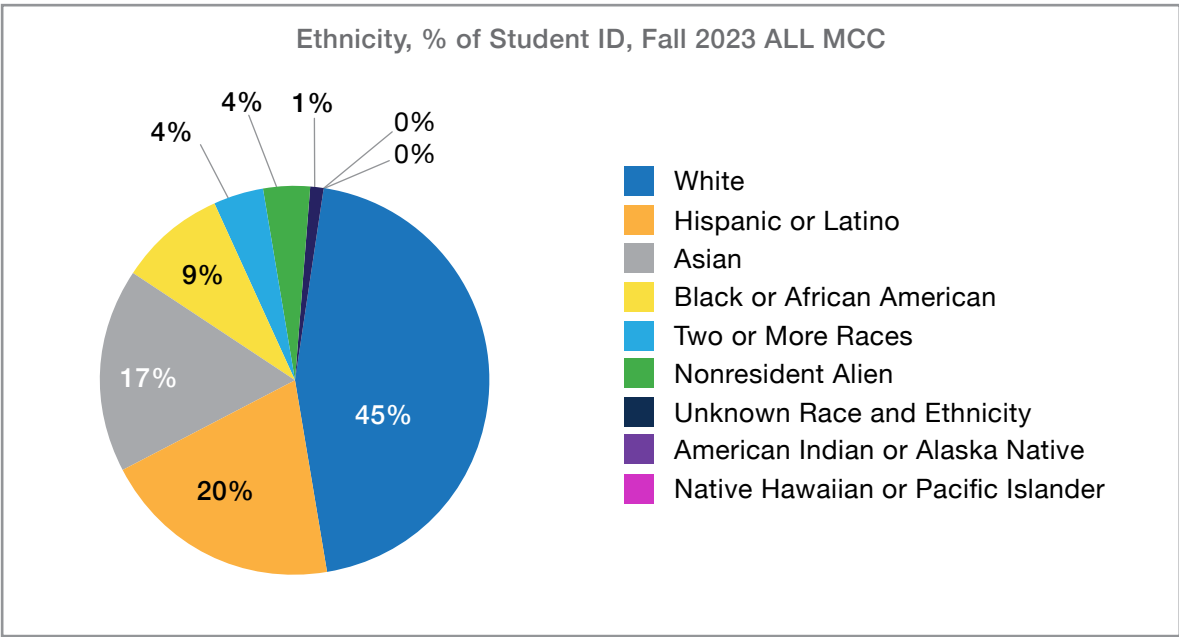
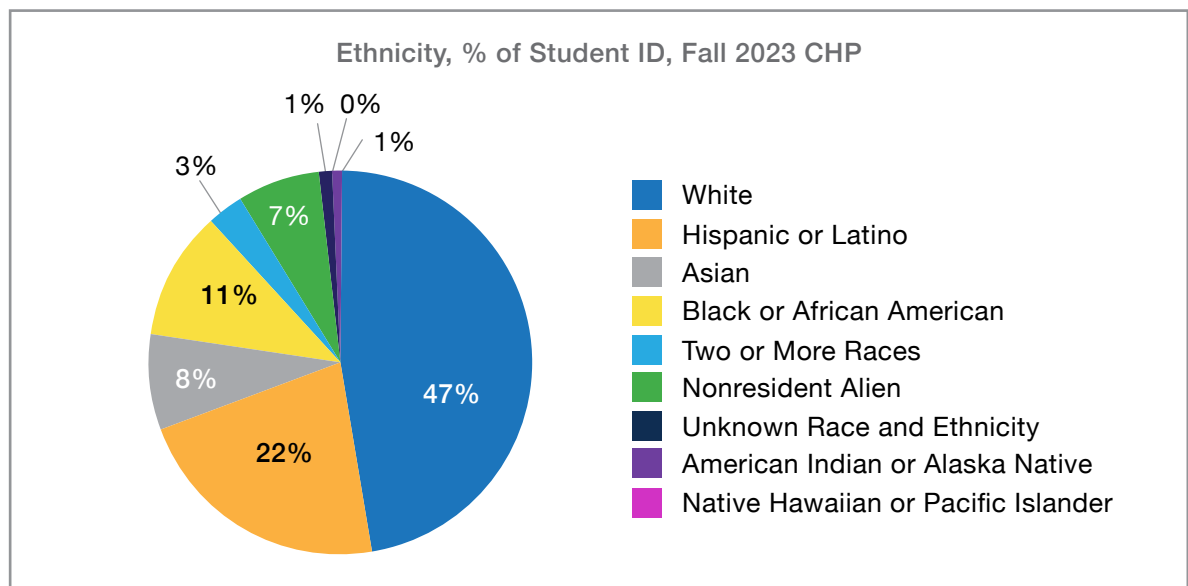


Figure 9. MCC's Commonwealth Honors Program Students by Race and Ethnicity in Fall 2023



In addition, the MCC Honors Program increased its first-generation student population from 31.2% in 2018-2019 to 33.6% in 2021-2022. During the same period, the overall population of first-generation students at MCC decreased from 37.5% to 28% of the student body.

INTERDISCIPLINARY AND INNOVATIVE CURRICULA

Equity-minded admissions and enrollment practices alone are not enough to increase minoritized students' participation in honors. Innovative and interdisciplinary curricula reflecting diverse, culturally relevant themes and topics are vital strategies to attract and retain students from minoritized groups in honors.

MIDDLESEX COMMUNITY COLLEGE

The most important equity-minded curricular strategy of MCC's Commonwealth Honors Program (CHP) is inviting all students to take honors courses at any time. Students can try out honors without applying, meeting enrollment requirements, or committing to continuation in the program. To graduate as a Commonwealth Honors Scholar with their associate degree, as required by the statewide Commonwealth Honors Programs

Council, MCC students complete three honors courses with a grade of B or higher and have a minimum of 3.2 GPA at the time of graduation. In addition to the statewide graduation requirements, MCC also requires honors students to participate in an annual research conference once before they graduate.

MCC's Commonwealth Honors Program offers a number of interdisciplinary honors seminars, including U.S. History Through Film; World Cultures; Postcolonial and Diaspora Studies; Globalization; and Exploring Social Justice Through Literature. (Course descriptions are available at <https://www.middlesex.mass.edu/honors/courses.aspx>.) The seminars include diverse representation to encourage minoritized students' active participation, deep learning, and collective knowledge-building with peers in the Honors Program.

Race, Class, and Gender Honors is the first course developed at the college that directly examines the multiple and intersecting ways in which concepts of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, social class, disability, and religion are socially constructed and how they shape society, social interactions, and individual life-choices. The course further explores how socially constructed categories might inform, reproduce, and challenge existing power relationships of privilege and oppression. It draws knowledge from feminist, queer, disability, Indigenous, critical race, and postcolonial practices and theories. The course is intentionally positioned to support the recruitment and success of minoritized students by addressing the critical need for representation of their lives within the curriculum. The topics are explored in an environment that promotes open dialogue and a sense of belonging. Students of Color find a space and a forum in the course to reflect on their experiences, contextualize their experiences within frameworks of historical and socio-cultural analysis, and challenge structural and systemic policies and practices of discrimination.

In order to support the success of students from a wide array of disciplines, MCC's Honors Program also offers a diverse array of other courses, including Introduction to Psychology, Ethics and Society, and Myths, which serve as humanities and social sciences electives. Such course offerings promote accessibility to honors by enabling students to fulfill their general education requirements through honors courses.

Traditionally, MCC's honors courses have been in the liberal arts and social sciences, with the exception of one organic chemistry course, making it difficult for STEM and health majors to graduate as Commonwealth Honors Scholars. To address this disparity, the MCC

Honors Program has recently expanded its course offerings to include STEM courses such as Statistics, Advanced Techniques in Biotechnology, and Astronomy. Additionally, the Honors Program partnered with the department of nursing to redesign two nursing courses. The two nursing honors seminars make it possible for nursing students to graduate as honors scholars, which otherwise would not be feasible due to rigid constraints of the nursing curriculum that typically allow no space for non-nursing courses.

BRIDGEWATER STATE UNIVERSITY

Honors at BSU, like at many other institutions, includes honors-designated sections of core curriculum courses — sections that are distinguished by more active learning (e.g., problem-based learning) and more demanding reading, research, writing, and/or other requirements. Until recently, most honors core courses offered at BSU had not changed in many years. Honors students complained that the same courses had been offered semester after semester, without enough variety or current relevance.

The growth in the size and diversity of the program has helped inspire a more varied set of course offerings. The “calls” to faculty for new honors course proposals have included information about the increasing diversity of the honors student body and a student-driven request for courses that center the voices and experiences of minoritized peoples. The response to the students' interest has been strong. Faculty have proposed innovative, multicultural honors courses that aim to draw the interest of diverse students. Courses such as *The Caribbean Supernatural*; *The College Hustle*; *Anthropology of the Middle East*; *Asian Art: China, Japan, Korea*; *Introduction to the Latinx and Caribbean Diaspora*; *Latinx Coming-of-Age Novels*; *Race & Science in the Americas*; and *Intercultural Communication &*

Language Learning, have promoted diverse representation in the curriculum. While many of BSU's traditional honors courses, taught by esteemed, longstanding honors faculty, remain, they are no longer the only choices.

A Racial and Social Justice Honors Colloquium was opened by the professor (Solomon) to all students, whether or not they had joined the Honors Program. The course allows students to explore racial and social justice in local and national issues and their individual consciousness. Students take on any topic of interest and engage in research, discussions, reflections, writing, and presentation of their learning to their peers. The professor directly recruits talented minoritized students who are not in honors from his past and current courses and advising roster. The professor also solicits student recommendations from his colleagues. Furthermore, the professor asks former students who have completed the course to serve as volunteer recruiters by sharing their experiences formally (in class presentations) and informally with their peers. Once potential students are identified, the professor sends out personalized emails sharing why they would be a good fit for the course. This innovative approach by a minoritized faculty member to bright minoritized students who do not yet see themselves in honors, alleviates the imposter syndrome many of these students report experiencing regarding honors eligibility and participation.

Three other first-year seminars in honors have been similarly opened to non-honors students with an interest in the topics, including a cultural exploration of the diverse city of Brockton, Massachusetts, and a TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) seminar. A survey conducted of non-honors students who participated in those honors courses found that 75% were interested in or had definitely decided to join

the Honors Program. The participants' open responses on survey data demonstrated that students' sense of imposter syndrome had been ameliorated by succeeding in the courses.

Although students who start at BSU in the Honors Program have an excellent record of first-to-second-year retention and degree-completion at the university, BSU loses over half of them from the Honors Program before senior year. In other words, honors students are doing well in graduating from the institution but not in graduating with honors. Those who have left the program have been disproportionately first-generation, Pell-eligible, and racially minoritized students. They have reported feeling intimidated by and unprepared for completing an honors thesis, which is required for graduating with Commonwealth Honors and/or Departmental Honors. In some large departments, there are not enough faculty available to mentor all the honors theses, so students who cannot secure a thesis mentor may simply drop honors.

A traditional honors thesis has a history and association of privilege, especially because of the time dedicated to a long academic paper and the gatekeeping of the "thesis defense" (Lindsey, 2019). Sloup (2021) found that first-generation students had more difficulty than their continuing-generation peers in completing honors theses. As part of the equity agenda in the BSU Honors Program, in 2021 we developed alternatives to the traditional honors thesis that allow students to complete an honors capstone suited to their goals. Each academic department decides whether to allow any or all the alternatives: conducting experimental research, developing a professional portfolio from a practicum/internship, composing a design or performing arts piece, or creating a distinctive marketing-communications plan for their industry. Each

of the alternatives requires a 1,000-word essay (e.g., artist statement) along with the main product (e.g., art exhibit, website). While fewer than half of BSU's academic departments (13 out of 30) have agreed to the honors capstone alternatives to a traditional thesis, those that have are already making the pathway to honors completion more equitable.

Like a thesis, an honors capstone is mentored one-on-one by a faculty member in the student's major. The capstone allows students to create a distinctive piece of scholarly, creative, and/or professional work to share with potential employers and/or graduate/professional schools. Students have expressed enthusiasm for designing an honors capstone that aligns with their post-graduation goals. As of this writing, the change is too early for us to have data on honors-completion among those who took the capstone alternative. We will be examining those results in the coming semesters and continuing to make equity-focused adjustments as needed.

ADVISING AND ACADEMIC SUPPORT PROGRAMS

Academic support and advising are critical to the success of honors students, especially those from minoritized groups at predominantly white institutions. BSU and MCC have always offered dedicated advising to honors students, with varying levels of student participation and success. Both programs' honors advising was traditionally conducted by faculty program leaders who were also responsible for their departmental advising rosters. As with many practices, this approach to honors advising likely worked well for the students who could make appointments or were able to drop in during faculty office hours.

We recognized needs that were not being met through that model, however, and have developed new, more equity-focused strategies

to advise and support honors students, with particular attention to the needs of BIPOC, low-income, and first-generation students, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Creating honors curriculum maps, hosting more honors-dedicated drop-in advising, and providing training and support for peer advisors, have been among the most effective changes.

BRIDGEWATER STATE UNIVERSITY

With a goal of retaining new and existing honors students in racially equitable ways, BSU's Honors Program expanded advising services and communication methods. They include:

- Hiring six peer and near-peer advisors from diverse backgrounds (racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity; LGBTQ+ and gender-identity diversity).
- Holding four, 90-minute, culturally informed group advising workshops each semester with those peer advisors, in which they get an overview of the BSU student population, participate in discussions about individualized student needs, plan for equitable and inclusive responsiveness, have opportunities for role-play, and test their new knowledge — all of which readies them for equity-focused meetings with their peers.
- Expanding advising modalities and times, offering in-person and virtual appointments and walk-in availability from 8 AM to 9 PM Monday through Friday, as well as Saturday mornings.
- Broadening physical access by offering walk-in advising at multiple locations across campus, including BSU's intercultural student success center, pride center, advising center, student accessibility services, residence halls, and commuter services.

- Creating additional print and online resources for all honors students, including a Registration 101 Guide with step-by-step instructions and screenshots, a video tutorial, and an honors course brochure. Such materials help to dismantle the barriers to honors. As Johnson (2022) reported, White students are more likely to know about honors opportunities and have the relationships with faculty to facilitate full participation. In designing inclusive resources and delivering them to students in accessible modalities, honors program staff can facilitate more equitable participation.

MIDDLESEX COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Similarly, honors Advising and Academic Support at MCC include:

- Creating formal open advising sessions for all students interested in taking honors classes.
- Collaborating with the Academic Center for Enrichment (ACE) to provide help for honors students.
- Using peer tutors to assist honors students with their project development and embedding them in courses to serve as resources.
- Creating a paid student representative position to ensure that student voice is being represented in honors faculty meetings, at open houses, and in assessment work; the student representative also communicates honors events and opportunities to the larger college community.
- Partnering with the library to have designated honors librarians supporting student research projects; and

- Creating *Honors Maps* (see <https://www.middlesex.mass.edu/honors/mapshomepage.aspx>) for most academic programs to provide honors scholars with a clear path to follow to complete program requirements successfully. This involved studying academic program maps and strategically incorporating honors courses within them. For instance, honors seminars are recommended as a means of fulfilling a program requirement for humanities electives. These customized maps serve as clear guidelines for students aspiring to graduate as Commonwealth Honors Scholars.

- Proactively sending letters of intent (which can be viewed at <https://tinyurl.com/MCChonorsform>) to all students in honors courses, offering them mentorship and advising awareness on graduating as honors scholars.

These straightforward, understandable, and user-friendly resources respond intentionally to the reality reported in the literature that racially minoritized students often feel unwelcome and unseen in honors (Jones, 2017; Walters et al., 2019; White, 2021). In designing clear curriculum maps, advising guides, and student-centered access to advisors, MCC and BSU have centered racial equity and social justice in honors. The practices described above answer the calls from higher education equity scholars for more culturally responsive honors advising, advocacy, support, and resources (Badenhausen, 2023; Radasanu & Barker, 2022; Raisaman, 2023).

CO-CURRICULAR OPPORTUNITIES

Co-curricular opportunities have always been important in honors education, as enriching experiences outside of the classroom often distinguish honors from other academic pathways. As with other novel interventions described in this chapter, our recent, innovative

changes to co-curricular offerings were not entirely brand-new offerings, but, instead, the results of examining, redesigning, and adapting existing co-curricular offerings from an equity framework.

MIDDLESEX COMMUNITY COLLEGE

The Honors Program at MCC organizes various co-curricular honors events, such as speaker series, World of Music concerts, and trips to museums. The MCC co-curricular speaker series provides academic, historical, and interdisciplinary context and framework to contemporary issues, demonstrating the intersectionality of diverse social issues. World of Music concerts provide exposure to different musical traditions, promoting cultural appreciation and understanding. Museum trips provide opportunities to engage with art, history, and culture outside of the classroom.

These events are open to all students (honors and non-honors), faculty, and staff. They are centered around increasing awareness about diversity, equity, and belonging. They serve to enrich the educational experience, foster personal and intellectual growth, and prepare students for a diverse and dynamic world. They complement academic learning by providing a holistic and well-rounded education.

MCC's co-curricular activities are intended to enhance minoritized students' sense of belonging in honors. The programs intentionally focus on art, history, music, cultures and social issues of concern and interest to minoritized groups and provide a space for students to engage with each other. This equity-minded approach to the honors' co-curriculum has created an environment that validates diverse backgrounds, cultural perspectives, narratives, and voices that serve as platforms for minoritized students.

BRIDGEWATER STATE UNIVERSITY

The BSU Honors Program has long offered Living Learning Communities (LLCs) in the residence halls, semesterly field trips to the Museum of Fine Arts and other sites, guest lectures, a credit-waiving "book club," and other co-curricular enhancements — all of which have been assessed favorably by the relatively small number of student participants. A reassessment with an equity lens, however, has led to several changes to co-curricular opportunities, in content, timeframe, collaborative approach, and level of commitment required to participate.

The First Year and Upper-Level Honors Living Learning Communities (LLCs) in two residence halls are intended to create a sense of belonging and community among honors students, guided by Resident Assistants (RAs) who are racially diverse upper-level honors students. Both within and beyond the LLCs, honors community-building, social, and co-curricular educational events are carried out in collaboration with other programs and divisions of the university that are focused on diversity, equity and inclusion services, including the intercultural student success center, the social justice center, the pride center, and multicultural student organizations, such as the Indigenous Cultures and Allies Association and the Asian Student Union. Those new collaborations have led to more diverse co-curricular honors events, such as celebrations for Holi, the Hindu Festival of Colors; National Coming Out Day; and Multicultural Snacksgiving.

For more than 10 years, up until 2018, BSU's Honors Book Club was composed of a full-day weekend event spent discussing an important text selected by faculty. The event was memorable for students who could attend, though not accessible to those with weekend jobs. In making some key changes,

including inviting students to vote on the book selection from a set of options written by diverse authors, and dividing up the discussions into shorter weekday sessions (some held online), student participation and their reported satisfaction improved. The updated Book Club emphasizes opportunities for students to engage with each other in reading and discussion of diverse texts in small groups facilitated by honors staff and faculty. It alternates between fiction and non-fiction titles by minoritized authors, including Celeste Ng, Margot Lee Shetterly, and James Baldwin. Those who wish to participate in the Book Club are provided with a free copy of the book to read during the summer or winter break and then participate in in-person or online small-group discussions during the semester.

LESSONS LEARNED

Lessons learned at BSU and MCC while engaging in equity-minded systemic change strategies in our honors programs include the importance of aligning missions with actions, removing traditional barriers, offering diverse and decolonized curricula and co-curricula, providing targeted support, using data for decision-making, promoting institutional collaboration, and fostering a sense of belonging for minoritized students.

To aid readers in considering whether strategies offered in the chapter will be of use on their campuses, they are summarized below.

BRIDGEWATER STATE UNIVERSITY

- Focusing on student awareness of honors long before their admissions process has been fruitful in demonstrating to minoritized students that they are welcome in the Honors Program. Personal messages from diverse faculty and student ambassadors have reached more prospective students, starting earlier in

their application and decision process, and have resulted in a significantly higher yield.

- Involving Faculty of Color in designing and teaching honors courses and mentoring honors theses/capstones has increased interest in honors among minoritized students. Courses on multicultural content have had consistently stronger enrollment, resulting in fewer course cancellations.
- Sharing personal messages from honors faculty and student ambassadors about their experiences in honors at BSU, including photos from a variety of disciplines showing BIPOC students engaging with HIPs in recruitment materials, have communicated a sense of welcome to prospective students.
- Introducing minoritized students to the program through honors seminars that welcome non-honors students and allow collaboration among colleagues across disciplines has, according to student reports, mitigated honors-related imposter syndrome.
- Changing the traditional honors thesis to more diverse means of meeting the honors capstone requirement in some departments (such as through an arts composition or community-engagement project), has made the pathway to honors completion more meaningful.
- Offering co-curricular activities in collaboration with multicultural student centers and groups has increased the number and diversity of participants at those events.
- Meeting students for advising and events where they feel most comfortable on campus such as centers dedicated to the success of students from diverse identities, have helped build community and relationships. We are seeing two times

the number of students for advising since moving advising meetings to the places students hang out between classes.

MIDDLESEX COMMUNITY COLLEGE

- Eliminating honors admission requirements has made honors courses more accessible to all students, regardless of GPA or previous honors experience. The number of students taking honors courses and graduating with Commonwealth Honors has increased significantly since that change.
- Interdisciplinary honors seminars, designed to decolonize the curriculum, have served to attract and retain minoritized students to the Honors Program. Those courses have had strong enrollment every semester.
- Providing courses in STEM and Health fields enabled students in these fields — underrepresented in honors for many years — to actively participate in the program.
- Co-curricular activities focused on equity, diversity, and belonging, have contributed to cultural transformation and community-building among honors students.

LIMITATIONS

In our work together, we have discovered remarkable synergy in our approaches to honors education. As BSU and MCC are both public institutions in Massachusetts, we and our colleagues share a commitment to the MA DHE Equity Agenda (2020). Infusing the equity agenda into honors is a singular commonality between us. Therefore, the limitations of this study are mainly related to the mission-class differences between the two institutions, not about any divergence in our philosophies of honors education. BSU and MCC each have a distinct mission and set of purposes for a state university and a community college, respectively, which makes some comparisons between our institutions uneven. For example,

MCC serves a more racially and ethnically diverse population and more post-traditional students than does BSU. While both institutions have increased the diversity of honors, the starting places are different.

Our two institutions had different types of data available, which means that we could not make equal comparisons of demographic groups over the same periods of time. Although these limitations are impossible to overcome due to the nature and status of the institutions and their specifically mandated state missions in the Commonwealth higher education system, the partnership demonstrated that equity-minded work can translate across policy, programming, institutional identity, and mission of campuses.

CONCLUSION

The *New Undergraduate Experience*, a visioning document for Massachusetts Department of Higher Education's (2022) 10-year statewide strategic plan focused on racial equity, calls for "expansive excellence" in public higher education. The vision is intended to

[...] push institutions to redefine measures of success, moving beyond completion, retention, and graduation rates to measure student engagement, belonging, post-graduate success, and individual and community impact; and above all to move into *expansive excellence* that increases racially minoritized students' success — and thereby the success of all students, including all racially minoritized groups and White students and with consideration for intersectional identities. (p.17; emphasis added)

The lessons learned from Bridgewater State University and Middlesex Community College confirm that equity-minded approaches can make a significant difference in the experiences

of minoritized students' access to and success in high-impact educational opportunities. To achieve those ends, equity must be put into practice by aligning mission to actions at the policy, program, and strategic-planning levels. Equity is proven successful when it is accountable to data, committed to diversity as an inclusive currency, and open to innovations that disrupt traditional paradigms.

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STRATEGIES THAT SUPPORT RACIALLY EQUITABLE GRADUATE EDUCATION

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Keywords: *Racially Equitable Graduate Education, Graduate Students, Skills Courses*

INTRODUCTION

Racial diversity facilitates the learning of all students in graduate programs and “prepares individuals for effective professional practice in multiracial settings” (Posselt & Garces, 2014, p. 443). Like undergraduate racially minoritized students, graduate Students of Color face barriers to obtaining their education. Graduate Students of Color report pervasive racism and repeated racialized experiences during their graduate study. The students experience racial microaggressions, loneliness, fatigue over the constant need to confront racism as they seek educational opportunities, and a reduced sense of belonging (Briscoe et al., 2022).

As Posselt aptly summarized: “competition for admission, recognitions and opportunities, for example, may look neutral to some observers, but the logics, rules and effects of many academic competitions disproportionately harm racially minoritized members of our community” in graduate education (2020, p. 121). Even the ways in which the academic subject and intellectual paradigms are too often created with only White students in mind hampers persistence and completion rates of Students of Color in graduate programs (Posselt 2018). A key tactic for combating

these barriers to student success is for faculty to provide supports needed to remediate the impacts of racism on student learning while simultaneously looking to created needed institutional change focused on equitable student success (Posselt, 2018).

It needs to be acknowledged that following the onset of COVID-19 lockdowns in the United States and the profound social isolation that followed, college teaching and learning became even more complex (Eika, 2021; Cavanaugh, 2023). Students of Color faced a higher rate of challenges than White students during the pandemic, due in part to a greater proportion of racially minoritized students confronting a lack of reliable access to Wi-Fi and adequate computers. Hybrid or online learning, that went to scale at the onset of COVID-19 and was often retained as the pandemic receded may compound harm to Graduate Students of Color due to a lack of a concerted effort to understand how the professors and students utilizing online learning modalities make meaning of the students’ “racialized identities and experiences” within the online environment (Briscoe, et al., 2022). In addition, students with first languages other than English reported difficulties with the online learning modality (Williams, 2021; Gee, 2023).

Students of Color were also more likely to be employed in the service industry, or to have family members employed in the service industry. These jobs, declined in number during the pandemic, devastating the household economies of individuals and families (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021; Molock, 2022, p. 2399). In addition, the public facing nature of these jobs exposed workers to a greater risk of infection.

During the pandemic Students of Color reported: disruptive changes in finances (54%), living situation (35%), academic performance (46%), educational plans (49%), and career goals (36%). Primary mental health challenges included stress (41%), anxiety (33%), and depression (18%). Students also noted challenges managing racial injustice during the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 occurred during a time in which the United States population grew increasingly aware of racial disparities inside and outside of higher education. The murder of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor in 2020 horrified America and resulted in a racial reckoning in higher education (Forte, 2021). Asian Americans faced enhanced violence in the period, due to the unwarranted assumption presuming a connection between the disease outbreak and individuals of Asian ancestry. This led to greater psychological distress reported by Asian American college students (Lu, 2022).

