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California Community Colleges Student Equity, ESL and Basic Skills Students

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The California Community Colleges (CCCs) system has implemented strategies to enhance student equity by identifying diverse populations and striving to develop ways to promote student success in English As a Second Language (ESL) and Basic Skills courses. Incorporating equitable best practices to promote student achievement in the US educational system is historically documented in the research as far back as the 1800s.

Thomas Jefferson stated in 1787, in his first of three principles, *horizontal equity;* the right of all children is to receive a fair and equal education. Jefferson stated, "It holds that all children similarly situated should be treated the same. In education, a pupil in a classroom should receive the same opportunity as any other child" (as cited in Verstegen, 2010, p.3). Verstegen discussed that Dewey's point of view on government recognized the importance of student equity and thus insured that diverse populations would have access to education. Dewey stated, "Vision of equity, equal educational opportunity implied governments not only would provide access to learning but also compensate for the differences on basis of environmental inequality" (as cited in Verstegen, 2010, p.3).

In 2016, disproportionate gaps in education students require that the CCCs develop strategies to strengthen student success specific for the following populations: African-American, Asian, Hispanic/Latino, Native American, Pacific Islander and White populations (Goldrick-Rab, 2010). Currently, CCCs educate over 3 million students. It is the responsibility of CCCs to direct and increase access to higher education available for the diverse student body it serves. The current student body proportionally mirrors the future population of 2050. In order to equalize workforce gaps, practices must be put into place to narrow disproportional impact on underserved populations (Goldrick-Rab, 2010).

Practices for achieving student equity have been recognized by the California Academic Senate as diverse for different populations in rural, urban or suburban settings. Equitable strategies for tailoring student success vary depending on geographic location. The research revealed that some institutions are better prepared than others to implement equity strategies when they have a strong governance system (Goldrick-Rab, 2010). Various institutions may be better prepared to integrate student equity into "programs, program review, clear program pathways, and program outcomes. Some colleges are not organized or ready to implement institutional-wide or programmatic practices to promote equity. At these institutions, faculty will need to individually address equity" (Goldrick-Rab, 2010, p. 8).

An *Equity-Minded* approach is the first process Goldrick-Rab identified as effectively addressing equity practices. This strategy is data driven. The purpose of this approach is to identify student barriers and develop an action plan that promotes student success. The stakeholders are faculty, administrators, staff and

students "linking student data to student success through budget and strategy planning across institutional practices and student outcome" (2010, p 8).

It is the responsibility of the institution to understand the cultural identity of its population. The second student equity practice, *Individual and Institutional Cultural Competence,* enables the institution and students to develop an environment on campus and in the classroom that results in equitable outcomes. The third equity practice discussed in this review is *Course, Program and Universal Design for Learning (UDL).* These strategies are universally accessible and beneficial for all students. UDL examines barriers, which occur for diverse student populations, and implement accessible instructional applications that employ a student-centered approach to address them (Goldrick-Rab, 2010).

Further practices that encourage student equity and equitable outcome are Institution-wide *dialog and data*. The researchers reported that leaders at Santa Ana College and Long Beach City College used these methods to encourage conversation about local diversity and student equity. The Center for Urban Education (CUE) support disaggregating student outcome by race and gender in order identify gaps in student achievement. This data driven approach is recommended to make the inequitable problems visible and approachable. Along with data discovery, institutions must be willing to examine their biases that may be "indicators that are structural or system focused, policy oriented or programmatic cultural understandings and Individual perspectives on equity should move to a broader perspective of institutional programs and systems to promote student equity and student success" (Goldrick-Rab, 2010, p. 18).

Data analysis helps educational leaders chart measureable statistical outcomes that are relevant to student success. Institutions must examine underrepresented populations and disaggregate students who may form subgroups based on language of origin. Students' academic achievement must be measured to find retention and matriculation trends in higher-level transfer math and English courses, which lead to completion of degree and certificate programs (Goldrick-Rab, 2010).

CCCs have been tasked with recognizing the impact on teaching and learning in higher education. By analyzing gaps in student success CCCs can begin to transform assessment practices and curriculum design to promote increased achievement in the diverse underrepresented student populations it serves. It is this analysis, which will help to support all students by narrowing the gap, by increasing student course completion and supporting student goals in certificate and degree programs.

Carpenter and Hunter (1981) introduced written discourse to address students entering the community college system with limited writing skills. The authors introduced an instructional approach to improve writing focused on English As a Second Language learners (ESL). In the ESL classroom environment, the learner

who has been exposed to complex writing concepts and critical thinking exercises in their native language, may have limited ability in reading and comprehending the complexity of writing a second language paper.