COVID-19-induced stressors impacted a learning landscape already challenged by the funding inequities between U.S. public school districts, income inequality, racism, anti-LGBTQ+ policies and sentiments, geographical segregation, book bans, unjust policies regarding Native Americans, hardened colonial settler mentalities, anti-Semitic attitudes, anti-Muslim sentiments, and other oppressive ideological patterns (Smith et al., 2023).

For the 10-year period prior to COVID-19, the enrollment of Students of Color in national graduate programs increased (McKenzie et. al, 2023). Following the onset of COVID-19, the enrollment of racially minoritized students in graduate programs across the nation declined. Enrollment of new graduate students from American Indian/Alaskan Native backgrounds declined by 1.6% between fall 2021 and fall 2022; for Black students the decline during that period reached 7.8%, and for Latine

students enrollment declined 5.7%. Lower enrollment rates for Students of Color were particularly evident in STEM fields (McKenzie et. al, 2023).

As we advocate for national policies that support access to graduate programs, we must work on improving the delivery of racially equitable graduate education on our campuses. In the first *Racial Equity and Justice Institute Practitioner Handbook*, (Gentlewarrior and Paredes), (2021) offer a vision of academic excellence through racial equity:

Campuses characterized by academic excellence through racial equity convey to Students of Color that they matter, that they can — and are expected — to succeed, and that risk taking on behalf of expanding their academic knowledge and skills is safe, celebrated and supported (Bowman & Culver, 2018; Smith, 2020; Wise & Montalvo, 2018). Campuses engaged in culturally responsive and equitable classroom and other academic practices also understand and affirm that academic excellence and accomplishments need not and should not conform to norms that have too often been based in the lived realities of majoritized students (Smith, 2020). (p. 98).

Unfortunately, research is lacking regarding equity-minded practices in pedagogy and instructional design for graduate Students of Color. (Cassuto, 2015). This chapter offers practical ideas for reducing racial institutional performance gaps (Bensimon & Spiva, 2022) in graduate education that are being piloted at Bridgewater State University.

INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

Bridgewater State University (BSU), in Southeastern Massachusetts where Lisa Krissoff Boehm has served as graduate dean since 2017, has between 1,400 and 1,650

graduate students in any one term, spread over 78 different master's degrees, an array of certificates, and education specialist degree opportunities. BSU features a separate graduate college with its own graduate student services, graduate admissions, and graduate shared governance. In operation since 1936, BSU's graduate unit has a reputation for building programs that serve a wide variety of diverse students who see value in our small classrooms and innovative approaches.

The College of Graduate Studies' enrollment is typically highest in the spring semester, as we have academic programs that enroll in the fall, spring, and summer semesters; students often start their journey of seeking graduate education in the fall and enroll for the first time in the spring. Graduate enrollment at BSU over the past five years ranged from 1,476-1,564. We had an upturn in enrollment in 2021-2022 due to individuals turning to education when their jobs (many in the service industry) reduced in hours or were eliminated.

Graduate enrollment is heavily female, with 74% female and 26% male students enrolled in spring 2024. In spring 2024, 1% of students were Asian, 6% Black, 1% Cape Verdean, 6% Hispanic or Latine, 4% Two or More Races, for a total of 18% Students of Color. Three percent of students were international and 77% were White. Forty-five percent of BSU graduate students in spring 2024 were first generation students (the first persons in their family to receive an undergraduate degree) and 23% were low income. Ten percent of our students were openly LGBTQIA+ (Tableaupub, 2024).

It should be noted that understanding retention and persistence rates are complicated in graduate work as many students are part-time and pause in their studies only to return at a later time to finish their degrees. In fall 2018 (pre-Covid), 301 out of 381 students beginning

their graduate programs were listed as White students. Seventy-three percent of these had graduated in three years. Black students (n=20) had a three-year graduation rate of 70% (3% below the group as a whole). Hispanic/Latine students (n=17) did better than the group as a whole, with 88% graduating after three years. The graduation rate for students of two or more races was 80% over three years. For Asian students (n=2), 100% had graduated by three years. Cape Verdean students saw a three-year graduation rate of 100% as well. There was one American Indian/Alaska Native student; this student was enrolled after one year and graduated in their second year (Tableaupub, 2024).

PROVIDING RESOURCES FOR NAVIGATING THE “HIDDEN CURRICULUM” OF GRADUATE EDUCATION

BSU acknowledges that once enrolled, graduate students, particularly those from minoritized backgrounds, may need assistance in navigating the hidden curriculum of higher education, especially as graduate school norms differ from those of undergraduate programs. As some graduate students resume formal educational study after considerable absences, and as many are the first in their families or social circles to attend graduate school, many appreciate assistance with skill building and formal introductions regarding graduate school policies and standards (Tarsi, 2022). COVID-19 made the need for assistance more acute. The opportunities for empowering graduate students with the knowledge and resources to succeed are particularly helpful for students from minoritized backgrounds (Williams, 2021) who often do not have prior knowledge of the graduate education's “hidden curriculum” — the “unwritten, implicit rules and expectations” — that are part of a successful graduate student academic journey (Desai et al., 2023). Research in this area

points to the importance of offering incoming graduate students' social interactions, ensuring opportunities are open to all graduate students, and providing assistance to students in learning skills, acquiring familiarity with graduate terminology and pointing them towards student success resources (Desai et al., 2023).

In order to invest in equity-minded systemic change in graduate education at BSU, Dean Boehm drew on her grant-funded work at Indiana University that demonstrated that skills courses imbedded into large lecture courses supported the success of students. While considered cutting-edge at the time, the scholarship of teaching and learning of the mid-1990s did not disaggregate student data by race. However, Dean Boehm's own notes and gradebooks from the work demonstrate that the students in her skills courses, made up of a representative sampling of Indiana University undergraduates by race and gender, did better than those of comparable SAT-scored control group (without the skills course intervention) drawn from the same representative demographics (Boehm, 1994). Unfortunately, the skills courses imbedded into larger lecture sections model was discontinued, primarily due to the cost and the degree of difficulty with implementing and tracking registration. Instead, the university's Student Academic Center offers skills courses for all students who seek them on an a la carte basis (Indiana University, 2024; Koke et al. 2022). In 2019, the university looked at a skills course required of students placed on probation and found that the 4,673 students involved were 20% more likely to persist and graduate compared to students on academic probation who did not take the course (Leon et al., 2019). More research from Indiana University testifies to the success of intervention strategies employed at the IU Bloomington program over more than 30 years, as the skills courses raised the overall GPA and one- and two-semester retention rates. The one-year retention rate of IU

undergraduates from first year to second year was 90.7% and the graduation rate of the 2016 cohort for Students of Color was 77.2% (Koke et al, 2022; Indiana, 2024b). The concept of skill-based courses works well when applied to graduate education because graduate study must approach learning at a theoretically complex level couched in high expectations.

Equitable student success does not decrease academic rigor or excellence, but instead ensures a route to success is available to all students — and not just the most privileged ones. For this reason, Dean Boehm instituted a skills-building course, “Maximizing the Graduate Student Experience” for students at the university, regardless of academic program. In 2018, the College of Graduate Studies staff wrote and issued a request for proposal encouraging faculty to apply for the compensated opportunity to design the course. Dr. Melinda Tarsi and Dr. Wendy Champagne Williams were selected to design and teach the course. As the Graduate College does not have the wherewithal to offer courses under its own banner, we teamed with the Department of Political Science, as the faculty there offer the Master of Public Administration and are highly committed to student success. All courses are added to that department's list of sections for the semester, although we employ a generic course prefix suitable for students in all academic programs.

The one-credit asynchronous, online course allows even busy students, or international students in the midst of moving to the states, the opportunity to enroll. Over time, we opened the courses to non-degree students planning on applying to one of our graduate programs. The course is offered to all graduate students free of charge in yet another important manifestation of equitable student success (Posselt, 2021). The “Maximizing” course syllabus contains sections on writing, research,

academic integrity, data analysis, mental health, self-care, creating presentations, strengthening public speaking, and time management. The learning outcomes are as follows:

- Recognize strengths in academic abilities (knowledge).
- Identify internal and external barriers to accomplishing learning goals (comprehension).
- Develop action steps to address barriers and reinforce strengths (application).
- Review and employ time management techniques toward supporting academic achievement (comprehension & application).

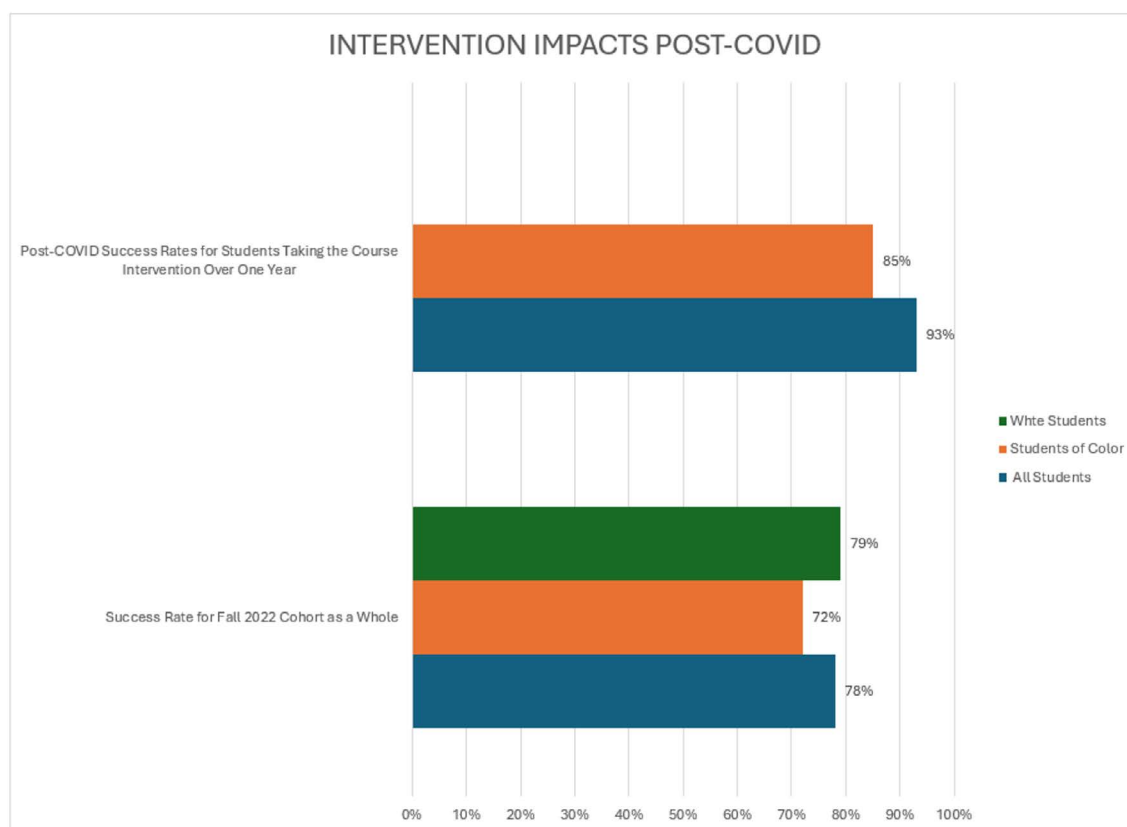
At the invitation of Dr. Tarsi, students complete a pre-assessment and post-assessment survey, which the instructors analyze yearly. The self-assessment asks for areas the students feel most and least competent in prior to the course, and why they chose to take the course. The answers range from those who report that much has changed from when they last attended college to mentioning that they are on academic probation. Some simply want to succeed and thought the course would be helpful. The course instructors compile data on their findings and update the course curriculum as necessary based on the assessment (Tarsi, 2022).

Survey responses after the first several semesters of the class suggest that the online format of the course helped students increase their comfort level with academic technology. One respondent remarked, “Having never taken an online course before, this was a great icebreaker for me. In many ways the course was a real confidence builder for me. I would recommend that this course be required for all in-coming graduate students.” Students

honed their time management skills and the writing of short-form assignments like the journal responses. Students also noted that the confidence gained from balancing the coursework with other commitments helped them feel more accomplished, with one student writing: “I strongly feel that I benefit from both the weekly journals and balancing my other commitment with graduate education. This course has allowed me to understand my needs and prioritize my needs as well. I did face challenges in providing timely submission due to many obstacles/limitations this semester but that allowed me to manage my time better in the long run” (Tarsi, 2022).

Course-by-course data comparisons reveal that enrollments ranged from 50% Students of Color to 100% Students of Color. This is excellent news, as Students of Color are self-selecting into the course and taking advantage of these no-cost university resources. The majority of the students took the course because it was recommended by a staff or faculty member. In order to keep the percentage of Students of Color enrolled in the course at a high level, we share the positive outcomes with our graduate program chairs and remind them that students take the course if their faculty or a staff member recommends it. Most students take the course early in their studies or even prior to applying to graduate school. Staff members recommend the course to all students on academic probation.

Examining data on students who took the “Maximizing the Graduate Student Experience” course over several semesters post-COVID, we see that 93% of all students who took the class have either graduated or persisted in their program since taking this course and 85% of Students of Color who have taken this course have either graduated or persisted. This is a noticeably higher rate of success than of students as a whole or for Students of Color as a whole for the fall 2022 cohort (Tableaupub, 2024). Note that success rate is measured by graduation or persistence for one year and graduation for three years. Please see the table below.



Following the impact of the initial skills course, “Maximizing the Graduate Student Experience,” Dean Boehm called for faculty to design a second skill-building course, “Mastering Graduate Writing,” designed to increase students’ facility with graduate-style writing, no matter the academic program. The RFP suggested that the professor concentrate on such items as facilitating the transition from undergraduate to graduate writing, familiarizing students with citation protocols, building student confidence with e-mail, introducing the concept of self-editing, and informing students of the available university writing resources, including the university’s Graduate Writing Fellowship program (a peer-to-peer support). Dr. Castagna Lacet was selected to design and teach the course; Dr. Allyson McVickar has taught subsequent sections of this course as well. The “Mastering Graduate Writing” course has the following course learning outcomes:

- Recognize strengths in academic abilities (knowledge).
- Identify internal and external barriers to accomplishing learning goals (comprehension).
- Develop action steps to address areas of need and reinforce strengths (application).
- Review and utilize available resources for competent writing (comprehension and application).

Post COVID-19, both BSU graduate skills courses offered during the university's winter intersession have proven popular. During the traditional fall and spring semesters, the courses also have filled far more rapidly than they did pre-COVID-19. Because the courses are offered at no charge and are accompanied by actual credits, students embrace them as valuable additions to their learning. The cost of these courses to the university is offset by the retention bump they provide, as well as their positive impact on admissions. Data reveals that once students at risk for expulsion take the Maximizing course, they move out of their Academic Probation status and back into Good Academic Standing.

Over the past three semesters we have seen increased interest in the skills courses and the courses fill more quickly during the registration period. Post-COVID, we have had a steady percentage of students on academic probation and a steady percentage of these students have been Students of Color. Over the past five years, 40 students were dismissed, 67.5% of whom were White. As Students of Color constitute approximately 20% of the graduate student body, they are over-represented on the academic probation lists as well as in the numbers of students who are dismissed (Boehm & Lamothe, 2024; Cincotta 2024). This overrepresentation fuels us to continue to engage in equity-minded change within the college.

The college staff's work with the Racial Equity and Justice Institute (REJI) led to enhanced data keeping and analysis regarding the two skills courses; the data collection included the disaggregation of data related to graduate student identities. In this way, we could ascertain whether the courses furthered the reduction of institutional performance gaps serving Students of Color. While the data trended positive, it also revealed that some White students with high grades and some Students of Color with high grades enrolled in the skills courses. Students who were not facing any worrisome academic challenges sought out the course to learn new skills and reinforce their academic "chops." This outcome was expected, as the same trend emerged at Indiana University (McVickar, 2024; Boehm 1994). Cognizant that equity-minded student success efforts support the success of all students (Gentlewarrior & Paredes, 2021; McNair et al., 2020), we are gratified that an array of students are benefitting from these efforts; as stated above, we will continue to actively work to ensure that students that will benefit the most have the information and support to enroll in these courses if desired.

The graduate skills courses remain open to all students, as we want anyone who would like to take them to do so. We have not yet required the skills courses for students who end up on probation, mindful of setting up another barrier for students to navigate. Requiring the courses could lead these students to drop out of their graduate studies rather than persevering. We strongly and repeatedly urge students who fall under the required 3.0 cumulative GPA to take up one or more of the skills courses at their earliest opportunity. We do so by writing the probationary students a letter with a link to the courses and urging their advisor to suggest enrollment in the skill sections. In addition,

the staff of the graduate college is exploring strategies to encourage the embedding of the skills courses into graduate programs' required curriculum, particularly in programs with more students on probation.

The next step we are undertaking as we work to improve these courses, is conducting a full review of them from a racial equity lens using the Center for Urban Education's tool for auditing syllabi (Center for Urban Education, 2020). The course syllabi are available to readers by contacting Dean Boehm (lboehm@bridgew.edu).

ADDITIONAL EQUITY-MINDED PILOT PROJECTS AND CURRICULAR CHANGES

Our university president, Frederick Clark, worked with University Advancement to create the David B. Jenkins Graduate Research Initiative Endowed Fund, which supports graduate research and creative initiatives. Utilizing these funds to support costs, we initiated opportunities for study abroad, including the first travel course open to all graduate students across the university. The study abroad class "Leadership in Wellness," with travel to Lisbon, Portugal, filled rapidly and student assessment revealed that students had a very positive experience in the course. Understanding the importance of study abroad as a high impact practice, particularly for undergraduate students (Trogden, 2022; Kinzie, 2021; Zilvinkis, 2021; Kuh et. al., 2005), we have begun collecting data and will assess the impact of this experience on participating graduate students over time. Assessment of the first pilot revealed that participating students gained confidence and global-mindedness, and that the funding assistance opened international travel to students who would have otherwise been unable to have this experience. The importance of ensuring equitable access to high impact practices is

informing our practice in making this study abroad course available to all students and at a lower cost (Kinzie et al, 2021).

Additional curricular changes we have made in an effort to reduce barriers to success include promising but not yet fully assessed innovations. These include:

- The faculty-driven decision to eliminate the Graduate Record Exam in our admissions process for most of our programs. Examination of the data over time for particular programs revealed that the GRE did not predict academic success in the programs. This data-informed decision was also based on the knowledge that use of these types of admissions processes are racially inequitable (Roberts et al., 2021).
- The design and implementation of the "Fresh Start" policy, which allows students who have started a previous graduate program and earned lower-than-desired grades the opportunity to start fresh when entering a subsequent graduate program in another field.
- Adding peer-to-peer support in writing and quantitative reasoning and skills that have improved student retention and students' sense of confidence throughout the College of Graduate Studies. While graduate writing fellows serve students from throughout the university, only the master of social work program has multiple graduate writing fellows assigned to assist students in that degree program, and the social work program has a more established and nuanced system of utilizing the fellows' assistance on writing assignments. As the students take courses as a cohort, all students interact with the graduate writing fellows program. Years of collected data reveals that the MSW program has a graduation rate that

exceeds that of the graduate school as a whole. This data, coupled with qualitative data from the students who utilize the service, correlates high rates of social work students utilizing in the graduate writing fellows program and greater student success for Students of Color. The three-year graduation rate for Students of Color within the MSW program was 81% between fall 2018 and fall 2020. More than 89% of the Students of Color completed the MSW within five years (Tableaupub, 2024).

- Increasing opportunities for student connection and community building through our Graduate Professional Students Association (GPSA). For the first time in the university's history, the entire executive board for the GPSA (2024-2025 academic year) will be Students of Color (McVickar, 2024a).

CONCLUSION

Like undergraduate programs, graduate education needs to be transformed through the practice of equity-minded practices (McNair et al., 2020; Posselt, 2020; Posselt, & Garces, 2014). The impetus for this work intensified due to the inequitable effects of COVID-19 on minoritized individuals and families (Cavanaugh, et al., 2023; Cengage, 2023; Molock, 2022). Only when graduate programs embrace equity-minded practices will graduate education fulfill our “economic and moral imperative” (Council of Graduate Schools, 2019) by ensuring that Students of Color can truly succeed because we are ready to “meet them in the fullness of their humanity” (Gentlewarrior & Paredes, 2021, p. 199). This effort will necessitate equity-minded systemic change in our programs. We look forward to collaborating with other colleges of graduate education engaged in this essential work.

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**FOSTERING EQUITY-MINDED SYSTEMIC
CHANGE THROUGH INSTITUTIONAL
OPERATIONAL PRACTICES**

SECTION 3



SECTION 3: OPERATIONAL PRACTICES

FOSTERING EQUITY-MINDED SYSTEMIC CHANGE THROUGH INSTITUTIONAL OPERATIONAL PRACTICES

By Yolany Gonell and Luis Paredes

Equity efforts in higher education have traditionally been the domain of academic and student affairs or the responsibility of DEI-focused roles. However, in order to close racialized institutional performance gaps (Bensimon & Spiva, 2022), the work of racial equity must be engaged campus-wide. Holcombe et al. (2022) emphasize that “thinking about the values and practices an individual leader is well positioned to enact based on their multiple intersecting and overlapping roles can help campuses advance equity leadership from anywhere within the organization” (p. 40). The final section of the handbook presents five chapters focusing on equity-minded strategy, planning, and action in an array of key functional areas in higher education.

These chapters illustrate methods for achieving systemic change by reshaping campus culture, enhancing planning efficiency and optimizing campus spaces and resources. The authors highlight the significance of decentralizing leadership roles, fostering inclusivity and diversity in decision-making processes, and actively seeking input through open dialogues and feedback from racially marginalized students to guide systemic transformation.

A Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) Core Competencies Framework in a Healthcare Education Setting by Truong et al. discusses the development and implementation of a JEDI Core Competencies Framework at a graduate student serving institution focused on training health professionals. The framework includes

lifelong learning, self-reflection, critical thinking, and structural analysis to cultivate JEDI leaders who can advocate for and enact equitable healthcare practices. Integrated into curriculum development, faculty training, and departmental objectives, the framework represents a significant stride in fostering a community committed to anti-oppressive practices and equity-minded change (Friere, 2000; Kezar et al. 2021).

From Moving Equity Values to Equity Action: Implementing Equity-Minded Data Tools for Faculty by Colligan et al. discuss the strategies the authors engaged in to support and routinize the use of data tools (Bensimon & Associates, 2021; Bensimon et al., 2021; Center for Urban Education, 2020) by faculty in an effort to improve racially equitable in academic outcomes. By analyzing data based on race and ethnicity, the initiative identifies disparities in course success rates, particularly in critical gateway courses crucial for student retention and completion. Supported by a Tableau dashboard that provides anonymized, instructor-specific data, the initiative helps interested faculty recognize and address disparities in their courses. This initiative underscores the significance of ongoing collaboration and support to maintain these transformative practices throughout the university.

The chapter *Operationalizing the Quest for Equity at Cape Cod Community College* by McCarron et al. describe the campus-wide process used to develop an annual Operating Plan guided by the “Five Principles for Enacting Equity by Design” (Bensimon et al., 2016). The Operating Plan is crucial for driving institutional change, influencing curriculum updates, faculty development, and restructuring student support while

promoting continuous reflection focused on enhancing equitable outcomes. By infusing equity-mindedness into their operating plan, the campus is improving data collection, expanding its focus to include the experiences of faculty and staff from diverse backgrounds, and working to ensure that racial equity is centered into their ongoing efforts campus-wide.

The chapter *Integrating Equity-Mindedness in Academic Program Review at North Shore Community College* by Stevens et al. discusses integrating equity-minded practices into the academic program review process (McNair et al., 2020). It emphasizes the importance of continuous improvement in higher education and the need for program review teams to reflect on programmatic effectiveness through an equity-minded framework. The authors describe the intensive and collaborative process they engaged in as they refined their academic program review process through an equity-minded framework and worked to create wide-scale support for its use. The chapter ends by providing the new equity-minded academic program review tool as a potential resource for readers.

Jason emphasizes the importance of rethinking institutional structures. The chapter *Enacting “Equity by Design:” Equity-minded Campus Space Design* discusses applying equity-minded principles to the physical design and use of campus spaces at a four-year regional comprehensive campus. The chapter provides an overview of the racialized architectural practices that have marginalized Students of Color. The author then applies the “Five Principles for Enacting Equity by Design” (Bensimon et al., 2016) to key space design and utilization practices including: utilizing equity-minded recruitment strategies in

identifying the design team incorporating equity-focused language in project solicitations and engaging students to ensure the renovated space reflects the needs of a racially diverse student body. The project is positioned as a model for broadly incorporating racial equity into public construction projects.

CONCLUSION

The chapters that follow illustrate racial equity initiatives in higher education which go beyond traditional roles to influence all aspects of institutional functioning. By incorporating equity-minded practices across the campus these efforts demonstrate a commitment to systemic change. The practices exemplify how adopting equity-minded strategies can address and diminish performance disparities by integrating equity at the core of higher education.

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A JUSTICE, EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION (JEDI) CORE COMPETENCIES FRAMEWORK IN A HEALTHCARE EDUCATION SETTING

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Keywords: *Organizational Change, JEDI, Equitable Healthcare*

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the MGH Institute of Health Profession (MGH IHP) Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI) Office shares the JEDI Core Competencies Framework that can be used for faculty, staff, and students, to learn and develop their JEDI skills. The JEDI Core Competencies were introduced at the IHP in 2022 as a framework to guide JEDI work across the IHP curricula and organization. The framework consists of elements focused on how individuals can exercise advocacy, develop their skills and learning, or implement new ideas and initiatives in the broader community, to ultimately become a community of JEDI leaders. Key ideas in the model include:

- JEDI as a life-long learning process
- Self-Reflection
- Knowledge Base
- Critical Thinking
- Structural Analysis
- Application
- Practicing JEDI Leadership.

INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

MGH Institute of Health Profession (MGH IHP) is a graduate school founded by Massachusetts General Hospital in 1977 in Boston, Massachusetts. It is also part of Massachusetts General Hospital and the Massachusetts General Brigham healthcare system, the largest healthcare system and private employer in Massachusetts. This graduate school primarily provides graduate degree programs in such fields as nursing, occupational therapy, physician assistant studies, healthcare leadership, and genetic counseling. The mission of the school is to prepare practitioners to be at the forefront of patient care and research by continuously re-evaluating healthcare delivery, improving health outcomes and advancing care for a diverse society through leadership in education, clinical practice, research, and community engagement. To fulfill this mission, the IHP has recognized that it must educate students to understand the challenges diverse patient populations encounter in accessing healthcare, including systemic barriers, such as racism. Achieving this mission requires an investment in justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) work.

In 2017, students at MGH IHP wrote a letter and met with the president to advocate for an orientation program that focused on race and racism as well as the establishment of a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Office (Boutin, Cahn & Milone-Nuzzo, 2020). The school founded its Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in 2019, as a result of this activism. The office was later renamed to the Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI) Office in 2020 (Truong & Martinez, 2021). Critical Race Theory (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller & Thomas, 1995; Harper, Patton & Wooden, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Solorzano, 1998; Tate, 1997) was used as a theoretical framework in the development of the office and engaging in

equity work at the institution (Truong & Martinez, 2021; NADOHE, 2021). Using this framework meant that it was important to center the conversation on race and racism as well as other forms of oppression and recognize the centrality of social justice in practice. Between 2019-2020 the JEDI Office expanded to include student JEDI Fellow roles, and two associate director positions — one of which focused primarily on pedagogy, curriculum and faculty support.

When the JEDI Office first started in 2019, there were a lot of discussions connecting racism to racial health disparities in access and outcomes, and a committee of faculty and staff had initiated the review and revision process of the institutions' cultural competency statement. In the midst of updating that document, the racial reckonings of 2020 occurred. In this context of the dual pandemics of the coronavirus and the racial reckonings, and hearing the news of Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, Ahmaud Aubrey, and George Floyd's murders among others, the small subcommittee scrapped the cultural competency statement and drafted a commitment to equity and anti-oppression statement instead. This committee presented the statement to the newly branded Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) Council, where it became an official statement of the institution. MGH Institute of Health Profession's statement sharing our commitment to equity and anti-oppression has been shared in its entirety in the accompanying text box.

MGH INSTITUTE OF HEALTH PROFESSION'S COMMITMENT TO EQUITY AND ANTI-OPPRESSION EQUITY AND OUR COMMUNITY

We define equity as seeking fair treatment, equality of opportunity, and fairness in access to information and resources for all. In our anti-oppressive practice, we acknowledge systemic oppression in our society and strive to confront power imbalances where none ought to exist within our organization and the communities we serve. We recognize the intersectional ways in which some communities and populations continue to be marginalized and strive to understand how this impacts access to resources and support.

ACKNOWLEDGING DISPARITY

Our commitment begins by acknowledging that existing disparities in healthcare, health outcomes, and education did not develop in a vacuum, nor do they continue to occur in a vacuum. Rather, they are the result of systemic oppression based on race, class, and other marginalized identities. On the individual level, learning about injustice is a lifelong process that encompasses active dedication towards pursuing knowledge about oneself and others as it relates to systemic oppression. On both the individual and institutional level, engaging in anti-oppressive practices will include making mistakes and learning from them; asking critical and reflective questions collecting relevant data; and facilitating and participating in ongoing dialogue to enhance our growth as an institute community.

OUR GOALS

Addressing inequities includes making changes in professional practice, health policies, healthcare financing, and systems of care. Our aspirational goal is to develop and teach our students skills to better serve marginalized and minoritized communities in order to address existing inequities. We know these communities have unique experiences navigating spaces that were not created for them, including hospitals and institutions of higher education. In our

mission to educate future health professionals, we aspire to integrate anti-oppressive practice in our policies, practices, and all aspects of our work: curriculum development, pedagogy, clinical environment, community environment, research endeavors, administrative practices, and everyday interactions with one another. These goals include, but are not limited to:

- Building and maintaining relationships to the communities we serve by engaging and listening to the voices of these communities in a culturally responsive way.
- Continuing to examine and develop new curricula that incorporate issues of social justice for the healthcare practitioner.
- Adopting inclusive pedagogical approaches and collecting outcomes data on our teaching.
- Providing continuing education and professional development to our clinical partners, faculty, and staff on anti-oppression.
- Seeking input from students, faculty, staff, clinical partners, and the communities we serve on areas for growth, and new ways to leverage our assets and resources (creativity, knowledge, experience, material) for anti-oppressive work.
- Creating intentional spaces for members of the IHP community to connect and address equity issues.
- Critically examining our teaching, learning, research, policies, and practices in relation to perpetuating inequities and injustices, and confronting them by developing solutions.
- Collecting and analyzing disaggregated data to help us better understand the inequities members of the community experience, and providing targeted and equitable support to these groups.

Our commitment to equity and anti-oppressive practice serves as a pledge of our shared responsibility to challenge systemic barriers within our learning community and in the healthcare system (<https://www.mghihp.edu/about/mission-vision>).

The commitment to equity and anti-oppression (IHP, 2020) statement emphasizes the institution's goal as a community to engage in anti-oppression practices, which include addressing existing inequities, and working towards lifelong learning to better serve marginalized and minoritized communities. The JEDI office was founded on the value of social justice in practice, which meant identifying and implementing tools that would integrate anti-oppression values into the organization and practices. The JEDI competencies introduced and outlined in this document are intended to be a tool that community members can use to reflect on where they are with respect to their own JEDI competency and identify opportunities for growth. The elements highlighted in the competencies are essential areas required for individuals to become competent JEDI leaders and for the IHP to become a community of JEDI leaders. The intention of these competencies is to provide a framework for groups and individuals to tangibly conceptualize JEDI principles, map them onto their particular settings within healthcare and higher education and point to directions for intentional strategy and growth.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE JEDI CORE COMPETENCIES

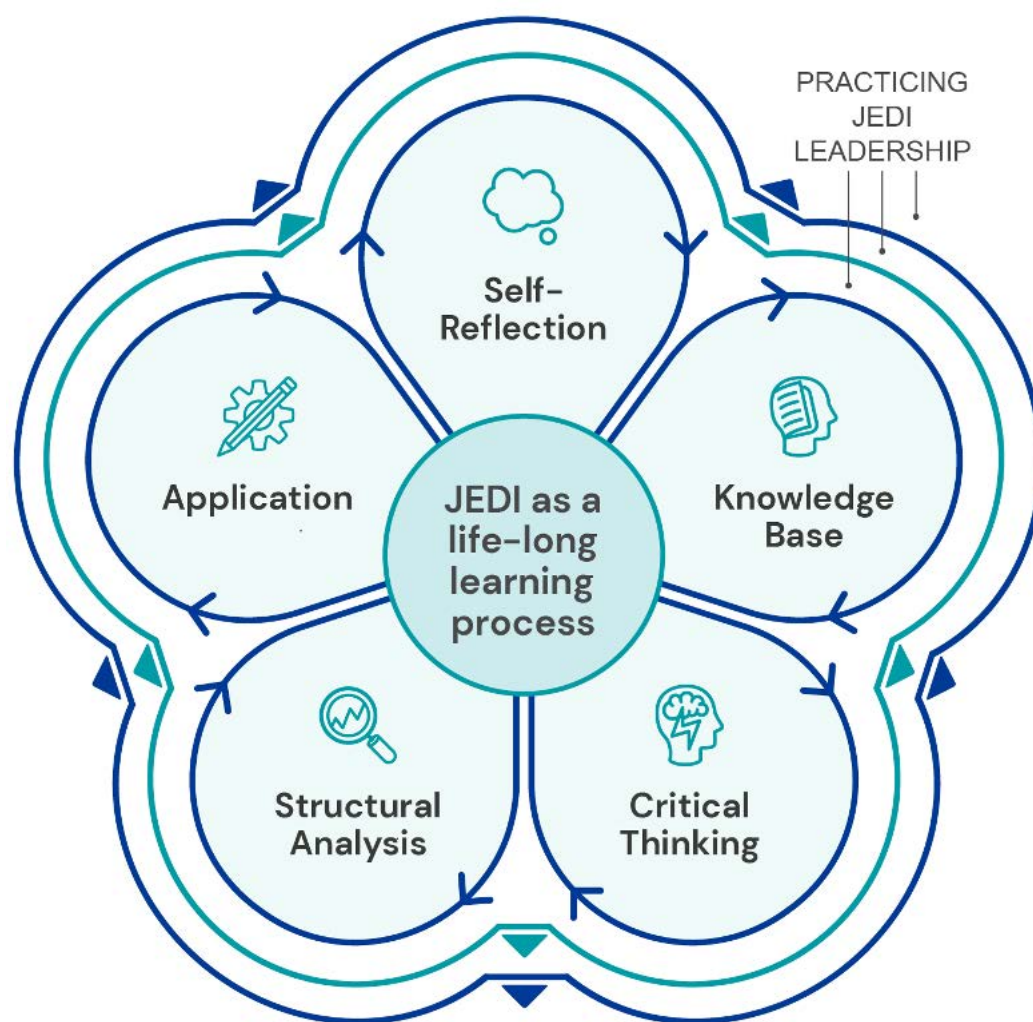
After the IHP developed the Commitment to Equity and Anti-oppression statement, the institution sought to align its policies and practices with this commitment. The JEDI Office took the lead in developing a set of JEDI Core Competencies as a framework for faculty, staff, and student development. The competencies were refined over the course of two years through the collaboration of JEDI office staff, student JEDI fellows, and multiple layers of feedback and engagement with the broader IHP community including administrators, deans, department chairs, faculty, staff, student leaders and appropriate organizational councils, committees and bodies. At the same time that the JEDI competency language and graphic (available on the next page) were being revised through the institutional processes, working versions of the JEDI core competencies were being used in JEDI curriculum review processes led by the curriculum and pedagogy team of the JEDI office and interested departments (Watkins Liu, et al., 2023). This parallel curriculum process allowed the JEDI office to have examples to highlight when discussing the competencies across the IHP.

JEDI office staff presented a draft of the JEDI core competencies at the executive council, academic counsel, faculty senate, and staff forum meetings where attendees asked questions and gave feedback such as how these competencies connected to learning outcomes and pointing out that the initial draft needed to engage not only faculty but also institutional staff. Through the iterative feedback process, it became evident that it was essential to not only describe each of the JEDI competencies, but to provide guidance for how they can be used. We found that providing guiding questions, and examples were particularly vital in this process. After

these competencies were approved, members of the JEDI office then met with different departments to hold tailored workshop sessions that talked about implicit bias and helped departments learn how to map out their work areas based on the JEDI core competencies.

The JEDI office drew from their experiences as equity leaders, as well as equity-minded and anti-racist theories, frameworks, and ways of knowing (AAMC, 2022; Cahn, Watkins Liu, & Hobbs, 2023; McNair, et al., 2020; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) to develop the JEDI core competencies and tailored it to our contexts in the health professions. We were also informed by the diversity, equity, and inclusion competencies across the learning continuum (AAMC, 2022). While the paths for students, faculty and staff may differ, as may the work in different departments, all build out from a consistent core of JEDI values and skill sets (Holcombe, et al., 2021). By intentionally attending to individual and collective JEDI competencies, the MGH IHP is working to actualize its stated commitment to become a bold community of empathic, courageous, proactive, compassionate, knowledgeable and effective leaders in healthcare and higher education and model shared equity leadership (Kezar et al., 2021).

THE JEDI CORE COMPETENCIES



There are seven elements of the IHP JEDI core competencies for programs, departments, and offices of the IHP community: JEDI as a life-long learning process; self-reflection, knowledge base critical thinking, structural analysis, application, and practicing JEDI leadership. In this diagram, each of the petals is a competency area that leads back into the lifelong learning process. The more knowledge and skills we develop in each of these areas, the more we can expand our learning into JEDI leadership, where we extend from internal development into broader community leadership. This might look like exercising advocacy, helping others develop their skills and learning, or implementing new ideas and initiatives in the broader community. The

elements of the JEDI Core Competencies are informed by years of knowledge development from equity minded approaches in education, sociology, and community engagement among other fields.

JEDI IS A LIFE-LONG LEARNING PROCESS

JEDI work requires deliberate and active learning — it is seldom a linear process and is characterized by ongoing change and progress. Everyone begins their journey at a different starting point, but continuous practice towards JEDI requires constant introspection and outward practice. This practice includes accepting limitations, identifying knowledge

gaps, and incorporating new knowledge for continuous, lifelong learning. This individual and collective learning process moves us towards becoming an anti-oppressive community (Friere, 2000; Kezar et al, 2021).

SELF-REFLECTION

Self-reflection in the context of JEDI is the process by which we examine how we relate to ourselves, others, and the broader sociocultural environment. We self-reflect to gain a deeper understanding of our thoughts, thinking patterns, and biases, which impacts our behaviors and interactions with others (Freire, 2000; Kezar et al., 2021; Seider & Graves, 2020; hooks, 1994; Santos et al., 2017).

KNOWLEDGE BASE

Every new skill requires foundational knowledge that provides the building blocks of intricate concepts. We recognize each program, department, and office is unique, thus we encourage members of our community to examine the most fundamental knowledge base applicable to one's setting (be it clinical or higher education) and intentionally cater toward a system that will push individuals of the IHP community to grow (Bensimon & Gray, 2020; Brondolo, et al., 2009; Crenshaw, 1994; Crenshaw et al., 1995; de Vries, 2015; Jones, 1972; Jones, 2004; McCall, 2005; Omi & Winant, 1994; Takaki, 1989; Truong et al., 2015; Tuck & Yang, 2012).

CRITICAL THINKING

Critical thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action (National Council for Excellence in Critical Thinking, 1987). To formulate judgment that is

anti-oppressive, we must be able to observe, analyze, and evaluate what is just (Bell, 1980; Bonilla-Silva, 2013; Choo & Ferree, 2010; Collins, 2015; Crenshaw, 1991; Freire, 2000; hooks, 1994; Kezar et al., 2021; Seider & Graves, 2020; Solorzano et al., 2005; Santos et al., 2017; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Yosso, 2005; Yosso et al., 2004).

STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS

Structural analysis means being able to apply an analytic framework that recognizes power structures within society and how they manifest in society, practices, institutions and lives. This includes being able to understand how current and historical oppressions of identities such as race, ethnicity, language, sex, sexual orientation, gender, age, ability, culture, socioeconomic status, geographic location, immigration status and its intersections lead to unjust allocation of power and resources and reinforce vulnerabilities and inequitable outcomes (Combahee River Collective, 1977; Bell, 1980; 1987, 1992; Byrd-Chichester, 2001; Crenshaw, 1994; Henderson & Tickamyer, 2009; Jones, 1972; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Santos, et al., 2017; Solorzano, 1998; Walby, et al., 2012).

APPLICATION

Application refers to having opportunities to take abstract or theoretical concepts such as structural analysis, critical thinking, knowledge base and self-reflection, and apply them in practice. Application is basically taking ideas and putting them into action. This might look like integrating a power analysis into patient interactions, research methods or policies. These application opportunities can then feed back into other JEDI areas (Freire, 2000; Holcombe et al., 2022; Lawson, 1995; McKay, 2010; Santos et al., 2017; Stovall, 2013; Yamamoto, 1997).

APPLYING THE JEDI CORE COMPETENCIES

Practicing JEDI leadership is where members of the IHP community expand upon their JEDI competencies beyond their individual growth or expertise. JEDI leadership entails understanding your role and sphere of influence to advance JEDI in and with the broader community. Ideally, community members will model JEDI leadership where they understand the concepts, can apply the concepts and can teach someone else how to do so. The following table offers readers equity-minded inquiry questions to aid them as they advance in their JEDI competency development and lead for justice, equity, diversity and inclusion.

Domain Title	Domain Description	Starting Point Questions
JEDI as a lifelong learning process	JEDI work requires deliberate and active learning – it is seldom a linear process and is characterized by ongoing change and progress. Everyone begins their journey at a different starting point, but continuous practice toward JEDI requires constant introspection and outward practice. This practice includes accepting limitations, identifying knowledge gaps, and incorporating new knowledge for continuous, lifelong learning. This individual and collective learning process moves us toward becoming an anti-oppressive community.	<p>Questions:</p> <p>What do I currently know about my own social position, power, structure and inequality?</p> <p>What social experiences am I familiar with? What ones am I less familiar with?</p> <p>How can I go about learning about that?</p> <p>What would strengthen my ability to be a competent, anti-oppressive JEDI practitioner today?</p> <p>Examples:</p> <p>For example, maybe I know a lot about gender inequality, but don't understand as much about structural racism, or maybe I understand income inequality at a policy level, but don't quite understand how it affects patient experience.</p>

Domain Title	Domain Description	Starting Point Questions
Self-Reflection	Self-reflection in the context of JEDI is the process by which we examine how we relate to ourselves, others, and the broader sociocultural environment. We self-reflect to gain deeper understanding of our thoughts, thinking patterns, and bias, which impacts our behaviors and interactions with others.	<p>Questions:</p> <p>How do my identities affect my life experiences?</p> <p>What kinds of relative advantages or disadvantages might I experience based on my identities or role?</p> <p>How does bias play a role in my interactions with ____ (as a faculty member, student, staff, etc.)?</p> <p>What do I notice about how I teach my students, how I mentor my students, how I manage staff, how I treat my classmates and/or coworkers?</p> <p>What patterns do I notice about my own reactions to certain types of interactions, or interactions with different groups of people?</p> <p>Examples This self-reflection might happen through journaling, or some other reflective practice. Here's a sample resource. (https://www.vivapartnership.com/optimal-living/reflective-note-taking-for-racial-justice-allies/)</p>

Domain Title	Domain Description	Starting Point Questions
Knowledge Base	Every new skill requires foundational knowledge that provides the building blocks of intricate concepts. We recognize each program, department, and office is unique, thus we encourage members of our community to examine the most fundamental knowledge base applicable to one's setting (be it clinical or higher education) and intentionally cater toward a system that will push individuals of the IHP community to grow.	<p>Questions:</p> <p>What concepts, theories or ideas do you need to understand to advance your JEDI leadership in this area?</p> <p>What challenges have you encountered in your area that you need to learn more about?</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implicit bias Microaggressions Intersectionality Diversity Systemic oppression Structural inequalities Racial inequity Social justice Social determinants of health Advocacy Allyship Cultural humility
Critical Thinking	Critical thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication as a guide to belief and action (National Council for Excellence in Critical Thinking, 1987, cited by The Foundation for Critical Thinking, 2024). To formulate judgment that is anti-oppressive, we must be able to observe, analyze, and evaluate what is just.	<p>Questions:</p> <p>How do societal, organizational and social power dynamics manifest in this situation?</p> <p>What current practices and policies reinforce further vulnerabilities and inequity?</p> <p>Examples:</p> <p>How can we ensure we are treating a person as a whole self, including their intersectionality of identities?</p>

Domain Title	Domain Description	Starting Point Questions
Structural Analysis	Structural analysis means being able to apply an analytic framework that recognizes power structures within society and how they manifest in society, practices, structures and lives. This includes being able to understand how current and historical oppressions of identities such as race, ethnicity, language, sex, sexual orientation, gender, age, ability, culture, socioeconomic status, geographic location, immigration status and its intersections lead to unjust allocation of power and resources and reinforce vulnerabilities and inequitable outcomes.	<p>Questions:</p> <p>How do societal, organizational and social power dynamics manifest in this situation?</p> <p>What current practices and policies reinforce further vulnerabilities and inequity?</p> <p>Examples:</p> <p>How can we ensure that we treat a person as a whole self, including their intersectionality of identities?</p>
Application	Application refers to having opportunities to take abstract or theoretical concepts such as structural analysis, critical thinking, knowledge base and self-reflection, and apply them in practice. Application is putting ideas into action. This might look like integrating a power analysis into patient interactions, research methods or policies. These application opportunities can then feed back into other JEDI areas.	<p>Questions:</p> <p>“Who benefits from our work?</p> <p>How does this disadvantage racially minoritized students?</p> <p>Who by race and ethnicity is most likely to benefit from this?</p> <p>How did the architects of this _____ take racial equity into account?</p> <p>Who, by race and ethnicity, might not meet the criteria for this?” (McNair, et al., 2020, p. 45).</p> <p>Examples:</p> <p>How can we ensure we are treating a person as a whole self, including their intersectional identities?</p> <p>Given the work that your role entails, what does it look like to embody anti-oppressive practices?</p>

Domain Title	Domain Description	Starting Point Questions
Practicing JEDI Leadership	Practicing JEDI leadership occurs when members of the IHP community expand upon their JEDI competencies beyond their individual growth or expertise. JEDI leadership entails understanding your role and sphere of influence to advance JEDI in and with the broader community. JEDI leadership moves from understanding to action, to aiding others in their JEDI competency development.	<p>Questions:</p> <p>What do you think is the best thing you can do to help someone else to succeed?</p> <p>How can you influence others to be an anti-oppressive practitioner?</p> <p>Examples:</p> <p>Starting courageous conversations</p> <p>Modeling self-care</p> <p>Being an ally to a student/faculty/staff</p> <p>Developing new programs informed by JEDI practices</p> <p>Creating a new book club to help educate other members of your community</p> <p>A JEDI Leadership example : https://embracingequity.org/blog/2021/8/19/anti-racist-leadership-why-it-matters-and-how-to-become-one</p>

EVIDENCE OF EQUITY MINDED SYSTEMIC CHANGE

When the JEDI core competencies were adopted by the IHP executive council in spring 2023, President Paula Milone-Nuzzo declared that all her direct reports would engage in JEDI core competencies mapping and goal setting for their offices. Human resources was the first office to pilot the mapping process and present their map to the executive council prior to adoption. Since then, finance, the office of strategic communications, operations, the provost's office, the office of student affairs and services, and the admissions office have engaged in conversations about implicit bias and JEDI core competencies mapping. Even

though the JEDI core competencies are still in their initial roll out stage at the organizational level, some offices have already started to implement their goals, such as participating in more JEDI-related professional development opportunities as well as leadership opportunities such as being a member of the JEDI council as well as facilitating our Power, Privilege, and Positionality Orientation Program (Truong & Martinez, 2020; Boutin et al., 2022).

Academic departments were an integral partner even before the JEDI core competencies were adopted by the executive council. As departments pursued their trajectories towards integrating JEDI into their

curricula, some asked for a framework for advancing that work. This alignment of the development of the competencies and the expressed need of the departments opened a prime opportunity to pilot initial versions of the competencies at the curricular level as early as 2021 before the competencies were approved more broadly. Having a draft of the competencies made it possible to develop several complementary JEDI tools and processes including: a JEDI syllabus audit tool; comprehensive JEDI competency-based curriculum discussions among faculty; an individual level JEDI reflection survey for faculty; a JEDI competency-based evaluation survey for students; and a process for mapping possible JEDI growth and development trajectories for students. Having these consistent tools and processes allowed faculty to comprehensively identify areas of strength, growth and collaboration at individual, course, curricular and departmental levels. It served as a valuable resource in moving from the value of prioritizing JEDI to concrete ways of doing so in practice (Watkins Liu et al., 2023; Naidoo et al., 2022). Participants reported that the competencies allowed them to review their courses and curricula in a way that helped them identify patterns and growth opportunities. This curricular work also helped strengthen adoption more broadly as it provided examples of what the competencies could look like in practice, making it easier to demonstrate their usefulness for the broader community.

Since introducing the JEDI core competencies, we have seen academic and administrative departments engaging in developing their own knowledge and growth to better support constituency groups, including in their work with students. It allows for alignment and connection around JEDI efforts. Similar to the work done at the University of Pittsburgh's Institute for Clinical Research Education, we

have found that the JEDI core competency model has aided departments in moving from a stage of “developing” to one of “transforming” (Norman et al., 2023).

LESSONS LEARNED

Engaging in this equity-minded practice of mapping out JEDI core competencies can be a time-consuming process. It consists of pre-work, opportunities for self-reflection based on one's own biases, experiences, and ways of knowing, as well as reflecting on one's identities in the workplace and in the team setting. In facilitating conversations and workshops with teams across our institution, we have spent countless hours in preparation, conversation, reflection, and developing our plans. This time has been meaningful in that we developed closer relationships with each other, are able to connect our work with the JEDI mission and are working towards appropriate goals while holding ourselves accountable. Some of the goals created by offices and departments include engaging in additional professional development focused on JEDI and connecting JEDI with their organizational mission to provide services that better meet the needs of constituency groups. For instance, one office is interested in developing an inclusive communications guide while another will be developing a checklist for planning inclusive institution-wide programs and events (e.g., vendors, speakers, content, etc.).

Collaboration was essential to developing the JEDI core competencies and implementing them with colleagues in various academic and administrative departments. The JEDI core competencies is not a one size fits all solution. We intentionally created the competencies to be flexible enough that it provides a baseline of expectations, but also allows for growth and transformation. The purpose of these competencies is to develop a framework to

advance JEDI related work in ways that make sense in particular contexts and provide tools to develop their own JEDI aligned goals (Holcombe et al., 2022). For instance, genetic counseling departments may wish to offer content on Henrietta Lacks as it relates to ethics and racism in medicine; and another department might have a particular focus on disability justice; and human resources might focus on personnel and hiring.

Because these JEDI core competencies are flexible, it takes human resource capital and resources to provide support to departments to go through the JEDI core competencies, engage in mapping, and setting goals. Because these concepts may be new to members of the various departments, they would need assistance to start conversations within their departments. Readers that may want to adapt a similar practice on their campuses are encouraged to ensure that they have the time and equity-minded personnel who have the skills and relationships needed to lead an institution through this type of comprehensive and transformative process.

Separate from these JEDI core competencies, but related is that the MGH IHP underwent a three-year institutional strategic planning process for which JEDI was woven throughout our strategic priorities. We continuously assess whether we are meeting our goals set forth in our strategic plan and dedicating resources to fulfill our goals. The institutional steps described here suggest a deeper integration of JEDI philosophy and mission, which is a key aspect of transformation (Norman et al., 2023). In 2023 — and for the seventh year in a row — the MGH IHP was recognized as “the only higher education institution in Massachusetts to receive the 2023 Health Professions Higher Education Excellence in Diversity (HEED) Award from Insight into Diversity magazine, the oldest and largest diversity-focused publication in higher education (Shaw, 2023).

CONCLUSION

After the 2020 racial reckoning, many people and organizations responded with a sense of urgency to make change and advance racial justice (NADOHE, 2021). It can be very difficult to identify the way to move forward for justice, equity, diversity and inclusion. Taking the time to identify a mission and vision for your particular context is a very important part in this process (NADOHE, 2021). For the MGH IHP, the JEDI core competencies are an important tool in identifying how the different parts of the institution can move together towards the anti-oppression goals articulated by the institution in 2020 (IHP, 2020). We encourage other institutions to learn from this tool and build on other resources that best align with their particular contexts.

Without a vision, accountability is impossible, and with a vision, we can take new steps toward our goal every day.

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MOVING EQUITY VALUES TO EQUITY ACTION: IMPLEMENTING EQUITY-MINDED DATA TOOLS FOR FACULTY

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Keywords: *Equity-Minded Inquiry, Course-Level Data, Gateway Courses*

INTRODUCTION

The transformation to an equity-minded institution that ultimately erases disparities for racially minoritized groups is one that happens with a care for students at its core, along with the belief that all students are inherently capable of great success (McNair et al., 2020). This process also recognizes that inequity is a “problem of practice,” emphasizing the responsibility of the institution, leadership, faculty, and staff to eliminate these disparities (Malcom-Piqueux & Bensimon, 2015). To support this institutional responsibility, critical inquiry and action must be engaged in by all levels across the university.

Effective tools for equity-minded inquiry must be disaggregated by race and ethnicity so that equity gaps can be seen. Making the data available and accessible in a meaningful way is the first step to moving from a culture of evidence to a culture of inquiry (Center for Urban Education, 2020). However, equally as important, as the accessibility of the data, is the reflective process practitioners embark on to ask themselves how they can close equity gaps, compelling them to action (Malcom-Piqueux & Bensimon, 2015; McNair et al., 2020).

Making equity gaps visible can be uncomfortable, but “this is, in large part, the point” (McNair et al., 2020, p. 57) — to compel asset-based reflection and immediately understand that the success of these students is within the practitioner’s and institution’s control. This moves from deficit-based inquiry, where ‘hunches’ are often based on anecdotal evidence or ‘unavoidable phenomenon’ that reinforce societal prejudices, to critical inquiry where practitioners ask questions about institutional policies and practices. This is a transformative shift from the current practice of changing or “improving” the students experiencing the disparate outcomes (Center for Urban Education, 2020; Malcom-Piqueux & Bensimon, 2015, 2017; McNair et al., 2020; Sosa, 2017).

An especially important piece of developing a culture of critical inquiry is the intentional step of reflection – both of practitioners’ own racial identity and privilege, but also of their practices and intentions with students. It is important for practitioners to be willing to recognize that even their best intentions may not be supporting racially minoritized students in ways that support their equitable success, and bringing data as close to practice as possible helps to contextualize that conversation (Center for Urban Education, 2020).

One area where this can be particularly impactful for long-term student success is in ‘gateway courses’ where large numbers of students are enrolled, and which act as ‘gatekeepers’ to continued study and degree completion. Completion of gateway courses is strongly correlated with retention and degree completion, while a failure to support student success in these courses can severely impact a student’s early GPA, academic progress, and likely motivation to continue their educational journey (Bloemer et al., 2017).

Where institutions have done this successfully, faculty “began to question patterns in outcomes, reflect on past interactions with minoritized students, and critically, see themselves as capable of empowering students from minoritized groups by demonstrating care, building relationships, and communicating a belief that their students can be successful” (Center for Urban Education, 2020, p. 3). This shift in mindset is student-centered, equity-minded, and radically shifts the onus of student success onto the institution and its practitioners.

As authors McNair, Bensimon, and Malcom-Piqueux (2020) indicate, the “process of moving from high-level indicators to finer-grained quantitative measures and other qualitative data close to practice is central to practitioner change” (p. 63). Members of the campus community need to see themselves and have others see them as change agents and campus influencers. It is important that faculty members (and other community members) engage in the critical inquiry process to begin to ask themselves what they can do to impact student equity gaps, to “find the actionable N” where they can make changes in their own practices (Dowd et al., 2018).

This chapter provides an overview of the work being done at Bridgewater State University (BSU) to support and institutionalize equity-minded data and inquiry practices created by Dr. Estela Bensimon and her colleagues at the Center for Urban Education (CUE) (Center for Urban Education, 2020). We describe the work being done to provide this data to all faculty, support them in its use, and provide expansive support for those who seek to examine and reflect on their own course-level data from a lens of equity-mindedness.

INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

Bridgewater State University is the 10th largest four-year college or university in Massachusetts, with over 9,500 graduate and undergraduate students in the fall 2023. BSU has been recognized for its commitment to racial equity, ranking among the top 36 four-year, public institutions in the country on how it serves Black students by the USC Race and Equity Center (Harper & Simmons, 2019). Its commitment to equity is also demonstrated in its ranking of 4.5 of 5 stars by the Campus Pride Index, the premier benchmarking tool denoting LGBTQIA+-friendly campuses (Campus Pride, 2024). BSU has been recognized among the top 20% of institutions nationwide by The Wall Street Journal, with significant attention paid to the social and economic mobility our students experience after their time at BSU, the ways in which we support the success of our students, and the diversity of those attending our campus (Wall Street Journal, 2023).

BSU aspires to support the success of every student, one student at a time, without exception. This oft repeated phrase both fuels our campus-wide efforts and describes our goal. With the understanding that racially equitable tenets and practices support the success of all students, BSU works to inform our daily efforts with the practices of equity-mindedness campus-wide. Students of Color comprise nearly 30% of the university’s student population, with 9% of students identifying as Hispanic or Latine, 9% as Black or African American, 6% as multiracial, 2% as Asian, 1% as Cape Verdean, and less than 1% as American Indian/Alaska Native or Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander. BSU also regularly disaggregates data on race intersectionally, with both enrollment and student success metrics available disaggregated by groups with race and LGBTQIA+ status, low-income status, first generation status, and sex. LGBTQIA+

students of color make up 4% of the BSU student body; 47% of Students of Color are low income; 62% of Students of Color are first generation.

Despite BSU's work in racial equity and long-term commitment to advancing racially equitable student success, data continues to show institutional performance gaps (Bensimon & Spiva, 2022) in persistence, retention and graduation experienced by Students of Color. BSU continues to reflect on our equity-minded practices and work to move from our equity-oriented values to action. One example of this is through implementing data systems and reporting mechanisms to monitor and assess the institution's efforts to bring equity-minded changes resulting in increased effectiveness of our work on course completion, gateway course success, retention, and graduation of students. With the support and collaboration of departments and individuals across the university, BSU worked to provide access to equity-minded data, and normalize the use of this data to create change focused on racially equitable student success in individual classrooms.

IMPLEMENTING A TABLEAU DASHBOARD TO CALCULATE EQUITY GAPS

As outlined in Center for Urban Education resources (2020), a starting point for accountability in student success is disaggregating key 'vital signs', such as course success. "Vital signs are a place practitioners can begin the process of inquiring into the causes of racial inequity and the campus conditions that allow inequity to persist" (p. 9). Beginning this work at the practitioner level centers the locus of change within the classroom and supports the reflection of faculty members on the policies, practices, and systems they create and uphold that may disadvantage racially minoritized students.

Disaggregating these data is the first step in noticing patterns of inequity, however, it is also important to measure outcome equity, or parity in success outcomes across groups and campus levels. Outcome equity can be measured by a percentage-point gap calculation, identifying the difference between one group and a reference group. Typically, the reference group could be the highest performing group or, when comparing across levels (university-wide, colleges, departments, etc.), all students. These calculations help to clearly identify which groups experience the largest inequities (Center for Urban Education, 2020).

In an effort to move BSU's data to action, an inter-divisional group of BSU staff and faculty members met in academic year 2021-2022 to make equity-minded disaggregated data easily available to faculty members and normalize its use to assess potential racialized course outcomes. This group included representatives from the BSU Student Success, Equity and Diversity Division, staff from the Registrar's Office, Information Technology (IT), Academic Affairs, and Institutional Research and Decision Support (IR).

The process began with including students' self-identified race/ethnicity data in all class rosters, enabling faculty members to better understand the students in their classes. These data also would be important as the group looked to implement tools developed by CUE to support equity-minded classroom practices, such as reviewing data on course success.

IT, IR, and/or Registrar's offices have long created 'DFWI' reports – reports that look at course success, defined as those who receive A, B, and C letter grades, while grades of D, F, Withdrawals (W) and Incompletes (I) are seen as unsuccessful. Student-level grade data are readily available, though the automation of

these reports at the university, college, and departmental levels can be challenging. An additional level of analysis – the individual faculty level – becomes even more challenging from a technical perspective, let alone ensuring that faculty members have timely access to these data. This individual faculty level of data and inquiry is key in understanding the role that each of us plays in upholding systems that do not support racially minoritized students. Led by IR, this collaborative group of equity-minded practitioners created a process to leverage university census data and data visualization software (Tableau in this case) to implement CUE's tool; work was done to create an instructor-specific, equity-minded course outcomes dashboard that disaggregated data by race and ethnicity (as well as other student characteristics) and calculated equity gaps.

This process was one of intentional collaboration, iteration, and much learning together. The continued inquiry and reflection process as we work together to institutionalize and improve the tool remain as valuable as the implementation itself. Key steps and challenges in the rollout of this tool are outlined in the discussion below and include:

1. Data privacy considerations for individual faculty members,
2. Building the technical infrastructure to automate the integration of both past and future years of data;
3. Creating intentional guidance informed by equity-minded research and practices to support the use and institutionalization of these tools in personal and professional faculty development; and

4. Ongoing collaboration and support needed to iterate on and update the design of the tools and guidance in order to ensure that these tools are accurate and action oriented.

DATA AND TECHNOLOGY CONSIDERATIONS

The first step in creating an interactive dashboard with instructor specific data was to address the privacy of faculty data. It was important for IR to find a way to anonymize faculty information while ensuring access to individual results and maintaining functionality for the dashboards. Using Tableau Prep, IR was able to join multiple data sources at the individual student and course level to create visualizations that looked at university, college, department, and course outcomes by student characteristics.

Building the technical infrastructure to automate the integration of historical and planned future data involved creating two dashboards – one made publicly (internal to all BSU users) available that compared and disaggregated course outcomes by student race/ethnicity at the university, college, and department levels and one that added a layer specific to an instructor's assigned courses in the given term.

Both of these reports revamped traditional reports on course passing rates, to focus on asset-based, equity-minded, course success reports. Additionally, IR created a randomly assigned faculty ID and password to be assigned to each instructor to ensure that faculty members' individual course level results were anonymous and available only to the individual faculty member and could not be used in any assessment of faculty performances unless the individual chooses to reflect and include in their assessment portfolios. Courses taught by multiple

instructors are defaulted to a 'primary' instructor, but data for all instructors can be shared through coordination with IR.

These dashboards not only calculated course success outcomes, but also incorporated intentional guidance to calculate a percentage-point gap for each student group compared to the overall rate of success, as well as a calculation for the number of students needed to reach equity (Bensimon & Associates, 2021; California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2017; Center for Urban Education, 2020; Sosa, 2017; Malcom-Piqueux & Bensimon, 2017).

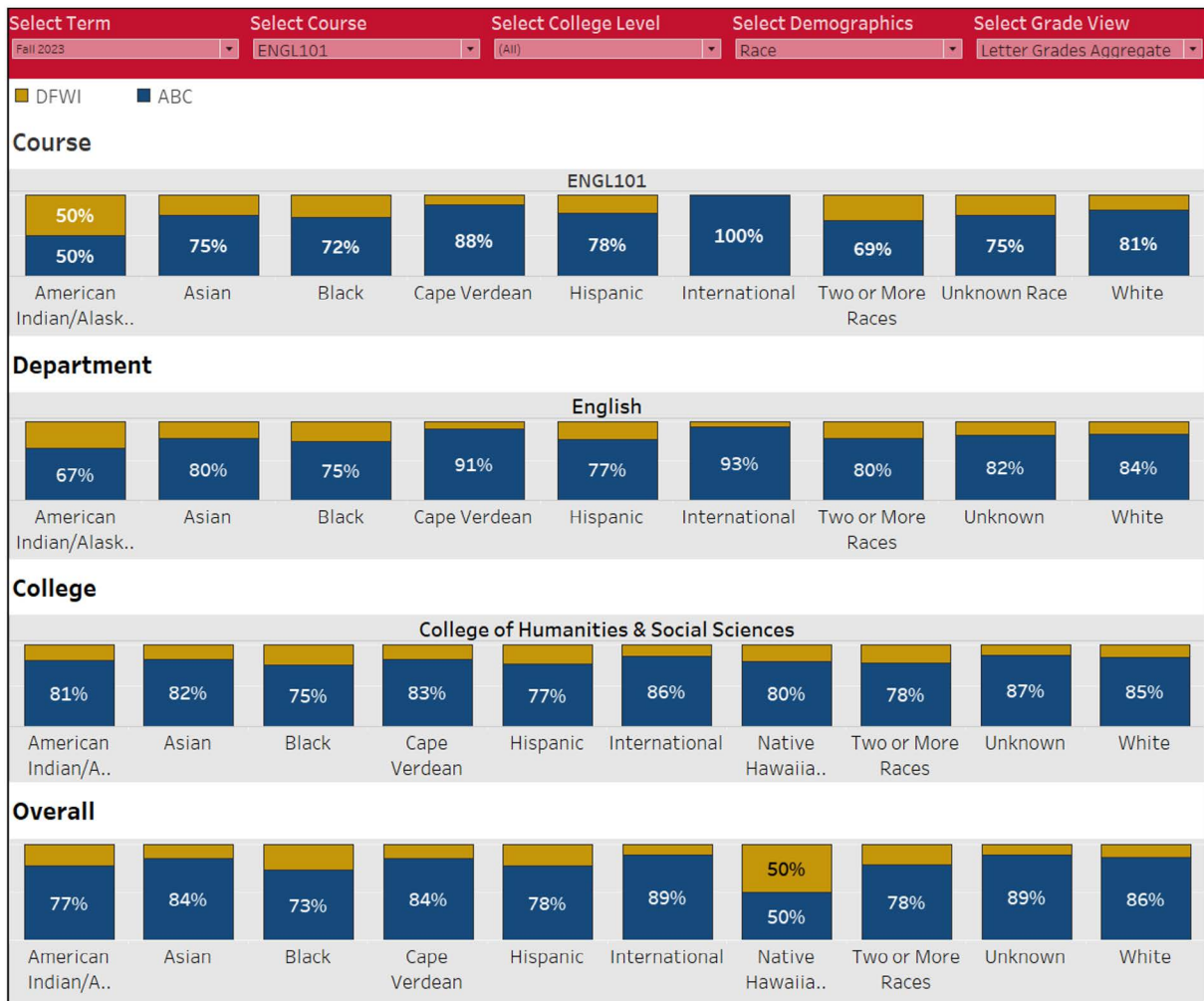
The percentage-point gap (PPG) calculation compares the outcome attainment rate for a specific student group with the outcome attainment rate for a reference group. This is calculated as: $PPG = \text{attainment rate for specific group} - \text{attainment rate for reference group}$

The benefit of using the PPG method of identifying potentially disparate outcomes for racially minoritized students is that it is easily interpretable and easy to describe. Using the calculation above, the positive (+) or negative (-) percentage point difference helps to easily distinguish whether the specific student group is experiencing this outcome at rates higher (+) or lower (-) than the reference group, which for our purposes is all students at BSU. This also helps to create an easy conversion to calculate the number of students needed to eliminate the equity gap (Center for Urban Education, 2015; Center for Urban Education, 2020; Sosa, 2017; Malcom-Piqueux & Bensimon, 2017).

For BSU's revamped, equity-minded DFWI reports, including the instructor-specific report, the PPG represents the percentage point difference in course success (defined as achieving a grade of C- or better) for a specific

chosen student demographic group (such as racial/ethnic group) and the course success rate for all students (the chosen reference group for BSU versus the more typically used standard of White students). The calculation is included in the dashboard, and highlighted when that number reaches certain thresholds. Though the margin of error is responsive to overall group size (Sosa, 2017), BSU chose an overall threshold of -3 percentage points to highlight as evidence of disproportionate impact and significant gaps of which to be aware, and so gaps of -3 percentage points or larger are highlighted in red, an approach supported by guidance from the Center for Urban Education (2020). The final column calculates how many additional students from each group experience an equity gap (those highlighted in red that are 3 percentage points or more below the overall rate) would need to pass in order to achieve the equity goal success rate.

The instructor-specific dashboard includes a visual representation of ABC and DFWI rates by race/ethnicity based on the individual instructor's data. Course here includes aggregated success rates for all courses taught by that instructor (all ENGL101 sections, for example), and instructors can then compare success rate across the department in which the course is taught (English), the college in which the course is taught (the College of Humanities & Social Sciences) as well as the overall university rate. Please see examples of the dashboard that highlights results for all English 101 courses by student race/ethnicity on the next page.



The instructor-specific report is the same layout but personalized for individual faculty members to see only their results. The structure of the dashboards follows best practices in fostering equity-minded inquiry in action. Translating these percentage point equity gaps into the number of students needed to achieve equity provides motivation to practitioners to take action in their specific domain. Faculty members are important institutional agents who can “use their human, social, and cultural capital to transmit resources, opportunities, and services” to racially minoritized students (Malcom-Piqueux & Bensimon, 2015, p.10).

Ensuring privacy for instructors to access these data on their own, without fear of repercussion from their department and/or administration also engenders support and space for this reflection. However, in order to catalyze this deep reflection around assumptions and address institutional resistance related to equity-minded data practices or taken-for-granted impacts of policies and practices, BSU deploys specific resources and guidance for faculty members to encourage ongoing equity-minded inquiry. These supports will be described in the next section.

Please see an example of an instructor specific report below. As a faculty member digs into their own data, they can see this table displaying data for their own course(s), with calculations for success (grades of ABC), the equity goal success rate (the rate for all students at BSU), and the percentage point gap calculation. Gaps of three percentage points or more are highlighted in red and the number of students to achieve equity in outcomes is calculated for only these groups.

Select Term		Select Course		Select Demographics			
Fall 2023		ENGL101		Race			
ENGL101	American Indian/Ala..	2	1	50.0%	78.2%	-28.2%	1
	Asian	24	18	75.0%	78.2%	-3.2%	1
	Black	132	95	72.0%	78.2%	-6.2%	9
	Cape Verdean	8	7	87.5%	78.2%	9.3%	
	Hispanic	165	128	77.6%	78.2%	-0.6%	
	International	3	3	100.0%	78.2%	21.8%	
	Two or More Races	116	80	69.0%	78.2%	-9.2%	11
	Unknown Race	12	9	75.0%	78.2%	-3.2%	1
	White	742	600	80.9%	78.2%	2.7%	
Total		1,204	941	78.2%	78.2%	0.0%	
		Number of Students Enrolled	Number of Students that Passed (ABC)	Student Group Success	Equity Goal Success Rate (All Students)	Percentage Point Difference	Number of Students to Achieve Equity

EQUITY-MINDED COLLABORATION

This initiative has been deliberately designed to span across multiple divisions. Key offices have supported the data tool's implementation and use with various resources. The usage of this tool has been cultivated from a faculty-led level with efforts being made to incorporate the tool into existing processes and training programs. We share the offices involved in this work at BSU in the event this information helps readers consider who should be involved in similar work on their campuses:

- **The Division of Student Success, Equity and Diversity:** Creating the Faculty Equity Fellows program and ongoing professional and institutional development around equity-minded work has ensured that this idea came to fruition and that there was

support and resources dedicated to the intentional rollout of this tool and guidance around equity-minded inquiry.

- **The Office of Institutional Research & Decision Support:** Bridging the vision of the Faculty Equity Fellows with the needs of data privacy and the ability to succinctly visualize university, college, departmental, and individual equity gaps, the IR office is an integral part of the development, dissemination, and updating of this tool.
- **The Office of Teaching and Learning:** In partnership with the Faculty Equity Fellows, the Office of Teaching and Learning (OTL) offers resources and workshops for faculty members or departments to create action plans for addressing existing equity gaps. These plans may include options

for reviewing course syllabi, curricula, design, and/or implementing culturally responsive pedagogy or equity-minded practices like grading for equity (Feldman, 2018; Feldman, 2023). OTL has also integrated the use and analysis of this tool into existing workshops to support the institutionalization of this work.

- **University Registrar:** In collaboration with these groups above, the Registrar has supported the creation and regular review of equity-minded practices in class rosters and data dissemination. Since 2021, faculty members can view their course rosters that include students' race and ethnicity in order to be mindful of their students' identities and lived experiences.
- **Information Technology:** IT has been critical in the implementation of these tools, offering an incredibly mindful perspective when sharing student and instructor-level data. Creating processes to gather and automate (where possible) necessary data can be daunting, but our IT colleagues at BSU have been at the forefront of ensuring our technology is built to support this equity work. Without their collaboration and willingness to be a part of this work, these tools would likely not be possible.
- **BSU Racial Equity and Justice Institute Campus Team:** Members of the BSU REJI team are cross-functional and offer support from their respective roles on how to connect with other offices, implement change, and measure impact. Representatives from each of the offices above are regular contributors to and members of the REJI, which continues to enable cross-functional collaboration to support all students.

As collaborating partners, we have worked together to increase access to data that

enables critical inquiry with a goal to create meaningful change and ensure that “data are made meaningful for the purpose of achieving racial equity” (Center for Urban Education, 2020, p. 35).

SUPPORTING THE USE OF THIS TOOL: FACULTY EQUITY FELLOWS

Faculty members played a crucial role in creating these reports and emphasized the importance of data privacy for each instructor. Over the course of the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 academic years, four Faculty Equity Fellows were appointed. These fellows, funded by the Division of Student Success, Equity, and Diversity (SSED), aided in the deployment of these tools to various groups within the campus community. In consultation with the President and Provost at BSU, the SSED Faculty Fellows piloted a summer institute for 11 of their faculty colleagues in the Mathematics Department in summer 2022. Created to support the piloting of these newly created equity-minded data tools for faculty members, the institute had four objectives:

1. Build on existing equity-minded competencies.
2. Consider departmental data and equity-minded steps to advance departmental equity-oriented work.
3. Consider course-level data and equity-minded steps to advance individual/course level equity-oriented work.
4. Offer participants the opportunity to engage in discussion, reflection and writing intended to deepen equity-minded mathematics instruction at BSU.

The Faculty Equity Fellows collaborated with colleagues to utilize the equity-minded course outcome tools. They identified inequities, integrated their understanding with relevant readings and best practices, and worked together to devise strategies to bridge equity gaps. The importance of data in highlighting these gaps and centering discussions around racial equity was emphasized by the participants (Malcom-Piqueux & Bensimon, 2015).

This pilot initiative evolved into a more in-depth summer institute focusing on professional and departmental faculty leadership in racial equity, hosted by the Office of Teaching and Learning and the Division of Student Success, Equity and Diversity. The use of equity-minded data and sense-making is a key part of these efforts. In addition, Faculty Equity Fellows attended department and college meetings to demonstrate the data tool and guide colleagues from an array of departments in reflecting on and critically examining the data. A guide was created to help faculty navigate the tool, which includes written instructions and interpretations based on Bensimon & Associates (2021) foundational work. This guide is applicable to both departmental-level and individual course-level data.

The Faculty Equity Fellows have been instrumental in promoting and guiding the use of this tool. By positioning themselves as supportive resources and digging into their own data, they effectively encouraged others to utilize the tool. They were mindful to present the tool not as an additional burden on the already busy faculty, but as a valuable aid that can significantly contribute to student success. In their discussions with individual faculty members or departments, they skillfully balanced the conversation between highlighting inequities, providing suggestions and resources for improvement.

This approach ensured the discussions were actionable and did not discourage faculty from engaging in this important work. As a result of these efforts, in one year, more than 7% (n = 50) of all faculty members (part-time and full-time) across all colleges have reached out to access the report, with additional professional development and workshops using the tool planned for spring and summer 2024.

CASE EXAMPLE: USING EQUITY-MINDED COURSE DATA TO TRANSFORM TEACHING PRACTICES

As a senior faculty member with 37 years of experience teaching at Bridgewater State University, Dr. Uma Shama has been involved in participating and co-leading a range of diversity-oriented campus initiatives. Her introduction to the framework of equity-mindedness was in 2020 when she read the foundational text *From Equity Talk to Equity Walk* (McNair et al., 2020). Based on a desire to enhance her equity-minded teaching competencies in a supportive community, she then joined BSU's REJI team. When an opportunity became available to apply to serve as an inaugural Equity-minded Retention Faculty Fellow, she applied and was selected as one of the two faculty members to serve in this position. In this role, she learned about and began to apply additional equity-minded tools including Dr. Bensimon's tool to identify course level equity performance gaps.

Part of her duties as a Faculty Fellow was to serve along with Faculty Fellow Dr. Kevin Duquette in an interdivisional effort to automate the availability of this data that is described in this chapter for use by interested faculty members. She also began to utilize the tool to understand racialized gaps in her own courses as a step to enhance her equity-minded teaching practice. What follows is a brief description of what she learned using this tool in two calculus courses.

In spring 2022, there were 36 students who were in two sections of Dr. Shama’s Calculus II course. Analyzing the disaggregated course level data made possible by the implementation of Bensimon’s equity data tool, she observed Black and Hispanic/Latine students in these classes were not being fully served as seen in the figure below.

							Enter Faculty ID
American Indian/Alaska Native							<input type="text"/>
Asian	2	2	100.0%	83.3%	16.7%		Enter Password
Black	4	2	50.0%	83.3%	-33.3%	2	<input type="text"/>
Cape Verdean	2	2	100.0%	83.3%	16.7%		Select Term
Hispanic	1	0	0.0%	83.3%	-83.3%	1	Spring 2022
International	1	1	100.0%	83.3%	16.7%		Select Course
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Island..							MATH162
Two or More Races	1	1	100.0%	83.3%	16.7%		Select Demographic
Unknown							Race
White	25	22	88.0%	83.3%	4.7%		
Grand Total	36	30	83.3%	83.3%	0.0%		
	Number of Students Enrolled	Number of Students that Passed (A, B, or C)	Student Group Success	Equity Goal Success Rate (All Students)	Percentage Point Difference	Number of Students to Achieve Equity	

She engaged in equity-minded sense-making as she looked at the data (Bensimon et al., 2020; Malcom-Piqueux & Bensimon, 2015), to try and understand what she could do in a more equitable way to support the success of Black and Latine students taking this course in the future, working toward continuous improvement. She considered the information from the literature (Artze-Vega et al., 2023; Gentlewarrior & Paredes, 2021; McNair et al., 2020) and from her 43 total years of teaching that indicates that due to systemic oppression, Students of Color often fear they may not belong in the classroom – especially in courses like mathematics (Center for Urban Education, 2020).

She was buoyed by the knowledge that there were clear strategies she could take to improve her equity-minded teaching practice and understood that “equity-mindedness is achievable” (Bensimon, 2024). Encouraged by the knowledge that it would only take

two Black students and one Hispanic/Latine student to close the equity performance gap in her teaching, she did the following:

- On the first day of class, students were encouraged to self-identify how they wanted to be addressed in the class, providing transparency and respect for students’ identities.
- She also asked students to partner with another student simply to get to know each other. Students took turns introducing one another in the class. This was done to begin to create community in the class and lessen isolation so often felt by students.
- The students and she discussed the syllabus and course expectations while contributing to the class ethos that they would succeed and that she was their partner in their success. An array of strategies were discussed that would be used to support their success.

- In weekly assignments, students were provided opportunities to ask questions in class, so the instructor was available to explain how to solve a problem from the assignments.
- Students were encouraged to help each other on assignments and practice exams so everyone was ready to take in-class exams. If necessary, students were allowed to re-submit their assignments to improve their grades.
- Extensions on assignments were granted if a student did not complete them.
- If students missed a class, she proactively connected with them through email to know if there was any help that could be provided. Students were asked to let the instructor know in advance if they had to miss a class so they could be provided with extra help.
- She engaged with equity-minded staff at BSU called Navigators who provide additional support and care to students including helping them utilize our ample student success resources.

As seen in the figure below, in spring 2023 the course-level performance gaps were erased for Students of Color as she changed her teaching practices. Mindful that the work for equity-mindedness must be ongoing, she is now engaging in equity-minded inquiry as relates to the gap being experienced by White students.

							Enter Faculty ID
American Indian/Alaska Native							
Asian	4	4	100.0%	85.7%	14.3%		Enter Password
Black	3	3	100.0%	85.7%	14.3%		
Cape Verdean							Select Term
Hispanic	3	3	100.0%	85.7%	14.3%		Spring 2023
International	2	2	100.0%	85.7%	14.3%		Select Course
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Island..							MATH162
Two or More Races	3	3	100.0%	85.7%	14.3%		Select Demographic
Unknown							Race
White	13	9	69.2%	85.7%	-16.5%	3	
Grand Total	28	24	85.7%	85.7%	0.0%		
	Number of Students Enrolled	Number of Students that Passed (A, B, or C)	Student Group Success	Equity Goal Success Rate (All Students)	Percentage Point Difference	Number of Students to Achieve Equity	

NEXT STEPS: ADVANCING AND INSTITUTIONALIZING EQUITY-MINDED PRACTICES

As the roll out and support of this tool at BSU is in the early stages of development, there is still considerable work ahead. Malcom-Piqueux & Bensimon (2015) underscore the challenge that “data reports often remain underutilized due to the absence of a structured process for practitioners to interpret the data” (p. 7). Recognizing this, the Office of Teaching and Learning (OTL) has embedded the evaluation of course-specific data into the fabric of an annual equity-minded practices institute — the Applying Personal and Professional/ Departmental Leadership in Equity (APPLE) Summer Institute. The APPLE Institute’s goals, as articulated by OTL, are to cultivate a collective dedication to these efforts and to guarantee that faculty members pursue this work both independently and alongside their departments, with a focus on long-term viability. This personal and professional development opportunity supports faculty members and department chairs in deepening their understanding of how their own experiences, identities, and biases impact the success of their own pedagogy and therefore their students. Intense support from OTL, Faculty Equity Fellows, and IR during this institute includes opportunities for faculty members to dig into their individual data using this tool and to work collaboratively to identify equity gaps and create equity-minded plans of action to support student success. As faculty members engage with their ‘actionable N’ — the sphere where they can effect change (Dowd et al., 2018) — and collaborate with colleagues, BSU anticipates not just a heightened awareness and application of the tool but also a significant contraction of equity institutional performance gaps.

Embedding these tools in ongoing personal and professional development, as well as key

institutional practices, continues to support equity-minded practices in the classroom. Efforts are currently underway to redesign data tools available for the Academic Program Review process, which will include analyses of course success rates and equity gaps in the aggregate. Continued use of these reports will enable departmental reviewers to identify key courses where equity gaps exist and benchmark their course success with the overall department, college, and university rates. Equity-minded questions and frameworks will be embedded into Program Review guidance, not only at the course level, but also in disaggregating rates of program retention and graduation. Lessons learned from the implementation of the individual instructor tool have helped IR, the Office of Teaching and Learning, department chairs, and faculty members more deeply understand and utilize the power of these data to clearly identify equity gaps and move from values toward action as we work together to create more equitable academic processes and programs.

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OPERATIONALIZING THE QUEST FOR EQUITY AT CAPE COD COMMUNITY COLLEGE

By Cathleen McCarron, John Cox, Kathleen Vranos, William Berry, Sara-Ann P. Semedo, Shuqi Wu

Keywords: *Operating Plan, Equity-Minded Institution, Equity Matrix*

INTRODUCTION

Cape Cod Community College (CCCC), a predominantly White institution in Massachusetts serving approximately 2,600 students of which 34% are Students of Color, published a Student Equity Matrix in 2021 in the inaugural *Racial Equity and Justice Practitioner Handbook* (Gentlewarrior & Paredes, 2021). The matrix, informed by the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education (MASS DHE) Equity Agenda (2019) and the American Association of Community Colleges' (AACC) Voluntary Frameworks of Accountability (VFA) (2012), disaggregated student outcomes in 11 key performance indicators (KPIs) and identified institutional performance gaps in how the campus was serving African American and Latinx students. When the CCCC campus community reviewed the data in the context of building the 2020-2025 strategic plan, the college committed to closing these equity gaps by rooting two of the four of the campus' strategic plan objectives in equity-mindedness. To hold themselves accountable for making progress toward closing the specific gaps exposed in the student equity matrix and achieving these broader strategic plan objectives, college leadership committed to developing an annual

operating plan. The plan's initiatives are informed by current scholarship and align with the "Five Principles for Enacting Equity by Design" (Witham et al., 2015).

This article reflects CCCC's progression from publishing our institutional Student Equity Matrix to developing an annual operating plan with a goal to make explicit the equity-minded inquiry, planning, actions, and assessment underway on our campus. We conclude the article by revisiting the campus' student equity matrix to reflect how gains and losses that appear in the 2020-2022 matrix have been driven largely by the initiatives outlined in the operating plan. The operating plan has become a leadership tool that CCCC uses to ensure equity-minded focus and accountability as the college moves toward becoming an equity-centered institution.

MOVING FROM EQUITY-MINDED DATA TO EQUITY-MINDED PLANNING

As a small rural college which had not previously disaggregated data by race, ethnicity, and Pell eligibility, CCCC aligned student outcomes to the focus areas identified by the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education's (MASS DHE) Equity Agenda (2019) and to the metrics developed by the American Association of Community College's (AACC) Voluntary Frameworks of Accountability (VFA, 2012). These new statewide and national metrics reflect more accurately the multiple missions and diverse population served by the community college sector, which are typically not reflected in more traditional higher education accountability measures (VFA, 2024).

CCCC's student equity matrix, which compares 11 key performance indicators (KPIs) representing milestones to students' completion, disclosed alarming gaps in outcomes among African American and Latinx students as compared to students overall. The

college understood that this data was a wake-up call to make sweeping changes. Therefore, the matrix set in motion a cross-college effort to change our institution so that our service provision in and outside of the classroom truly supported the success of African American and Latinx students. The effort began with publishing the matrix in the CCCC Strategic Plan 2020-2025 (Cape Cod Community College, 2020) and creating objectives to close these gaps.

The strategic plan's first two objectives, "1. Enhance support for a diverse community of students to successfully navigate from admission to completion"; and "2. Increase community access and remove barriers to success in courses and academic pathways", related directly to CCCC's response to the data in the student equity matrix and underscored the campus' commitment to becoming an equity-minded institution. While the COVID-19 pandemic took focus away from the launch of the CCCC 2020-2025 Strategic Plan, as the campus reflected on the plan at the start of AY 2021-2022 after the immediate pandemic crisis response, the centralized nature of the equity objectives was found to be relevant and timeless.

PROGRESSING FROM EQUITY-MINDED PLANNING TO EQUITY-MINDED ACTION

The creation of the Operating Plan for 2021-2022 was initially begun as a management tool during a time of leadership transition in Academic and Student Affairs. The effort was intended to gather all initiatives underway in the institution, whether or not they were aligned with the strategic plan and assess the institution's status. As the leadership team aligned initiatives beneath strategic plan objectives and strategies, themes emerged related to nuanced opportunities for improvement. After considerable reflection, the

leadership team set measurable, annual goals for each initiative within the plan to address focused opportunities and gaps for the coming year. At the conclusion of the academic year, the leadership team "closed out" the AY 2021-2022 operating plan by reporting progress against the measurable goals set for each initiative. A summary of the year's outcomes was delivered to the campus community. After this report, the process of reflecting and establishing new annual goals began again.

It follows that the Operating Plan has evolved as a valuable tracking, reflection, and refinement tool to enable the leadership team to hold itself accountable for steady, systematic improvement in attaining the centralized equity objectives outlined in the CCCC 2020-2025 Strategic Plan. In short, the college has "operationalized" equity by outlining the initiatives, leaders responsible, and annual progress made toward achieving desired equity-related outcomes. This tool not only holds the college accountable for its progress, the data reported on also inspires further inquiry to both sharpen and expand ways to advance equity.

To ground the design and development of the plan in current scholarship on equity, the leadership team, several of whom were involved in the Racial Equity and Justice Institute (REJI) and were introduced to the work of the Center for Urban Education (CUE), decided to align this work to the "Five Principles for Enacting Equity by Design" (Witham et al., 2015). Following these principles led college leaders to ask critical questions not only about the data that had surfaced but also about the kind of institution CCCC wanted to become. Subsequently, the administration designed a dynamic plan that would be assessed and revised annually to ensure forward progress is being made.

To operationalize equity, college leadership followed the four steps which will be described below:

STEP 1: REVIEW STUDENT EQUITY MATRIX AND STRATEGIC PLAN

After the strategic plan was approved in 2021, administrators, faculty, and staff examined the data in the student equity matrix. (See Table 1)

Table 1: Student Equity Matrix (2017-2019)

Student Equity Matrix 2017-2019												
Success Indicator	All			Latinx			African-American			Pell-Recipient		
Access (change from 2017-2019)	-10%			+14%			+ 11%			-10%		
	2700	2544	2440	205	228	234	171	194	190	1552	1456	1395
Course success rate	77%			+1%			-3%			+7%		
Complete college-level math within first 24 credits	21.6%			-1.0%			-12.1%			-4.4%		
% enrolled in college level math	34%			+1.7%			-15%			-5.4%		
College-level math success rate	63.5%			-8.5%			-13.5%			-7%		
Complete college-level English within first 24 credits	52.3%			-2.3%			-2.3%			+2.9%		
% enrolled in College-level English	72.6%			-3%			-3.6%			+2.5		
College-level English success rate	72.1%			-0.3%			+0.3%			+1.4%		
Fall-to-Fall Retention (3-year average)	52%			+ 0.3%			+ 5.0%			+ 3.4%		
4-year Completion Rate	19%			-7%			-13%			+2%		
6-year Transfer Rate	27%			+0%			-5%			+0%		
6-year Success Rate	42%			+2%			-8%			-1%		

■ = No Equity Gap: Sustain and Improve

■ = Equity Gap: Action Needed

Equity Matrix Chart originally published in Cape Cod Community College's Strategic Plan 2021-2025

In making equity-minded sense of the data and our institutional performance gaps, the Voluntary Frameworks of Accountability (VFA) and the Massachusetts Department of Education (DHE) Equity Agenda informed our efforts. For example, The VFA, created by community college leaders in concert with the American Association of Community Colleges, includes a series of accountability metrics to examine more authentic success measures of the highly diverse full- and part-time community college population than traditional metrics designed for full-time, 18-to-24-year-old students at baccalaureate institutions. Similarly, the DHE Equity Agenda has developed separate metrics for community college students, recognizing the uniqueness of the population and the multiple missions that this segment of higher education serves. Including additional metrics brought to light different gaps.

As shown in the table on the previous page, institutional performance gaps were evident in our work with African American and Latinx students. The largest gaps related to access and successful completion of college-level math and four-year completion rates. These data indicated that broad-based institutional change was needed to ensure that the campus was successful in offering students what they needed to move from entry into college-level courses to completion. In view of this information, the college leadership reviewed the two equity-oriented objectives in the institutional strategic plan and agreed to incorporate disaggregated data and objectives focused on equitable outcomes in the operating plan.

STEP 2: ADOPT THE “FIVE PRINCIPLES FOR ENACTING EQUITY BY DESIGN” IN THE OPERATING PLAN

Extensive equity-minded scholarship was considered and informed our efforts. The scholarship that supported the decision to use the Operating Plan as a tool to hold the college accountable for becoming an equity-minded institution stemmed from three areas of literature: transformational higher education leadership, organizational change, and equity-minded research and practice. To create a strategy to effect transformational change, college leadership drew from three seminal works: Toma’s (2010) *Building Organizational Capacity: Strategic Management in Higher Education*; Burke’s (2014) *Organization Change: Theory and Practice*, and Fullen and Scott’s (2009) *Turnaround Leadership for Higher Education*. To design a strategy to ensure that this institutional transformation would bring about equitable outcomes for an increasingly diverse student body, the team consulted Kezar and Posselt’s (2020) *Higher Education Administration for Social Justice Equity: Critical Perspectives for Leadership*; McNair and associates’ (2020) *From Equity Walk to Equity Talk*, and Witham and associates’ foundational article (2015) “*Five Principles for Enacting Equity by Design*.”

Viewing the college with fresh eyes from a systems thinking perspective informed by many of the top higher education scholars of the past two decades, the leadership put theory into practice at their summer retreat, crafting a plan that reflected the situational context of the institution and the recognition of its enormous potential. Pragmatically, Witham and associates’ (2015) five principles guided our theoretical basis as we did our work.

These principles overlap, intersect, and are non-linear, indicating the recursive and growth-minded approach colleges must adopt to uphold them. These tenets are offered below:

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

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

Principle 3: Equitable practice and policies are designed to accommodate differences in the contexts of students’ learning — not to treat all students the same.

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

Principle 5: Equity must be enacted as a pervasive institution- and system-wide principle (Witham et al., 2015).”

The leadership team used these principles as a lens through which to build the Operating Plan. The chart below illustrates how analyzing data points from the Student Equity Matrix through the lens of these principles began the inquiry process that led to the establishment of outcomes that fulfill the objectives of the Strategic Plan. (See Table 2):

Table 2: How “Equity by Design” Principles Drive Inquiry

Data Informing Inquiry	“Equity By Design” Principle(s) Followed	Equity-minded Inquiry	Institutional Practices Considered from Equity Framework	Desired Outcome
The college’s largest equity gap is in the percentage of Black/ African American students enrolling in college-level math	1, 2, 3, 4	What institutional factors are causing African American students to enroll in college-level math at lower rates than their peers?	Investigate new student onboarding, math placement processes, math messaging, math academic support, math pedagogy, cultural competency to isolate barriers to access to college-level math for African American students. Make changes to each based on findings.	African American students enroll in college-level math at the same rates as their peers.

Data Informing Inquiry	"Equity By Design" Principle(s) Followed	Equity-minded Inquiry	Institutional Practices Considered from Equity Framework	Desired Outcome
Students of Color were over-represented in conduct cases	1, 2, 3, 4	What institutional factors are causing Students of Color to be overrepresented in conduct cases?	The college created the new position of Assistant Dean of Students/Director of Community Standards, which includes overseeing conduct. The goal is to create a safe and supportive campus environment that promotes student success by providing resources, by educating faculty about the conduct process, and by creating inclusive communities, intercultural engagement, and ally development for historically underserved students.	Fewer conduct cases occur; no difference among the races/ ethnicities of students who are involved in conduct cases.

Following the principles for "Enacting Equity by Design" ensures that equity remains centered throughout the campus' inquiry process. The description of data informing our inquiry is phrased clearly and centers equity. The investigation of current practices and policies foregrounds the experiences and outcomes of African American students. Framing questions such as "What institutional factors are causing African American students to enroll in college-level math at lower rates than their peers?" places the responsibility for the equity gap and its solution firmly on the institution instead of on the student. Next, college leadership needed to move from inquiry to investigation to determine which initiatives to launch to achieve the desired outcome of equitable access to

college-level math. Clear data measuring gaps in access to college-level math led to a multi-year, multi-pronged approach (still ongoing) that is beginning to achieve equitable outcomes; these improving outcomes are shown in **Table 4**.

Following the five "Equity by Design" principles helped college leaders understand why and how to advance equity from a theoretical perspective. Putting these principles into practice required developing a tool that could reflect what specific initiatives would be undertaken to reach the desired outcomes, who would lead each initiative, and how progress would be tracked to hold the college accountable for advancing equity. Toward

that end, college leadership developed an annual operating plan that “operationalizes” the strategic plan by making concrete the actions and assessment necessary to achieve equitable outcomes.

STEP 3: BUILD THE OPERATING PLAN TO INCLUDE MEASURABLE EQUITY-ORIENTED OBJECTIVES

The operating plan transformed key aspects of the strategic plan into an action plan that is assessed annually. Organized to follow the strategic plan’s objectives and strategies, this approach makes clear who is responsible for advancing each initiative, and delineates the annual progress expected toward achieving the desired five-year outcome.

STEP 4: REVIEW OPERATING PLAN CONTINUOUSLY: MEASURE PROGRESS, REFLECT ON, AND REFINES THE PLAN ANNUALLY TO HOLD THE INSTITUTION ACCOUNTABLE FOR IMPROVING EQUITABLE OUTCOMES AND MOVING THE COLLEGE TOWARD BECOMING AN “EQUITY-MINDED” INSTITUTION

Building, assessing, reflecting on, and revising the annual operating plan is beginning to build a culture that values and actualizes equity. Today, under the guidance of the president and vice president for academic and student affairs, deans, directors, and the institutional research team the campus leaders populate the matrix with initiatives with measurable goals that can be assessed at granular levels.

Table 3: Example from the 2021-2025 Annual Operating Plan

Strategic Plan Objective 1: Enhance support for a diverse community of students to successfully navigate from admission to completion.

Obj. #	Strategy	Initiative	Leaders Responsible	Metric	2020 Benchmark	Year 1 progress (2021-2022)	Year 2 progress (2022-2023)	Year 3 Progress (2023-2024)	Year 4 Progress (2024-2025)	Desired 2025 Outcome
1.2	Foster growth mindset and sense of belonging	Closing equity gaps at the course level. Implement state grant with focus on closing equity gaps in high enrolled courses and courses with large equity gaps	Dean, Faculty, IR Director	# of courses with improvements in equity gaps	20 courses with either equity gaps or high enrollment were identified for improvement	Faculty teaching 17 courses with enrollments of at least 50 students of color over a 3-year period underwent training. Faculty revised curricula, established DEI statements, revised grading policies.	13 out of 17 courses saw improvements in Students' of Color success rate and completion gaps	TBD	TBD	17 out of 17

The example in **Table 3** showing one action plan among many in the Operating Plan reflects how the expansion of the matrix allows college stakeholders to monitor and assess progress. This initiative was designed to make improvements to 20 courses. Extensive professional development in cultural competency, diversification of curricula, equity in grading, and the establishment of DEI policies in course syllabi in Year 1 and implementation in Year 2 have already resulted in improvements to 17 courses. In year two of the intervention, three faculty withdrew from the intervention, slightly reducing the potential impact, but for the 85% of faculty who participated through completion, the results were positive.

The clear presentation of the operating plan matrix allows participants to look at the results annually, examine what the data are indicating, and make further changes. For example, the fact that 17 courses showed improvement leads us to ask how to scale up this work across the college. To learn how to successfully scale up this work requires expanding the data set to include qualitative data. Potential questions under consideration are asking students open-ended questions about the impact of the inclusion of a DEI statement on course syllabi and what their experience is in courses that use more equitable grading practices. Thus, the operating plan not only becomes a tool to hold the college accountable it also becomes a launch pad for further inquiry and action.

In addition, ongoing work outlined in the operating plan made clear that while persistence among Latinx students steadily increased and persistence among students who identify as two or more races stayed relatively the same, persistence among African American students decreased in 2022-2023. This decrease was the impetus for building a

large-scale retention management plan. This retention plan will then help to inform the 2024-2025 Operating Plan. Like the Operating Plan, the Retention Management Plan followed the principles for “Enacting Equity by Design” (Witham et al., 2015) to articulate broad-based changes in existing policies and practices and the launching of new initiatives using clear language, disaggregated data points, and equity-minded measurable goals. The campus is now engaged in creating an equity-minded strategic enrollment management plan. In short, the Operating Plan has become a college-wide tool to advance equity-minded systemic change.

LESSONS LEARNED AND NEXT STEPS

Reviewing the operating plan for the purpose of writing this article has itself been an act of assessment. Working with colleagues to reflect on the initiatives implemented, data gathered, and progress made has led to the discovery that the plan needs to be expanded both in terms of the types of data gathered and the areas of focus. One example of how the operating plan functions as a dynamic document that will continue to evolve to advance equity occurred in early 2024. The strategic plan included a goal to increase the percentage of students attending New Student Orientation (NSO) from 30% to more than 80%. Based on this, the operating plan included this goal, placing the Dean of Student Retention and Completion and her team in charge of overhauling NSO into a mandatory experience rooted in boosting students’ sense of belonging. Remarkably, in two short years, through strong leadership, innovative programming, and excellent outreach, the college has already reached its 2025 goal. However, when examining the data, the team recognized it had not disaggregated participants by race and ethnicity, nor set goals for attendance by these populations.

An interdivisional team gathered and disaggregated the data and found that 14.5% of participants identified as African American; 11.3% Latinx, and 6.8% two or more races. These results indicate that the percentage of Students of Color attending NSO closely reflects the percentage of Students of Color enrolled at the institution. The team will now pursue two additional data points: 1) who did not attend NSO (disaggregated by race and ethnicity); and 2) qualitative data gained from surveys regarding the experiences of students attending the new student orientation. Going forward, establishing outcomes for NSO disaggregated by race and ethnicity and including qualitative data will be part of the Operating Plan.

Returning to the beginning of this journey with the publication of the 2017-2019 student equity matrix in the 2020-2025 strategic plan, one can see in **Table 4** below that the operating plan become both a catalyst for and a symbol of how “humanistic data use motivated by an ethic of care” (Dowd et al., 2018) inspires change. Two years after the initial student equity matrix was published, it was updated with new data. Slightly revised to capture data that was more easily replicable, the new matrix includes 13 KPIs that once again provide the college with a rich source of data for measuring and tracking student progress and outcomes

TABLE 4: CAPE COD COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENT EQUITY MATRIX (2021-2023)

Student Equity Matrix (2021-2023)															
	All			Latinx			Black/ African-American			Two or More Races			Pell-Recipient		
1. Enrollment (% Change from Fall 2021 to Fall 2023)	6%			32%			45%			33%			11%		
Fall Term (End of Term)	2021	2022	2023	2021	2022	2023	2021	2022	2023	2021	2022	2023	2021	2022	2023
Headcount	2541	2398	2685	270	273	357	188	223	273	115	134	153	785	737	869
All Degree-Seeking Students (Fall Term)															
2. Course Success Rate	72%			-3%			+2%			-5%			0%		
3. Developmental Math Course Success Rate	54%			-1%			+6%			-2%			+4%		
4. College-level Math Course Success Rate	55%			-7%			+5%			+2%			-3%		
5. College-level English Course Success Rate	64%			-2%			+2%			-8%			0%		
First-Time Degree-Seeking Students															
6. % Enrolled in College-Level Math within First Year	37%			+3%			-20%			-4%			-2%		
7. Complete College-Level Math within First Year	21%			+3%			-10%			-11%			-2%		
8. % Enrolled in College-Level English within First Year	82%			+1%			-2%			+3%			+6%		
9. Complete College-Level English within First Year	57%			+1%			-2%			+2%			+3%		
10. Fall-to-Fall Retention Rate	48%			+2%			+2%			-8%			+2%		
11. 4-year Completion Rate	20%			-3%			-4%			-3%			+1%		
12. 4-year Success Rate	40%			+3%			0%			-6%			-2%		
13. 6-year Success Rate	44%			-7%			-1%			-14%			-2%		

*The Equity Matrix is updated each February.
Updated: 2/28/2024

■ No Equity Gap: Sustain and Improve
■ Equity Gap: Action Needed

The updated student equity matrix reflects changes in some of the categories to represent the research our community has engaged in to more accurately reflect how to measure different outcomes related to student success. The 2021-2023 matrix showed improvements in several areas among first-time degree seeking Latinx students; it also demonstrated promising results among Black/African-American students' college math success rate and six-year success rate. However, the matrix also indicated that there are significant equity gaps in Latinx students' college-level math success rate and Black/African Americans' enrollment in college-level math within the first year. Data related to a new student category titled "Two or More Races" showed that this relatively small population is struggling in several areas. Interventions implemented since the publication of the first matrix included a transformation of the college math placement process, a re-tooling of the math curriculum, and implementation of significant wraparound services for math success. Progress is beginning to be made, but through the operating plan process, we expect to refine interventions and assessment practices as we continue to strive to close these gaps.

CONCLUSION

What is emerging at Cape Cod Community College is an institution which thoughtfully collects, analyzes, and reflects on data in its Operating Plan to implement plans and make changes that are improving equitable student outcomes. With the 2017-2019 Student Equity Matrix as the genesis for change, the college has built its Operating Plan not only to respond to the gaps exposed in the matrix but also to expand its efforts to become a more equitable institution.

Using the Operating Plan as a leadership tool is generating positive results. Reflecting on the plan, its progress, and desired outcomes has

brought college leadership to two discoveries: 1) the plan needs to expand its focus area to include striving for equitable outcomes for not only Students of Color, but also Faculty and Staff of Color as well; and 2) the plan must also gather qualitative data to capture the real experiences of Students, Faculty, Staff, and Administrators of Color who are navigating a predominantly white institution. Toward that end, CCCC will align our Operating Plan with the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education (DHE) Strategic Plan for Racial Equity (2023) that shares aspirational but attainable goals for racial equity in higher education. One step we will take is to engage more deeply in equity-minded hiring and employee retention practices. Additionally, the college will begin to generate and collect qualitative data from open-ended survey questions, interviews, focus groups, and other safe spaces that yield authentic responses.

College leadership is committed to taking the next steps to become an equity-minded institution. We will once again center equity in our 2026-2030 Strategic Plan and continue to revise and expand its flexible, responsive, dynamic Operating Plan that serves as the leadership tool designed to increase equitable outcomes for all members of the college community.

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INTEGRATING EQUITY-MINDEDNESS IN ACADEMIC PROGRAM REVIEW AT NORTH SHORE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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Keywords: Academic Program Review, Diversity, Equity-Minded, Inclusive Pedagogy

INTRODUCTION

Effective program reviews are an essential tool for ensuring continuous improvement in higher education (Bers, 2011). A growing movement emphasizes the need for program review teams to reflect on programmatic effectiveness through a framework of equity mindedness (McNair et al., 2020) catalyzed in part by disaggregating student data to explore equity gaps that may exist in their programs (Bragg, 2017; Fox et al., 2018; Rockey et al., 2021). North Shore Community College (NSCC) embarked on a project driven by the campus' involvement in the Racial Equity Justice Institute (REJI) to enhance our program reviews by embedding equity-minded practices into this process (McNair et al., 2020). This chapter provides a description of our work to implement this equity-minded systemic change strategy on behalf of the students we serve.

INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

North Shore Community College (NSCC) is a public, nonprofit, two-year institution of higher education. Since its founding in 1965, NSCC has grown from a single leased building to an urban campus in downtown Lynn and a suburban campus in Danvers, Massachusetts,

and from five to 80 academic programs of study. Our students include first-generation college students, high school graduates seeking an affordable pathway to college, parents seeking a better life for themselves and their families, veterans and active-duty military, English language learners, and those interested in exploring new careers. Our campuses, curriculum, and resources are designed to support and provide students pathways to academic and professional achievement without incurring unnecessary student debt, as well as fostering the confidence to embrace excellence, equity, inclusion, and fulfillment in their career choices. Nearly 50,000 students have graduated from NSCC.

EMBEDDING EQUITY-MINDEDNESS INTO PROGRAM REVIEW

With the college's recent Strategic Plan, "A Vision for Transforming the Future with Our Community: 2022-2027" (North Shore Community College, 2022a) NSCC connects the ongoing, vital mission of the institution with today's economic, technological, cultural, and social challenges. This strategic plan is intended to help advance the campus' commitment to enhance our student outcomes in order to support both the success of our students overall and decrease equity institutional performance gaps. Doing so will also demonstrate the campus' commitment to provide the region with diverse, well-educated professionals that employers need to meet our region's workforce requirements.

Given the college's commitment in our strategic plan to excellence and our renewed pledge to engage in equity-minded practice, NSCC's Racial Equity Justice Institute (REJI) team sought to integrate values, practices, and principles of equity-mindedness into the college's academic program review cycle. The NSCC REJI team decided to focus on the program review process as infusing program

review with an equity-minded framework allows for college-wide attention to and analysis of equity in the academic process. Completed every five years, program review serves as a process that evaluates the educational effectiveness and student learning outcomes to help identify the future needs, priorities, and direction of programs. By prioritizing equity-mindedness in the process, all academic departments will now routinely identify equity gaps in their departments and create an action plan to address these institutional performance gaps.

Equity-minded program review normalizes and institutionalizes equity analysis, so such work is not left only to those committed to diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice and is not isolated from the rest of the functions of the college (Rockey et al., 2021).

The process of developing equity-informed recommendations for the program review guide lasted from spring 2021 through spring 2022. The cross-college REJI team met 18 times from April 2021 to February 2022 to develop recommendations. The group's charge was to review NSCC's current template for program review and provide input on how to integrate equity-minded data into the assessment and evaluation of programs. What follows is a detailed description of the process NSCC engaged in to embed equity-mindedness in our program review; this detailed description is offered so that readers can consider if this is a practice they could adapt to their institution.

GROUP FORMATION — SPRING 2021

The committee co-chairs began by working to recruit team members to collaborate in leading this effort. Co-chairs wanted to ensure representation from across different roles and areas of the college. Effort was made to recruit a mix of existing REJI members as well as college faculty and staff who did

not have experience on the campus REJI team. To ensure all academic divisions in the college were represented in the group, emails that explained the project were sent out to faculty in departments who had recently served on a program review team. Faculty were compensated for their service on the subgroup over the summer months. The final Equity-minded Program Review Project Team membership consisted of faculty, staff, and administrators from across the college.

BUILDING CAPACITY — SUMMER 2021

Cognizant that most individuals in higher education are “racially illiterate” (Bensimon & Gray, 2020) and have not been trained in the theory and practice of equity-mindedness, the team reviewed materials and resources related to equity to build the team's background knowledge in areas that would allow them to develop informed recommendations for the equity-minded program review project. This review included conducting research into racial equity scholarship, reviewing models of racial equity work at peer institutions, and providing the group with more detail about the way that program review operated at NSCC. The team engaged in discussions of this research during bi-weekly group meetings throughout the summer months.

The team members first grappled with the question of why we were engaged in racial equity work and why there was a need for this work at NSCC. During this stage, the members watched a video on implicit bias and participated in a facilitated group discussion so that they could reflect on their positionalities and the biases they possess; emphasis was placed on highlighting the need for reflective practice as part of equity-minded work in program review and beyond. Our capacity building work in this effort was grounded in theories of implicit bias (Gopal, PD, 2021;

del-Mar Vazquez & Harris, 2020); Staats, 2016a). We spent time learning about the importance of and process for centering stakeholder self-reflection of our own biases and assumptions as an essential aspect of engaging in institutional change (Rockey et al., 2021).

In addition, our professional development emphasized learning more about equity-minded sense-making and critical self-reflection needed when “examining disaggregated student outcome data” (McNair et al., 2020, p. 77). The team also examined what the current academic program review process at NSCC. This included a review of the program review cycle, an examination of sample program review reports and presentations, and a description of the types of data available as part of the institution’s program review process.

In order to be successful in these efforts, we recognized that we needed to expand faculty members’ access to institutional data and provide them professional development in understanding and applying data (Fox et al., 2018). We understood that we needed to engage cross-unit campus teams with diverse perspectives and campus roles in this effort (Bragg, 2017; Fox et al., 2018; Rockey, et al., 2021).

ENGAGING IN EQUITY-MINDED INQUIRY — FALL 2021/WINTER 2022

Next, the team turned to questions concerning the types of data we should recommend that teams collect as part of their program review process. Questions posed by the group at this stage of the project included: what kinds of data do racial equity experts suggest we collect? Do we have models for how peer institutions have engaged in this type of racial equity work?

The team reviewed the data typically provided to NSCC program review teams, including student demographics, enrollment, and completion trends. The team took a preliminary look at how the data could be disaggregated. As part of the inquiry into how to make the review process more equity-minded, the team reviewed content in *From Equity Talk to Equity Walk: Expanding Practitioner Knowledge for Racial Justice in Higher Education* (McNair et al., 2020), which emphasized the importance of determining if racialized academic outcomes existed in course-level and departmental data. The team then spent time reviewing and reflecting on the Northern Essex Community College’s work highlighted in a chapter in the first *REJI Practitioner Handbook* (Gentlewarrior & Paredes, 2021) exploring equity gaps at the course section level as a model for how a peer institution was grappling with examining student performance data to spur equitable and inclusive classroom practices (Saretsky et al., 2021). This collective review led the team to commit to identifying strategies intended to identify and address equity gaps in NSCC’s program review process.

During the fall 2021 semester, members of the equity-minded program review project team met every two weeks to review sections of the existing program review template to provide equity-minded feedback on how to improve the academic program review process. To support this work members were assigned one to two sections of the program review template to individually review outside of meetings and provide feedback to the senior specialist for assessment of student learning outcomes. The senior specialist then collaborated with the assistant director of the office of planning, research & resources to discuss how the data collection process in program review might be enhanced to better align with the group’s recommendations. At the full team meetings members engaged in discussions about ways

to embed equity-minded language into the program review template and ways to align data collection strategies to support those adjustments. This process was repeated five times, until the entire program review template was reviewed. After reviewing all sections of the template and sharing preliminary ideas, the group met two more times to finalize their recommended language adjustments to the revised equity-minded program review template.

ENGAGING KEY STAKEHOLDERS — SPRING 2022

The equity-minded program review project team discussed the strategies they should utilize to gain approval for their recommended changes to the program review process. NSCC's president's cabinet and the Management Association Committee on Employee Relations (MACER) were identified as two campus groups whom the team knew would be important to share their recommendations with and gain their approval in order for campus-wide use of the new program review process to begin. Topics covered in the presentations to these groups included the historical context of this work both locally and regionally, proposed changes to the NSCC academic program review process and template, updates to the program review data collection process, and recommendations for how to sustain the work of equity in program review by expanding faculty professional development in equity and inclusion practices. The proposed changes were supported and approved in May 2021. The 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 cohorts of program review teams utilized this updated program review template to conduct their reviews.

CREATING AND PILOTING RESOURCES IN SUPPORT OF EQUITY-MINDED PROGRAM REVIEW — SUMMER 2022 TO WINTER 2023

The equity-minded program review project team recognized the need to sustain the future of equity-mindedness in program review efforts by providing campus members with professional development and resources to support them in achieving equitable and inclusive adjustments to their programs. Materials intended to support campus members engaged in the review process have been developed.

Key to these efforts was the creation and piloting of the Program Review Equity and Inclusion Guide. This resource contains training materials on equity-minded concepts, a glossary of key terms, and reflection questions and activities for teams to complete. Examples of tools and resources in the guide include links to internal resources such as the NSCC Library's Anti-Racism Resource page (North Shore Community College, 2022b); information on other equity-minded organizations that teams could connect with, such as the NSCC chapter of the National Coalition Building Institute (NCBI) (North Shore Community College, 2022c); and links to external resources on topics like how to create a more equity-minded syllabus using the Center for Urban Education's Syllabus Review Guide (USC Center for Urban Education, retrieved 2024).

Another component of sustaining the equity-minded program review work was providing faculty engaged in program review work with additional training on using institutional data to disaggregate college, program, and course data by race and ethnicity. The assistant director of the office of planning, research & resources and the senior specialist for assessment of student learning outcomes

partnered to design training on data disaggregation, which was piloted with multiple audiences. In this way, the program review work benefitted both faculty engaged in program review and members of the larger college community.

In addition, the team also provided a yearly equity-minded teach-in or panel to current program review team members. Select topics in these trainings have included an introduction to the importance of equity-minded work, an overview to NSCC resources and partners who could support teams in engaging in equity-minded work, and further context about how the equity goals of program review aligns with institution-wide equity goals in the college's strategic plan.

In fall 2023, a new position of faculty equity consultant was added to support program review team members. This new role was designed to provide support for teams brainstorming on teaching and learning strategies to address equity gaps in their data. Areas for collaboration with existing programs in the college were also identified. Assessment Fellows were available to provide feedback and support on areas such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL), formative assessment strategies, and Transparency in Learning and Teaching (TILT).

KEY EQUITY-MINDED CHANGES IN NSCC'S PROGRAM REVIEW PROCESS

While the entire equity-minded program review template can be found in the chapter's appendix, **Table 1** summarizes some of the equity-minded innovations in our new program review process (Northshore Community College, 2022b).

Table 1: Equity-minded Changes to NSCC's Program Review Process

- **Equity-minded Data** — The updated program review process includes explicit instructions to disaggregate student enrollment and performance data by race and ethnicity and to build this capacity into the NSCC Tableau Dashboards.
- **Accessible and Equitable Programmatic Offerings** — The program review process now includes additions that ask programs to examine the use of accessible course materials, such as Open Educational Resources (OER). Departments are asked to consider the accessibility of their experiential education offerings and also to examine how equitable program facilities are across NSCC's campuses.
- **Inclusive Course Design** — Campus members engaged in program reviews are now asked to report on the inclusiveness of course learning materials, texts, and images and the use of flexible instructional approaches, such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Engagement in options-based and formative assessment practices is also assessed.
- **Equity-minded Faculty Onboarding and Professional Development** — Programs are asked to reflect on faculty participation in equity-minded professional development (e.g., UDL, Transparency in Learning and Teaching (TILT), asset-based and culturally relevant pedagogy, etc.) and to describe training opportunities and mentoring for new faculty in these areas.
- **Commitment to Diverse Faculty and Community Partners** — The updated process includes asking departments to share the proportion of program courses taught by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) faculty, as well as the diversity of the program's advisory board.

LESSONS LEARNED

Since 2022, 13 NSCC programs and departments have used the equity-minded program review template during their program review year. Examples of equity-minded actions stemming from this work include recommending the expansion of co-requisite course models, collecting faculty survey data on the use of equity-minded teaching practices, proposing that faculty members apply for Center for Teaching, Learning, and Innovation (CTLI) led course redevelopment grants that support equity-minded online instructional methods, partnering with the chief diversity & equity officer to enhance equity-minded hiring processes and diversify program curricula, and expanding access to wrap-around student support services, such as on-campus tutoring.

REJI Team members have also led efforts to develop and facilitate three CTLI-sponsored equity-minded syllabus workshops, which were directly inspired by the equity-minded program review initiative. These workshops targeted adjunct faculty and were attended by 63 NSCC faculty members. Thirty-three of these participants went on to re-design their syllabi and post them on their course's Blackboard page. As the equity-minded program review initiative is still in the early stages of development, future work is needed to identify initiative success metrics, strengthen program review action planning, and refine data collection and training support provided to program review teams.

In the process of implementing our strategy at NSCC, we gained several valuable insights. First, the importance of cross-unit collaboration was evident. The formation of a diverse committee, drawing members from both REJI and non-REJI groups, fostered a shared vision and effective communication. This was crucial in disseminating the plan

and in developing impactful professional development programs. Inviting participation from all academic departments enriched the group's perspectives and efforts. Ongoing cross-unit collaboration is also critical for strengthening the newly implemented professional development and data collection strategies that support this effort.

The implementation timeline was another critical aspect. The structured approach to the work allowed for deep engagement without overwhelming the team members. This process, characterized by dividing tasks into manageable weekly goals, ensured that every voice was heard, and every suggestion was valued, visibly contributing to the final outcome. Regular, meaningful meetings and a well-executed communication plan, including obtaining necessary approvals and informing larger institutional groups were key to our success.

Moreover, the sustainability of these changes relies on ongoing professional development, extending beyond mere modifications to the program review template. Reflecting on the project, it is evident that embracing a "power with" rather than a "power over" approach (Graeber, 2019) not only distributed leadership (Brown, 2020) but also strengthened our collective efforts. Finally, establishing an environment that valued vulnerability and honesty emerged as a crucial element in the success of our group, underscoring the power of shared leadership and open, inclusive dialogue in driving meaningful change (Kezar et al., 2021).

CHALLENGES TO ADDRESS WHEN ADAPTING THIS PRACTICE TO YOUR CAMPUS

This equity-minded initiative, while impactful, faced some limitations that offer learning opportunities for future endeavors. A primary

constraint was time. The comprehensive nature of our approach required significant time investment, both for planning and execution, which was challenging to manage alongside regular duties. In addition, the need for extensive collaboration across different campus units, while beneficial for inclusivity, also posed challenges. Ensuring consistent and effective participation across various departments required considerable coordination and often negotiation of conflicting schedules and priorities.

Motivation and incentives were another critical area. While some participants were driven by volunteerism and a personal commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, others needed tangible incentives. The provision of summer stipends for faculty was a key motivator, but it raises questions about sustainable compensation models for ongoing involvement.

Finally, the sustainability of cross-unit collaboration in the post-recommendation implementation phase was a concern. Maintaining the momentum and ensuring that teams remain engaged through the implementation process without the initial drive of the project's novelty posed a challenge. This highlights the need for a robust framework to support continued collaboration and engagement beyond the planning stage.

CONCLUSION

NSCC's equity-minded academic program review initiative is a cross-college approach, anchored in collaboration and equitable principles, that has the potential to transform institutional practices. Our experience underlines the significance of continuous professional development, the power of shared leadership (Graeber, 2019; Kezar et al., 2021), and the importance of maintaining an inclusive and honest dialogue within our community.

Looking ahead, NSCC and the campus' REJI team are committed to sustaining these efforts, building upon the lessons learned, and continuously striving for a more inclusive and equitable educational environment. We hope that our experiences will inspire and guide other institutions in their own journeys toward systemic change as we work for equity and inclusivity on behalf of the students we serve.

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APPENDIX

NSCC Program Review Template (Approved May 5, 2022)

REJI Editorial Board Note: The equity-minded changes made to the program review process have been highlighted in yellow by the authors below.

OVERVIEW

Program review is most effective when departments and programs drive the review process. The following template is designed to be both supportive on a structural level and open-ended in terms of the ways in which departments and programs are able to respond to the discipline-specific inquiries they make. The Center for Teaching, Learning, and Innovation, and Institutional Research will provide support with data collection, including focus groups if applicable, and organization. All quantitative data will be provided by Institutional Research.

1. OVERVIEW OF DEPARTMENT OR PROGRAM

- Name of program or department
- Date of review
- Members of the Instructional Program Review Team (i.e., internal and external stakeholders)
- Executive Summary of Review (Please provide a brief overview of your findings and areas of need, including specific recommendations for future growth and institutional support for your department/program. In your report, please ensure that discipline and industry specific words are defined and that terminology and program titles are up to date. Please be sure to highlight connections from your previous program review including, if applicable, any unexpected outcomes

in its implementation). This information could frame the department's or program's presentation to the president's cabinet.

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION OF THE DEPARTMENT OR PROGRAM

Please describe your department/program, including:

- its organization
- its program and student learner outcomes
- its responsiveness to current trends in the discipline
- its incorporation of equitable and inclusive practices and initiatives
- how this review cycle expands commitments to equity and inclusion that the department/program has demonstrated in past reviews. Or, if this is a new commitment to equity and inclusion, how will you measure "success" in your efforts?
- its strengths and challenges
- its connection and collaboration with other programs in the college
- its relationship, where applicable, to external review and accreditation requirements
- shifts in the implementation of priorities specified during the last program review, if applicable

COMMUNITY AND EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

Please describe any experiential education examples or pedagogies at work in your department/program, including:

- clinical fieldwork, internships, service-learning, sustainability, externships, etc.

- accessible and equitable access to opportunities (e.g., do students receive college credit and/or stipends to participate, are opportunities easily accessed via public transportation, etc.)
- collaboration with faculty in related departments and/or other colleges/universities.

CURRICULUM

Please describe your curricula in terms of the following attributes:

- relevance, effectiveness and responsiveness to student and institutional needs
- inclusiveness and representation of the experiences of all students, particularly BIPOC and historically minoritized students and groups, in course learning materials, texts, and images
- instructional objectives and alignment with program, departmental and NSCC General Education outcomes (as applicable)
- alignment to pathways that support student success (i.e., transfer; articulation agreements; vertical alignment with high schools, pre-college programs, employers; etc.)

INSTRUCTION

Please describe the instructional strategies used by faculty with emphasis on the following:

- involving students in the learning process
- allowing student and institutional needs to shape the department/program
- use of flexible instructional approaches, such as Universal Design for Learning, that incorporate best practices to meet the needs of a multitude of diverse student learning styles and interests

- instructional approaches to engage students, including technology use, innovative pedagogies, and/or other subject-relevant approaches
- use of affordable and accessible instructional learning materials and technologies (e.g., Open Educational Resources, etc.)
- engagement in formative assessment practices, including Universal Design for Learning principles, to assess students' understanding of course content
- faculty involvement in professional development opportunities for enhancing instruction (e.g., Universal Design for Learning, Transparency In Learning and Teaching, asset-based and culturally relevant pedagogy, Technology Across the Curriculum, Writing Across the Curriculum, Green Curriculum, Service-Learning, National Coalition Building Institute, Center for Teaching, Learning, and Innovation seminars, conferences, etc.)

EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Please describe student success, retention, and program completion trends (degrees, certificates, persistence rates) in your department/program, including:

- your program's definition and measures of success for your students
- student performance on defined success metrics
- programmatic assessment frameworks and measures, including multi-institutional collaborations, rubrics, portfolios, and others as appropriate

- Analyze institutional indicators of success as applicable, such as:
 - o Performance data for core program courses, disaggregated by campus location and modality
 - o Program suspension and mid-term alert rates
 - o Program graduation and retention data
 - o Disaggregate these performance data analyses by race/ethnicity and other demographics (e.g., gender, etc.)
- Reflect and report on collaboration with support services (tutoring, advising, career services, accessibility services, etc.)

Program Student Learning Outcome Assessment

As part of the evaluation of your department/ program's educational effectiveness, please describe your student learning outcome assessment process, including:

- an identified program or departmental student learning outcome that you will assess in order to identify areas of and opportunities for continuous improvement
- a description of your department/program plan to measure this outcome. Include details regarding:
 - o The assessment methods(s) and/or tools that you will use to measure the outcome
 - o Which course(s) the measures will be used in
 - o Your timeline for administering the tools and analyzing data

- o Which faculty member(s) will manage the assessment process

- a description of your department/ program student learning outcome assessment results
- an examination of assessment results, disaggregated by race/ethnicity
- a description of how these assessment data are being used to improve pedagogy and practice in your department/ program

2. ANALYSIS OF PROGRAM DATA STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS

Please analyze recruitment and enrollment for each department/ program, including:

- Five-year application and enrollment trends
- Disaggregate data by race/ethnicity and other relevant demographics (e.g., gender, age, etc.)
- compare program demographics with labor market and local community demographics
- suggest contextualized strategies needed to maintain or improve enrollment and recruitment, particularly initiatives to improve enrollment as a result of data gathered relative to student characteristics, if applicable
- student enrollment as it relates to demographics, campus location, course delivery mechanism (i.e., online or face-to-face), and other relevant factors

Department/Program-specific Area(s) of Inquiry and Analysis

Please describe any findings from department/ program-specific areas you have investigated or are in the process of investigating, including:

- department/program-related self-study projects on topics of interest

- o disaggregate self-study data by race/ethnicity and other relevant demographics
- additional relevant data, including, where applicable:
 - o program's labor market and placement rates into careers aligned to degree
 - o program's advisory board and its reflection of the diversity of its student body
- transferability of courses to partner universities

Staffing, Resources and Finances

To be developed by the division dean in consultation with the department chair or coordinator

Please describe the program's current staffing levels, resources, and related expenditures, including:

- significant hires or losses
- mentoring of new FT/PT faculty
- equity and inclusion training opportunities for new faculty
- percentages of courses taught by FT vs. PT faculty
- percentages of courses taught by BIPOC vs. White faculty
- percentages of BIPOC faculty in program in comparison to percentages of BIPOC students in program
- facilities, equipment, access to internal/ external resources:
- institutional cost of the program
- associated program fees

- how program resources are equitably distributed to students (e.g., equipment and technology across campus locations)
- other factors as relevant to program needs and requirements

3. CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTION PLAN

Please provide conclusions and recommendations for future growth and resources needed, including:

- anticipated significant changes during the next five years
- resources needed, including personnel, facilities, and institutional support
- recommendations for curricular and program improvements
- strategies for improving retention and completion, based on your program's disaggregated data analysis
- ongoing course and programmatic assessment
- partnerships within and outside of the college
- professional development
- co-curricular needs of students that affect student learning in your area
- mentoring of new faculty
- department/program needs from the chief diversity and equity officer, Center for Teaching, Learning, and Innovation, and/or faculty fellow to meet equity goals (including success gaps and curriculum development)
- action plan(s) for implementing recommendations

4. FOLLOW UP/STATUS OF PROGRAM OUTCOMES, ACTION PLANS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion regarding any recommendation(s), action plan(s), and program outcome(s) to be collaboratively accomplished with faculty, departments, dean, the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Innovation, vice provost, and NSCC senior leadership.

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“ENACTING EQUITY BY DESIGN:” EQUITY-MINDED CAMPUS SPACE DESIGN

By Karen W. Jason

Keywords: *Space Design, Equity-Mindedness*

INTRODUCTION

Equity-minded practice in higher education seeks to address and redress higher education’s “racial debt” (Bensimon, 2020) by engaging in practices that are evidence-based, race conscious, and place the responsibility for change on educational institutions, rather than on the individuals experiencing racialized disparate outcomes. Moreover, there is a recognition that such disparities are frequently a consequence of both ongoing and historical racism that Students of Color face (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015; Dowd et al., 2018; Gentlewarrior & Paredes, 2021; McNair et al., 2020). In the foundational article titled “Five Principles for Enacting Equity by Design” (Bensimon et al., 2016) the following tenets were delineated as those that characterize equity-minded practices:

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

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

Principle 3: Equitable practices and policies are designed to accommodate differences in the contexts of students’ learning – not to treat all students the same.

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

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

Equity-mindedness has been applied to an array of areas in higher education including obtaining and making sense of data to drive equity-oriented change, teaching and learning, and student belonging (Gentlewarrior & Paredes, 2021; McNair et al., 2020). Far less has been written about how campuses can “enact equity by design” (Bensimon et al., 2016) in the actual design and use of campus spaces. In some of the literature on the topic that does exist, it is made clear that our built environment “is not ahistorical, apolitical — and certainly not race neutral” and as such, “must be examined with a racially critical lens” (Brown, 2019).

In their interview in *Architectural Record*, (McGuigan, 2020), three prominent architects, Mabel Wilson, Mario Gooden and Justin Garrett Moore remind us that the practice of architecture has been and continues to be a profession dominated by White males. They describe the development of architectural practice throughout history, a practice dominated by European assumptions of ideals of being civilized. Being civilized was believed to be reflective of the lives of prosperous White males as the ideal. They suggest this ideal was upheld by contrasting it with those who were viewed as uncultured, primitive, and historically left behind – which was defined as anyone other than White males. Architecture was created to exclude and leave behind those perceived as less than the White, European ideal. They propose that this whiteness,

manifested in the architecture of that period, has continued as the basis for practice today.

Brown (2019) reminds us that historically “race inherently and inevitably assumed a distinct and tangible role in illustrating special distinctions between White colonizers and the non-White Indigenous populations they colonized.” Recent examples of the racialization of space include the colonization in architectural spaces in North America, particularly during the Jim Crow era (Brown, 2019) and the use of red-lining (Egede et al., 2023; Schindler, 2015) to keep racially minoritized communities in spaces meant to underscore their oppressed status.

Higher education spaces often reflect racial histories. For example, many university campuses were constructed by enslaved individuals (Smith & Ellis, 2017). Additionally, the allocation and positioning of spaces within campus buildings, as discussed by Schindler (2015) can reveal priorities. A telling comparison might be the size and prominence of the center dedicated to supporting Students of Color versus the expansive and often centrally located athletics complex.

As we consider the use of space on college and university campuses, it is important to underscore that enrollment in U.S. colleges and universities saw a significant increase of 45% between 1945 and 1960 and then doubled again by 1970 (Mintz, 2022). During this period there was significant growth of campus facilities to support these enrollments. The architectural and design work during this period of significant physical growth was led by predominantly White men and in support of the majority student which was White men (McGuigan, 2020, NCES, 2019, Robinson, 2022).

Clauson (2018) reminds architects and planners that users of spaces want to see their identity reflected in these spaces, and that the homogeneity of college campus buildings may reinforce feelings of exclusion and intimidation for Students of Color. In their foundational text *From Equity Walk to Equity Talk*, the authors offer a series of questions to aid higher education practitioners in enacting equitable practice. One of these questions, while not specific to building design and use, is of special salience to this topic: “How did the architects of this practice, program, or policy [or building] take racial equity into account?” (McNair et al., 2020, p. 45). This chapter shares the ongoing work being done at Bridgewater State University as we work to infuse our building design and utilization with the practice of equity-mindedness.

INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

Bridgewater State University, a regional public 4-year institution in Massachusetts, serving the southeastern region of Massachusetts is the largest comprehensive liberal arts university in the Massachusetts state university system. The campus includes 278 acres and two million square feet of physical facilities to serve our 9,192 students. As of spring 2024, 29% of our students identify as Students of Color, 14% identify with the LGBTQIA+ community, increases of 4% and 7% respectively since spring 2020 (<https://www.bridgew.edu/office/institutional-research>).

Prior to 1945, BSU consisted of three primary buildings with ancillary service buildings totaling 186,546 square feet which housed and educated fewer than 800 students training to be schoolteachers. By 1970 the campus facilities totaled 892,950 square feet and the university saw a second significant enrollment and physical facility growth growing to 1.2 million square feet by 1993 (Turner, 2012). The most recent expansion between 2002 and 2022

further increased the built campus environment to over two million square feet. Each of these projects has required the services of architects and engineers guiding the university through design and construction processes. Like most campuses in America (McGuigan, 2020), BSU did not apply a race conscious framework to our space design and usage decision-making processes in the past.

However, there is a shift in perspective with the renovation of Burnell Hall — a 70,000 square foot multi-purpose building used for classrooms, labs, faculty and staff offices. The planned transformation of Burnell Hall that houses our College of Education and Health Sciences aims to create an environment that reflects the diverse experiences of our faculty, students, and staff. It will be a space that acknowledges the social and emotional needs of students, fosters opportunities, promotes instructional excellence, and provides motivation and support for student success (Smith et al., 2017).

The following chronicles the work we have done since fall 2021 to infuse racially equitable practice into this major space renovation project with the goal of better serving our students, the region — and potentially helping inform the efforts of public construction in Massachusetts through equity-mindedness. Readers will note that the section headings that follow are organized around the five principles for enacting equity by design as proposed by Bensimon, Dowd & Witham (2016).

“PRINCIPLE 1: CLARITY IN LANGUAGE, GOALS, AND MEASURES” (BENSIMON ET AL., 2016)

In the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the procurement, design and construction of publicly owned facilities is highly regulated under Massachusetts General Law, Chapters 7

and 149/149A. These regulations require that the design and construction of a renovation of this cost and scope be led and managed by the state agency called the Division of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance (DCAMM). DCAMM is responsible for all matters pertaining to Commonwealth capital planning, public building construction, facilities management, and real estate services.

Working with our planning project manager from DCAMM, we drafted the required public advertisement which is managed statutorily by a volunteer board referred to as the Designer Selection Board. From the outset of selecting our architect and engineering team, we added explicit language to our public solicitation notices requiring not just commitment to racial and social justice but evidence in their practice as an evaluation criterion.

The BSU team shared early on that racial and social equity and the Commonwealth’s Department of Higher Education’s (DHE) Equity Agenda (<https://www.mass.edu/strategic/equity.asp>) that prioritizes racial equity in the Commonwealth’s public campuses, as well as the university’s equity advancing values and strategic goals, were drivers for this project. We made clear in our solicitation for architect and engineering teams the connection between this project and BSU’s role in educating a racially diverse workforce. A section of the advertisement’s evaluation criteria included very specific language. (*Note that the Commonwealth uses the language of “minority-owned” so it was used in the solicitation; Bridgewater State University does not use this word in campus activities.*) See **Exhibit 1** on next page.

EXHIBIT 1 PROJECT EVALUATION CRITERIA

EVALUATION CRITERIA

Diversity Focus Statement: Approach to enhancing diversity in assembling the team for this project and the inclusion of firms that expand the overall breadth of different firms working on Division of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance projects including description of specific working relationships and responsibilities between and amongst team members for both Minority-owned Business Enterprises (MBE) and Women-owned Business Enterprises (WBE) firms and those with which they will be teaming. If applicable, please highlight projects that have met MBE/WBE goals.

“PRINCIPLE 2: EQUITY-MINDEDNESS SHOULD BE THE GUIDING PARADIGM FOR LANGUAGE AND ACTION” (BENSIMON ET AL., 2016)

The design team that was selected for the Burnell Hall Project is led by a Latine woman. The prime architectural firm of which she is the lead is a woman owned business. Both the civil engineering and landscape architecture firms are women owned businesses, and the structural engineering and plumbing and fire protection engineering firms are led by racially diverse individuals. *Our efforts yielded results.*

Once the new design team was contracted, we organized a training session in collaboration with the BSU Division of Student Success, Equity and Diversity and Institutional Research. The session aimed to educate the team on the fundamental principles of equity-minded practice, particularly how these principles could be integrated into the project. The training was led by the vice president for student success, equity and diversity, a decision made to underscore the significance

of this initiative to BSU. The session covered essential equity-related terms used on campus, expected to inform the project’s development, and included a comprehensive discussion on racial equity. We explored how to shift from basic transactional methods to transformative strategies that would bring racial equity to the forefront of the building project. Additionally, the design team was briefed on the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education’s Equity Agenda (<https://www.mass.edu/strategic/equity.asp>), which advocates for racial equity in the structure, culture, and policies of the state’s public higher education institutions.

Finally, as part of this training for staff involved in the project, we shared the disaggregated enrollment and retention data at Bridgewater State University with emphasis on the differential outcomes experienced by Black, Latine, and LGBTQIA+ students. Key to our discussions was the exploration of what BSU could do to ensure that students from a wide range of identities feel that they truly belong when they utilize the newly renovated College of Education and Health Sciences building.

Once this training was completed, each member of the architectural and engineering team along with the staff from the Commonwealth’s Division of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance (DCAMM) project management team were given copies of *From Equity Talk to Equity Walk*, by McNair, Bensimon and Malcolm-Piqueux (2020). Sections of the book were noted, and the BSU Capital Planning staff called their attention to a set of slightly modified questions from this text (see **Exhibit 2**) to guide this renovation design work to ensure it was conducted in a “critically race conscious” fashion.

EXHIBIT 2 – ADAPTATION OF MCNAIR, ET AL.’S EQUITY-MINDED PRACTICE GUIDING QUESTIONS (2020, P. 45)

- *“In what ways could this (renovation project) program disadvantage minoritized students?”*
- *Who, by race and ethnicity, is most likely to benefit from this (renovation project) program?*
- *How can the architects of the (renovation project) program take racial equity into account?*
- *Who, by race and ethnicity, might not meet the criteria that determines who qualifies for the benefits of this (renovation project) program?”*

“PRINCIPLE 3: EQUITABLE PRACTICE AND POLICES ARE DESIGNED TO ACCOMMODATE DIFFERENCES IN THE CONTEXTS OF STUDENTS’ LEARNING – NOT TO TREAT ALL STUDENTS THE SAME” (BENSIMON ET AL., 2016)

With the design team in place and some common learning and understanding established, we focused our planning meetings on strategies we would utilize in the design process to ensure that everything we did stressed “the critical examination of educational environments in which the students will engage” (McNair et. al., 2020 p. 7). For BSU and the design/engineering team it was clear that we needed to seek input from the students who would utilize the space.

As is common in higher education, administrators often interact with students in order to learn how to better serve them. To that end, we conducted multiple active listening sessions with students, prioritizing the inclusion of voices from diverse backgrounds. These sessions took place in popular student spaces, such as success centers for Students of Color, LGBTQIA+ students, commuters, and students with disabilities. We also invited students from academic programs that will benefit from the renovated facilities, along with members of the Residence Hall Association. While the primary topic of the conversations focused on campus

space recommendations that would enhance their sense of belonging, the conversations were free-flowing, and discussions were led by students.

The honesty with which these students shared was profound. Students of Color shared that at times our spaces can feel white-centric; they want to feel and know that all the spaces on campus welcome them. They want to feel at home. They specifically asked for more daylight, comfortable and varied furniture particularly classroom seating, a coffee shop, space for conversations that are not overheard, nap pods, and softer lighting. They were very specific about asking that the piano remain.

Students also noted characteristics of campus spaces that made them feel welcome; this included the ability to have privacy and noise attenuation even in public spaces, the display of diverse art, and the use of vibrant colors throughout the building. Students want to see themselves represented in the images used in the buildings. They asked for workspaces that foster collaboration on projects and a decrease in individual, isolating work areas along with more public space options to meet with faculty. They requested clear signage and wayfinding, and fabric finishes on windows like home. They acknowledged that they know that while BSU

already has 75 gender neutral bathrooms on campus they want additional gender-neutral facilities to be a priority.

**“PRINCIPLE 4: ENACTING EQUITY REQUIRES A CONTINUAL PROCESS OF LEARNING, DISAGGREGATING DATA, AND QUESTIONING ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT RELEVANCE AND EFFECTIVENESS.”
(BENSIMON ET AL., 2016)**

During the initial phase of space planning, which involved outlining the specific needs and requirements for the project, we made it a priority to ensure that the call for construction management teams was explicit about their commitment to equity. At the pre-qualification walk through, which is an opportunity for those companies interested in the project to visit the site and meet the project team, BSU representatives took the opportunity to reiterate the importance of the DHE equity agenda and BSU’s commitment to values that support a diverse student body. We emphasized that it was essential for the construction teams to mirror the diversity of BSU’s students. The presence of our design team, showcasing their diversity, especially in leadership roles, was a testament to this commitment during the walkthrough.

BSU made an email request of DCAMM to incorporate the language emphasizing our commitment to an equity-minded process as part of the addendum of the DCAMM Request for Proposals (RFP) for the construction management firm. DCAMM’s construction project manager indicated that DCAMM’s legal counsel and construction project management team spent some time reviewing BSU’s requested changes, and all agreed that the introductory paragraph is something they could certainly place in an addendum and also include in the front end of the project specifications. This introductory paragraph read as follows:

The Massachusetts Department of Higher Education (DHE) and Bridgewater State University are committed to racial equity. The DHE Equity agenda is provided for your review <https://www.mass.edu/strategic/equity.asp>. Bridgewater State University is the largest producers of teachers in Massachusetts and as such we feel it is our responsibility to grow the teacher workforce to reflect the racial and other diverse demographics of southeastern Massachusetts and its Gateway Cities, New Bedford, Taunton, Fall River, and Brockton. Many of our students come from these communities and in total 27% of our students identify as Black, Cape Verdean, Indigenous/Native Alaskan, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander Asian, Hispanic/Latinx and Middle Eastern/North African. Twelve percent of our students define as being members of the LGBTQIA+ communities. Two percent of our students are veterans. Bridgewater State University seeks partners including construction management firms whose practices are aligned with the DHE and the university.

Some of the requests we made for this RFP process were not supported — specifically requesting that contractors share their process for soliciting a diverse workforce, requiring a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Corporate Statement and requesting that applicants provide their contractual requirements used to meet minority and women owned workforce project goals. While BSU had hoped for more emphasis on equity in the Construction Management Request for Proposals (CM RFP) process, having the introductory paragraph included in the addendum was a smaller success in our work toward racial equity and social justice that demonstrated the importance of questioning established practices (such as what is included in RFPs) and advocating for racially equitable change.

**PRINCIPLE 5: EQUITY MUST BE ENACTED
AS A PERVASIVE INSTITUTION —
AND — SYSTEM-WIDE PRINCIPLE.”
(BENSIMON ET AL., 2016)**

An unexpected by-product of this work led by BSU, was an invitation from the Division of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance (DCAMM) to present the equity-focused efforts of the Burnell project team to their planning and design project managers. The DCAMM planning and design project managers oversee a broad range of Commonwealth facilities, including higher education institutions, judicial buildings, correctional institutions, health and human services, housing, community development, as well as transportation, conservation, and recreation infrastructures. Having the opportunity to be part of presenting our work to such a diverse group of project managers was an honor.

The agenda of our presentation included sharing the four framing questions referenced previously in *From Equity Talk to Equity Walk* (2020) in **Exhibit 2**; describing the project initiation including where and how requirements for diversity and inclusion were incorporated; delineating the process our team developed and implemented to date, and the ways in which feedback from diverse students and staff was informing our efforts. We ended the presentation with our project goals and then opened the session up to questions.

Perhaps the greatest gift of this experience was when the question was asked “Yeah but how could any of this apply to the design of prisons when the requirements for designing these facilities are so specific?” This allowed a discussion to occur about the racial disparities in the U.S. criminal justice system (ACLU, 2024; Arditti, 2012; Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2023; Nellis, 2024; Pettit & Gutierrez, 2018). The discussion centered on the obligation planners have to infuse racial equity

into prison designs as one small but important step to take while efforts also continue to work to eliminate the racialized inequities in the criminal justice system.

CONCLUSION

As we have done this work and actively engaged our students, faculty and staff, we have received far more feedback on this project than any I have participated in the past 25 years. By meeting with the students and truly asking for their experience with campus buildings and by soliciting their wisdom, we were able to engage in trusting conversations as they shared what characteristics in campus buildings would help them feel seen, acknowledged, celebrated — and at home at BSU. We are currently in the design development stage and will implement steps to provide opportunities to meet with students to present the project plans to date and again review with them the earlier feedback they provided. We will determine whether they feel that their thoughts and suggestions have been incorporated and offer another opportunity for student feedback to inform the final stage of construction documentation.

The work to date, with a sustained focus on racial equity and social justice, has been well received generally and has taught the team to be more equity-minded, bringing this into the design conversation at all occasions. We are committed to continuing this work on the Burnell project through sub-contractor solicitation and construction.

We are excited to build upon this process as BSU engages another designer for our campuswide Space Master Plan. The master plan is a document that BSU uses to define strategic direction and vision for the campus’ built environment including buildings and grounds. The master plan is typically a tool used for planning and decision making for

the next 10 to 20 years. To date, the current master planning team has met with more than 50 separate stakeholder groups, with the group affiliated with our Racial Equity and Justice Institute team (focused on racial equity action planning and implementation) and Racial Justice and Equity Council (offering advice and counsel on these issues) showing the greatest participation. Whether the conversations were with students, identified equity groups on campus, senior leadership, or faculty or librarians, the campus' commitment to ensuring equity principles guided our use of campus space was a major theme.

In April 2024 the BSU presidential cabinet approved the university's first space policy which helps to institutionalize a focus on equity-minded space design and utilization. Going forward the campus-wide Space Committee commits to "ensuring the equity-minded practice for the allocation of space" at Bridgewater State University.

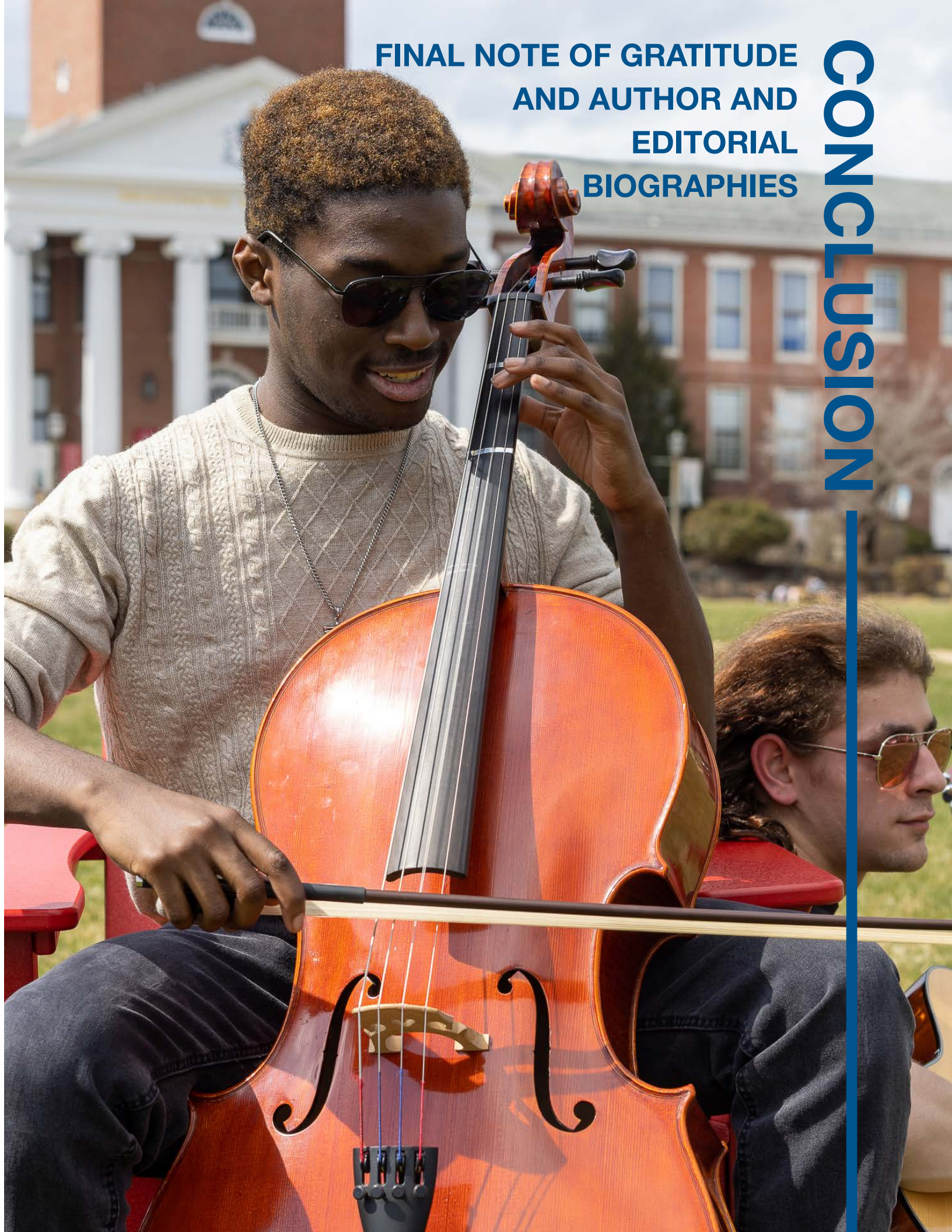
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FINAL NOTE OF GRATITUDE
AND AUTHOR AND
EDITORIAL
BIOGRAPHIES

CONCLUSION



A FINAL NOTE OF GRATITUDE

By Sabrina Gentlewarrior, Yolany Gonell, Luis Paredes, Uma Shama

In the first chapter of the handbook readers were asked to imagine their campuses as racially just (Gentlewarrior, 2024). Those that continued to read beyond that point probably did so out of the understanding that the academy is far from this aspiration and with the commitment to engage in racially equitable actions in order to move higher education “toward the vision of racial justice” (Race Forward, n.d.).

The Racial Equity and Justice Institute is grateful to be in community with practitioners nationwide who work every day to centralize racial equity into higher education. As faculty, staff, administrators, and trustees committed to racial equity, we know that this work is hard, joyful, liberatory — and necessary. We also know that “equity-mindedness is achievable” (Bensimon, 2024).

We hope that *The Racial Equity and Justice Practitioner Handbook Volume 2: Advancing Equity-minded Systemic Change in Higher Education* has provided readers with practical and actionable strategies to aid you in your change efforts. We are grateful to you for your ongoing work for racial equity.

Together we are making our collective vision of racially just higher education in America a reality.

KEY RESOURCES

The first *Racial Equity and Justice Institute Practitioner Handbook* (Gentlewarrior & Paredes, 2021) can be accessed free at the link: <https://reji-bsu.org/handbook/>

To learn more about the Racial Equity and Justice Institute, including information on membership: <https://reji-bsu.org/>

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AUTHOR AND EDITORIAL BOARD BIOGRAPHIES

EDITORIAL BOARD



Sabrina Gentlewarrior (she/her) is the vice president of student success, equity and diversity at Bridgewater State University (BSU) and convener of the Racial Equity

and Justice Institute. She has 38 years of experience as an equity worker – the last 20 years at BSU. Her social work practice, scholarship, teaching, grant-funded work, and administrative leadership have emphasized equity praxis. Dr. Gentlewarrior's work emphasizes collaborative efforts to advance measurable racially equitable change in higher education.



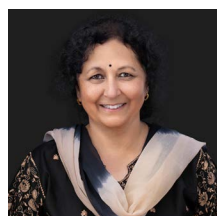
Yolany Gonell (she/her) serves as the assistant vice president for student success, diversity and inclusion at Bridgewater State University. She is

a first-generation college graduate, a U.S. veteran and has more than 18 years of progressive experience in higher education providing guidance and strategic direction to advance inclusion, racial equity, and student retention.



Luis F. Paredes (he/él) is the associate vice president for institutional equity and belonging at Wheaton College in Massachusetts. His extensive career

includes pivotal roles such as director of institutional diversity at Bridgewater State University and director of diversity and inclusion at Stetson University. He has also contributed academically as an editor of the *Racial Equity and Justice Institute Practitioner Handbook* (2021). Dr. Paredes holds a PhD in cultural studies from the University at Albany, SUNY.



Uma Shama is a professor of mathematics and computer science, co-director of GeoGraphics Lab, and the university marshal at Bridgewater State University.

She is the faculty director for the REJI and is a faculty fellow in a NSF grant to support equity-minded practices. Dr. Shama was awarded the Dr. Robert A. Daniel award for racial justice, equity, and inclusion from Bridgewater State University. She holds PhD and MS degrees in mathematics from the University of Connecticut.



FORWARD

Estela Mara Bensimon developed the concept of equity-mindedness as a counter-narrative to perspectives attributing

racial inequality in educational outcomes to student deficiencies derived from poor schooling, personal circumstances, and lack of good academic habits. She and her colleagues at the USC Center for Urban Education (now merged with the USC Race and Equity Center) have elaborated on the concept of equity-mindedness in scholarly articles, reports, and practical tools. She now leads Bensimon &

Associates, a consulting firm that provides services with a focus on racial equity to colleges, universities, and philanthropic organizations.

ACTUALIZING THE VISION OF RACIAL JUSTICE IN HIGHER EDUCATION: EQUITY-MINDED SYSTEMIC CHANGE

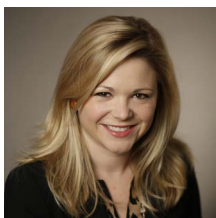
Sabrina Gentlewarrior (see Editorial Board)

SHARED EQUITY LEADERSHIP SUPPORTING RACIALLY EQUITABLE CULTURE CHANGE



Adrianna Kezar is dean's professor of leadership, Wilbur-Kieffer professor of higher education, at the University of Southern California and director of

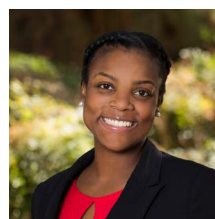
the Pullias Center for Higher Education within the Rossier School of Education. Dr. Kezar is a national expert on equity and diversity; student success; the changing faculty; change, governance, and leadership in higher education. Dr. Kezar is well published with 25 books/monographs, more than 100 journal articles, and more than 100 book chapters and reports.



Elizabeth Holcombe is a senior research associate with the Pullias Center for Higher Education at the University of Southern California. She researches

organizational change and leadership in higher education, with specific interests in leadership and change for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), faculty development, and undergraduate teaching and assessment. She holds a PhD from the University of Southern California, MA from Columbia University, and BA from Vanderbilt University.

FROM INTENTIONS TO IMPACT: PRACTICAL LESSONS FOR BOARDS OF TRUSTEES IN SHAPING AND ADVANCING EQUITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION



Raquel M. Rall is an associate professor and associate dean of strategic initiatives in the School of Education at UC Riverside. Before her appointment at

UCR, she was a UC chancellor's postdoctoral fellow and assistant research professor at the University of Southern California (USC). Dr. Rall has a PhD in urban education policy from USC and degrees in human biology and African and African American studies from Stanford University. Her research centers on postsecondary leadership and governance.



Jean F. MacCormack was chair of the board of trustees at Bridgewater State University and chair of the diversity/student success, racial equity and

justice, and academic and student affairs committees. She was a commissioner at New England Commission on Higher Education (NECHE). She had many senior leadership roles at University of Massachusetts Boston and University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, including 13 years as chancellor. She always worked tirelessly for equitable access and equitable outcomes for students.

Sabrina Gentlewarrior (see Editorial Board)

INSTITUTIONALIZING RACIAL EQUITY ON CAMPUSES: THE ROLE OF PRESIDENTS IN EQUITY-MINDED SYSTEMIC CHANGE



Frederick W. Clark Jr.

is the 12th president in the 184-year history of Bridgewater State University, his alma mater.

The advancement of

student success has been the cornerstone of President Clark's administration. BSU has ascended to a position of national leadership in removing barriers to academic success, providing the necessary supports to help every student grow and succeed, and eliminating equity gaps among all student groups.

The Wall Street Journal named BSU a best college in America for the 2nd year in a row for advancing social mobility among students from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds and identities, the diversity of its student body, and the campus-wide work for student success.



Karen Hynick is the acting provost for Connecticut State Community College (CT State), serving more than 65,000 students annually. CT State is proud

to be a majority minority serving institution. Dr. Hynick served as the campus chief executive officer for Connecticut State Community College-Quinebaug Valley leading efforts to advance equity through access to family sustaining life wage career pathways. She has also led efforts to advance access and revise dual enrollment policies and procedures.



Christine Mangino

serves as president of Queensborough Community College of the City University of New York.

She previously served in

various faculty positions and provost and vice president for academic affairs at Hostos Community College. The first person in her family to attend college, Dr. Mangino earned an AAS degree at Nassau Community College, a BA and MA in Elementary Education at Hofstra University, and an EdD in Instructional Leadership at St. John's University.

EMBRACING EQUITY, LEADING EQUITY: THE ROLE OF THE PROVOST IN HIGHER EDUCATION EQUITY PRACTICES



Arlene Rodríguez has devoted 30 years in community colleges to leading successful equity-centered initiatives to close institutional gaps

among her students and provide them with a pathway to economic mobility. She has designed inclusive curricula, centering Latinx/Hispanic writers and applying equity-informed pedagogies. With colleagues and community partners, she co-authored more than \$15 million in grants focusing on equity. She is the provost/vice president of academic & student affairs at Middlesex Community College in Massachusetts.

EQUITY-MINDED ORGANIZATIONS AND FACULTY-LED COALITIONAL CHANGE



Cynthia D. Villarreal is an assistant professor of educational leadership at Northern Arizona University. Her scholarship interrogates issues of racial equity for racially minoritized faculty and students in higher education. She uses interdisciplinary theories to interrogate policies, structures, and cultures that are rooted in complicated racial histories and deeply held assumptions. She holds a PhD in Urban Education Policy from the University of Southern California.



Román Liera is an assistant professor at Montclair State University and a 2024 National Academies of Education/Spencer Foundation Postdoctoral

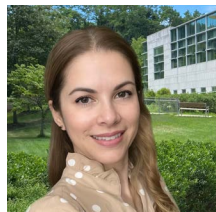
Fellow. He studies how organizational mechanisms offer possibilities for institutional transformation while highlighting the conditions under which racism operates to undermine racial equity. As a public scholar, he regularly advises administrative and faculty leaders at elite four-year universities, comprehensive public four-year universities, community colleges, and Hispanic Serving Institutions on equity-minded practices.



Steve Desir (he/him) is an assistant professor of research in the Pullias Center for Higher Education and the USC Race and Equity Center. He is the

Director of Professional Development and Organizational Learning for the Equity in Graduate Education Resource Center at USC. His research primarily examines racial equity issues in higher education and K-12 educational settings.

LEVERAGING PERKINS FUNDS FOR EQUITY-MINDED INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEOS IN COLLEGE ACCOUNTING: A SCALABLE APPROACH FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS (ELS) AND MULTILINGUAL STUDENTS



Yelenna Rondon is passionate about dismantling structural barriers for underrepresented groups. With graduate degrees in both finance and economics, and a PhD in research and evaluation in education, she brings a unique perspective to her work as a professor and chair of the business department at North Shore Community College. As a Hispanic immigrant, she is dedicated to fostering inclusive academic environments. She was recognized with the 2022 NISOD Teaching Excellence Award.

ACCESS AND OPPORTUNITY: PREPARING FUTURE TEACHERS FOR A RACIALLY DIVERSE AND MULTILINGUAL WORLD



Nicole J. Glen is the associate provost for academic and faculty affairs and a professor of science and engineering education in the Department of Elementary and Early Childhood Education at Bridgewater State University. She has been the PI or co-PI on several grants from the National Science Foundation focused on equity in STEM teaching and learning. Her research focuses on the interdisciplinary nature of science, engineering, and literacy; and building the self-efficacy of beginning teachers.



Jeanne Carey Ingle is an associate professor at Bridgewater State University. She is an international initiatives' faculty fellow and co-

principal investigator for STEM-EL, a National Science Foundation Improving Undergraduate STEM Education Grant. She teaches courses on multilingual-learner education and educational technology. Dr. Ingle has published work in multiple book chapters, academic and practitioner journals, and is co-authoring a book on Digital Literacy in Teacher-Preparation (2025). She also frequently presents at national and international conferences.

THE PEDAGOGY OF REAL TALK IN COMMUNITY COLLEGE CLASSROOMS: NOT JUST A TALK



Lara Kradinova is a professor of English at Middlesex Community College. In addition, she is a co-coordinator of MCC's Scholarship of Teaching

and Learning, college-wide organization promoting action research and building interdisciplinary connections, and one of the faculty leads at the Faculty Academy, a professional development initiative for the faculty based on the Pedagogy of Real Talk (Dr. Paul Hernandez). She received her PhD at the University of Arizona in 2007.



Vikram Sharma is the chair of the Department of Business Administration and Economics at Middlesex Community College. He primarily

teaches accounting and economics. He has previously taught at Winthrop University (South Carolina), University of South Carolina, and Bowling Green State University (Ohio). He is

passionate about mentoring students and has led student fellowship trips to Costa Rica and Greece. In addition to a law degree, he has master's degrees in business administration and business education.

CREATING A COMMUNAL CULTURE WITH LINKED-COURSE COMMUNITIES



Laura Ramsey is a professor of psychology at Bridgewater State University. Using multiple methods, her research aims to understand and

promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in STEM fields. A second line of research focuses on the objectification of women. She earned a bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of Mary Washington, and a master's degree and PhD in social psychology from the University of Michigan.



Thomas Kling is professor of physics at Bridgewater State University. He is interested in STEM student success and faculty development and

has served as PI for four NSF grants and three state grants related to STEM student success. From 2015 to 2023, he was chair of the steering committee of the Massachusetts PKAL Regional Network for which he helped organize two STEM faculty development conferences per year.

UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH PRACTICES THAT DRIVE EQUITY



Jenny Olin Shanahan (she/her) is assistant provost at Bridgewater State University in Massachusetts, where she collaborates with colleagues across

departments to lead equity-focused, scholarly opportunities for students. Dr. Shanahan has co-edited 11 books, including Routledge's series of textbooks on undergraduate research in various disciplines, and written more than 20 academic articles. Her scholarship focuses on racial equity and social justice in higher education and culturally responsive mentoring. She holds a PhD in Literature from Marquette University.



Francisco Alatorre is an associate professor in the Department of Criminal Justice at Bridgewater State University in Massachusetts.

Dr. Alatorre is the chair of his department's Diversity Equity, and Inclusion Committee, a faculty fellow for Latine student success and coordinator for community-engaged teaching and scholarship. Dr. Alatorre's work has appeared in *Debates on U.S. Immigration*, *Qualitative Inquiry*, *Encyclopedia of Women and Crime*, *The Journal of Qualitative Criminal Justice and Criminology*, and *Contemporary Justice Review*.



Abichaël Belizaïre is a first year PhD student at Brandeis University focusing on physical chemistry. Growing up in a predominantly Black

Haitian community in New York, moving to Massachusetts was a major culture shock. It made more evident the racial divide in society which he aims to equalize. Moving through his schooling, he aims to be an inspiration to others desiring an education.



David German Alatorre is an undergraduate student at Bridgewater State University in Massachusetts. He has participated in the (ATP) Research Program and

serves as a justice fellow at the Martin Richard Institute for Social Justice. Additionally, he has contributed as a student researcher in the Undergraduate Research Department and is actively involved in the Honors Program. Originally from Mesa Community College in Arizona, he is committed to advancing equitable research opportunities for all students.



Heather Pacheco-Guffrey is associate professor of STEM Education in the Department of Elementary and Early Childhood Education at Bridgewater

State University. She teaches advanced PK-12 STEM Ed and digital literacy to pre-/in-service educators with a focus on creating accessible and compelling learning experiences for all students. She writes the "Tech Talk" column for the NSTA publication *Science & Children*, sharing innovative ways to use technology in science and engineering education.



Jacquelynne Anne Boivin is an assistant professor of elementary and early childhood education at Bridgewater State University in Massachusetts. She

is co-chair of her department's Anti-Racism Matters Committee and is co-chair of the College of Education and Health Sciences' Diversity and Equity Council. She is a former elementary school teacher who uses her experience in the field to contextualize her instruction. Her largest passion is authentically connecting academic disciplines with social justice skills.



Inkyoung Kim (she/her) is associate professor of political science at Bridgewater State University. Her research interests include

regional environmental cooperation and the interplay of trade and the environment. Her scholarship has appeared in the academic journals including international environmental agreements: politics, law and economics and international relations of the Asia-Pacific as well as in Routledge's handbook series on Japanese foreign policy and international trade agreements.



Paulina Aguilar Delgado (she/her) is a law student at the University of Massachusetts School of Law. She holds a bachelor's degree from Bridgewater

State University, where she developed a sparkling interest in research. She grew up in Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico, and has long been interested in social justice. She is a legal intern at the public defender's office in Quincy and after law school, she plans to focus on equal access to justice and advocacy.

AN HONORS PARADIGM SHIFT TO CENTER EQUITY AND INCLUSION: A REPLICABLE, HIGH-IMPACT MODEL FOR HONORS PROGRAMS AND COLLEGES



Jibril Gabriel Solomon is an associate professor at Bridgewater State University, where he partners with faculty across disciplines and staff

colleagues to provide equity-focused scholarly opportunities for students in academic programs including social sciences, STEM, honors, and global exchange. Dr. Solomon's scholarship focuses on racial equity, social justice, and culturally responsive practices. He holds a PhD in psychometrics from Lesley University.



Binnur Ercem is a sociologist and cultural anthropologist with more than 35 years of teaching experience with a focus on diversity and social justice. She is also the director

of the Commonwealth Honors Program at Middlesex Community College.



Kate Baker is a professor of English and the assistant director of the Commonwealth Honors Program at Middlesex Community College. She

earned an MA in literature from the University of Colorado-Boulder and graduated from University of Massachusetts Lowell with a BA in writing. Her teaching interests are English composition I & II, the accelerated learning program, classics of children's literature, and exploring social justice through literature. Her courses focus on research and critical thinking skills.



Jennifer MacCallum (she/her) is honors program advisor at Bridgewater State University where she provides equity-focused, holistic honors advising and

leads admissions, enrollment, and orientation efforts. Focused on an “every student, one student at a time” ethic, she is committed to accessible, inclusive policies and practices that create a sense of belonging and increase student success and persistence.



Sean Maguire (she/her) is the student scholars coordinator in the Center for Transformative Learning at Bridgewater State University. Her work in the

Honors Program centers around community-building, recruitment and retention, continuous improvement, and advising. She also is a mentor for students applying for competitive fellowships and grants. She earned an MA in educational leadership from the University of Nevada, Reno and a BS in interdisciplinary studies from Sam Houston State University.

Jenny Olin Shanahan (see Undergraduate Research)

STRATEGIES THAT SUPPORT RACIALLY EQUITABLE GRADUATE EDUCATION



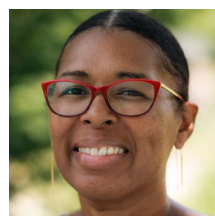
Lisa Krissoff Boehm is the dean of the College of Graduate Studies at Bridgewater State University, as well as professor of history

and American studies. Previously she served as founding dean of the school of arts and sciences and professor of history at Manhattanville College in New York. She is the author of *Making a Way Out of No Way:*

African American Women and the Second Great Migration (2009), and *America’s Urban History* (with Steven Corey, 2014 and 2023).



Melinda R. Tarsi-Goldfien is an associate professor of political science and chair of the Master of Public Administration program at Bridgewater State University.



Wendy Champagnie Williams (she/her) is an associate professor at Bridgewater State University. She is chair and coordinator of the

MSW program. A social worker for more than 30 years, Dr. Williams has served in higher education for more than two decades. Scholarship interests include strengths and resilience among children, families, and communities of color, particularly those impacted by incarceration; dismantling dynamics of power and privilege towards equity and inclusion; and equity-minded practice in organizations.



Castagna Lacet is an associate professor in the School of Social Work at Bridgewater State University. Dr. Lacet teaches at both the undergraduate

and graduate levels. She helped design and teach courses to support and prepare new graduate students. She teaches a course on graduate level writing, as well as acclimating to and embracing the graduate school experience. Dr. Lacet is the interim director for the BSU Office of Teaching and Learning.



Ally McVickar (she/her) is the assistant director of graduate student services at Bridgewater State University, and has been a member of the Racial Equity and Justice Institute since 2021. She received her doctorate in educational leadership specializing in international student sense of belonging and previously worked in a multicultural office serving underprivileged students. Dr. McVickar has a passion for social justice in higher education and advocating for graduate students.



Lauren Lamothe serves as Assistant Director of Graduate Student Services in the College of Graduate Studies at Bridgewater State University. She is a proud double-bear earning her B.A. in Sociology and her M.Ed. in Educational Leadership, Higher Education Administration at BSU. Her passion for higher education and helping students has inspired her over 15 year career serving students at BSU.



Paul Cincotta Jr. is the director of graduate admissions at Bridgewater State University where he oversees admissions and enrollment for more than 80 graduate degree, certificate and licensure programs. Mr. Cincotta received his bachelor of science degree in marketing from Fairfield University and his master of business administration (MBA) from Providence College. He also is a board member (treasurer) for NEGAP, the New England Association of Graduate Enrollment Management.

CHAPTER 14: A JUSTICE, EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION (JEDI) CORE COMPETENCIES FRAMEWORK IN A HEALTHCARE EDUCATION SETTING



Kimberly A. Truong has more than 20 years of experience advancing justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion as a strategist and leader in education. Dr. Truong is chief equity officer at MGH Institute of Health Professions. Dr. Truong is an adjunct lecturer at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. She is founder and principal at XEM Consulting Services, LLC. Dr. Truong serves on the board of directors of the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education.



Callie Watkins Liu is the director of JEDI Education and Programs in the Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) Office at the MGH Institute of Health Professions in Boston. Dr. Watkins Liu is an intersectional and critical race scholar with a background in sociology, social policy, urban planning, and psychology. Dr. Watkins Liu has more than 10 years of experience in higher education and more than 20 years of experience in community engagement, community organizations and organizational development.



Corliss Kanazawa is an acute care nurse practitioner currently working in New York City. After graduating from the MGH IHP, she is serving marginalized communities who have a cancer diagnosis. She has hopes of taking her career to higher heights and is hoping to take her

experience to advance health systems. When she's not at the hospital, she is hosting café pop ups and experimenting with different recipes.



Kanayo Sakai (she/her) is a board-certified psychiatric mental health nurse practitioner, and a graduate of MGH Institute of Health Professions, where she was

a justice, equity, diversity and inclusion fellow and received the outstanding student leader of the year award and Stephanie Macaluso '88 leadership award. She hopes to continue developing skills to be the change agent to produce tangible, meaningful improvements in health for all people through multidisciplinary collaboration and evidence-based clinical practice.

MOVING EQUITY VALUES TO EQUITY ACTION: IMPLEMENTING EQUITY-MINDED DATA TOOLS FOR FACULTY



Amanda Colligan is executive director of institutional research & decision support at Bridgewater State University. She has been

lucky enough to work in and learn from both four and two-year institutions, as well as at the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education. She earned a BA in sociology from Bridgewater State and an MA in applied sociology and education from University of Massachusetts Boston. She relishes the opportunity to work with her colleagues to leverage data and support equitable student success.

Uma Shama (see Editorial Board)



Laura Pistorino is the business intelligence analyst in institutional research & decision support at Bridgewater State University, where she

leverages her expertise in data visualization to support the ongoing campus dissemination of data. A double BSU Bear with degrees in psychology and educational leadership, she brings a passion for closing equity gaps to her work. In her free time, she enjoys game nights, musical theatre, and quiet evenings at home.



Ashley A. Hansen-Brown is an associate professor at Bridgewater State University, where she has been a faculty member since 2017. Dr. Hansen-

Brown is a social psychologist with research interests primarily in scholarship of teaching and learning. She previously served as an equity retention faculty fellow with the Division of Student Success, Equity, and Diversity and is currently spreading the word about equitable teaching practices through her work on the Office of Teaching and Learning advisory board.



Margaret A. Lowe is a professor of American history at Bridgewater State University, who specializes in the progressive era, American women, gender

and first-person studies. Her publications include *Looking Good: College Women and Body Image, 1875-1930*; *From Megaphones to Microphones: Women's Public Discourse, 1920-1960* with Susan Ross & Sandra Sarkala; and *How Very Wrong They Are, How Little They Know: Diary-keeping, Private Anguish, Public Bodies and Modern Female Subjectivity*, *Journal of Historical Biography*.

Kevin Duquette has worked in rural, urban, and suburban K-12 as a teacher and school counselor prior to becoming a counselor educator. Dr. Duquette is passionate about improving mental health support in K-12 schools, and provision of equitable school counseling interventions. In his spare time, he is a diehard Pittsburgh Penguins fan, plays rec league hockey, and enjoys playing guitar and drums.

OPERATIONALIZING THE QUEST FOR EQUITY AT CAPE COD COMMUNITY COLLEGE



Cathleen McCarron is a lifelong educator who taught English at Northeastern University, University of Maryland-European Division, and

Middlesex Community College. Since 2020, she has served as an academic dean at Cape Cod Community College. She began her racial equity work as co-coordinator of the scholarship of teaching and learning community at Middlesex. She continues this work at CCCC and credits her colleagues from University of Massachusetts Boston's Higher Education program for deepening her commitment to racial equity work.



John L. Cox is president of Cape Cod Community College. President Cox is committed to advancing student, faculty, and staff success while championing

equity and inclusion. He leads a diverse college community, highlighted by the net-carbon negative Science and Engineering Center. A dual Fulbright recipient and Rotary International Scholar, he holds a doctorate from George Washington University and received the 2010 John Grenzebach Award for Outstanding Research in Philanthropy.



Kathleen M. Vranos is vice president of academic and student affairs at Cape Cod Community College where she leads strategic plan implementation to narrow

student success equity gaps. Dr. Vranos also served as vice president of academic affairs at Dean College, and as dean/professor of marketing at Greenfield Community College. She holds an EdD from Northeastern University, an MS from Northwestern University, and a BA from Boston College.

William Berry began their academic journey



at a community college in Detroit, Michigan, and has dedicated more than 25 years to supporting beginning writers. They currently

teach online and in-person writing courses at Cape Cod Community College. In addition to their teaching, Dr. Berry is a published phenomenologist and transgressive fiction writer.

Sara-Ann P. Semedo is an academic



coordinator at Cape Cod Community College and has been working with the campus' Racial Equity and Justice Institute team since 2017. She has been a leader

in DEI, racial justice and cultural programming work at CCCC since 2016 and has focused on racial & social justice and multicultural and diversity programming and curriculums. She is an adjunct in the performing arts and Black studies at Northeastern University.



Shuqi Wu is the director of institutional research and planning at Cape Cod Community College and a member of the college's Racial Equity

and Justice Institute (REJI). She oversees the collection and analysis of institutional data to support decision-making processes. Dr. Wu's expertise has been pivotal in implementing data-informed strategies to promote student success and advance racial equity.

INTEGRATING EQUITY-MINDEDNESS IN ACADEMIC PROGRAM REVIEW AT NORTH SHORE COMMUNITY COLLEGE



Kim Stevens (she/her) is the senior specialist for assessment of student learning outcomes at North Shore Community College. She brings more than 20

years of experience in qualitative and mixed methods research, program evaluation, and assessment. At NSCC, Dr. Stevens coordinates equity-minded academic program review and serves on the campus REJI team. She holds an EdM in prevention science and practice and an EdD in culture, communities, and education from the Harvard Graduate School of Education.



Nikki Pelonia (he/him) is the chief diversity & equity officer at North Shore Community College with 15 years of experience in nonprofit, social work,

international and higher education. He is a restorative justice practitioner, holds a master's degree in intercultural service, leadership, and management, and has developed several equity-minded learning and development opportunities. He is dedicated to social justice

by integrating community needs and critical pedagogy to dismantle systemic barriers. He is a proud cat/dog dad.



Andrea Milligan is an innovative and dedicated higher education professional with more than 25 years of experience in teaching and learning,

educational technology, instructional design, online and hybrid course design, and professional development. As the director of the CTLI, she works to support faculty and students in the teaching and learning environment through fostering effective, innovative, and inclusive teaching practices as well as facilitating the use of technology as an integral part of the academic experience.



Jennifer A. Harris has been a behavioral sciences professor at NSCC since 1997. She has also served as faculty fellow for equity and inclusion

and the honors program. Dr. Harris earned bachelor's degrees in psychology and speech communication from the State University of New York at Geneseo and her master's degree and PhD in counseling psychology from Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. She has been an active and enthusiastic member of Racial Equity and Justice Institute since 2019.



Gary Miller is the assistant director of the Office of Planning, Research and Resources at North Shore Community College, where he has served since 2016.

He has earned a BA from Syracuse University as a policy studies major and a GIS certificate from Penn State University. He is also a volunteer Greyshirt with Team Rubicon, a disaster response nonprofit, and is an FAA-certified remote pilot.



Lucy Bayard (she/her), ADA coordinator at MassDOT, has 20 years' experience promoting equity-based practices and universal design for learning

principles as a special education teacher, national trainer at the Institute for Community Inclusion for CNCS, and in accessibility services in higher education. She earned her master's degree in moderate disabilities at Lesley University. At NSCC, she led a DEI governance committee and co-led a Racial Equity and Justice Institute subcommittee on equity-based practices to reduce barriers for students.



Andrea DeFusco-Sullivan has lived the transformative power of education. She began her career as a lecturer at Boston College, advancing to

assistant dean and English program director. With a decade at North Shore Community College, she led the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Assessment, and served as dean of liberal studies, VPAA, and assistant provost. Currently, she is the head of school at St. Joseph's in Medford, Massachusetts, where she is dedicated to enhancing student success.



Daniel James Hauge has a PhD in practical theology from Boston University, with a focus on whiteness studies and developmental psychology. His work

focuses on addressing the preservation of white normativity in progressive institutions. He is the staff assistant to the chief diversity and equity officer at North Shore Community College.

CHAPTER 18: "ENACTING EQUITY BY DESIGN:" EQUITY-MINDED CAMPUS SPACE DESIGN



Karen W. Jason was appointed as vice president for operations at Bridgewater State University in July 2016. She has been responsible

for more than \$500 million of construction and leads a diverse staff of more than 400. Ms. Jason is an inaugural member of the BSU-Racial Equity Justice Institute team. She received her BFA from Colby Sawyer College and graduate degrees in management, educational leadership, business, and social work while she has worked at BSU.

CHARTS AND GRAPHS IN TABLE FORMAT

APPENDIX 1: TEACHING ENGINEERING SELF-EFFICACY SCALE (TESS) RESULTS

I can...	pretest average	posttest average
1. discuss how engineering is connected to daily life.	3.57	5.5
2. recognize/appreciate engineering concepts in all subject areas.	3.47	5.43
3. spend the time necessary to plan engineering lessons.	4.12	6
4. employ engineering activities in my classroom effectively.	3.56	6
5. craft good questions about engineering for my students.	3.79	5.8
6. discuss how criteria affect the outcome of an engineering project.	3.56	6
7. guide my students' solution development with the design process.	3.47	5.78
8. gauge student comprehension of the engineering I have taught.	4.06	5.71
9. assess my students' engineering products.	4	5.78
10. promote a positive attitude toward engineering in my students.	5.42	6
11. encourage my students to think critically when engineering.	5.08	6
12. encourage my students to interact with each other when engineering.	5.38	6
13. encourage my students to think creativity during engineering.	5.3	5.75
14. calm a student who is disruptive or noisy during engineering.	5	5.06
15. get through to students with behavior problems while teaching engineering.	4.8	5.06
16. keep a few problem students from ruining an entire engineering lesson.	4.8	5.06
17. control disruptive behavior in my classroom during engineering.	4.7	4.88
18. establish a classroom management system for engineering.	4.95	5.25
19. help a student get better grades in engineering than he/she gets in other subjects.	4.25	4.94
20. help my students do better than usual in engineering when I exert a little extra effort.	4.2	4.75
21. see significant change in students' engineering achievement when I increase my teaching effort.	4.75	5
22. generally be responsible for my students' achievements in engineering.	4.45	4.88
23. use my effectiveness in engineering to influence the achievement of students with low motivation.	4.75	5.25

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APPENDIX 2: THE SCIENCE INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES SURVEY (SIPS) RESULTS

how often students will do the following	pretest average	posttest average
1. Generate questions or predictions to explore	4.6	4.56
2. Identify questions from observations of phenomena	4.2	4.5
3. Choose variables to investigate (such as in a lab setting)	3.6	3.89
4. Design or implement their OWN investigations	3.5	3.89
5. Make and record observations	4.35	4.44
6. Gather quantitative or qualitative data	4.05	4.33
7. Organize data into charts or graphs	3.75	4.22
8. Analyze relationships using charts or graphs	3.7	3.94
9. Analyze results using basic calculations	4	4.22
10. Explain the reasoning behind an idea	4.75	4.56
11. Respectfully critique each others' reasoning	4.6	4.5
12. Supply evidence to support a claim or explanation	4.8	4.5
13. Consider alternative explanations	4.7	4.56
14. Make an argument that supports or refutes a claim	4.45	4.44
15. Create a physical model of a scientific phenomenon	3.05	3.5
16. Develop a conceptual model based on data or observations	3.2	3.67
17. Use models to predict outcomes	3.75	3.94
18. Provide direct instruction to explain science concepts	4.45	4.44
19. Demonstrate an experiment and have students watch	4.05	4.11
20. Use activity sheets to reinforce skills or content	4.25	4.39
21. Go over science vocabulary	4.55	4.72
22. Apply science concepts to explain natural events or real-world situations	4.6	4.61
23. Talk with your students about things they do at home that are similar to what is done in science class	4.65	4.67
24. Discuss students' prior knowledge or experience related to the science topic or concept	4.75	4.67

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FIGURE 1. NUMBERS OF WHITE STUDENTS AND STUDENTS OF COLOR IN THE ADRIAN TINSLEY PROGRAM FOR UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH AND CREATIVE SCHOLARSHIP, 2018-2022

	White	Students of Color
2018	46	8
2019	40	14
2020	25	11
2021	35	10
2022	34	17

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FIGURE 2. NUMBERS OF FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS AND CONTINUING-GENERATION STUDENTS IN THE ADRIAN TINSLEY PROGRAM FOR UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH AND CREATIVE SCHOLARSHIP, 2018-2021

	First Gen	Not First Gen
2018	19	35
2019	25	29
2020	14	22
2021	16	29

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**FIGURE 5 IN TABLE FORMAT:
HIGHEST REPRESENTATION OF RACIALLY & ETHNICALLY DIVERSE STUDENTS
IN BSU HONORS PROGRAM**

	Fall 2021	Fall 2022	Fall 2023
Asian	10	16	29
Black/African American	31	47	53
Two or More Races	29	56	77
Hispanic	46	78	113

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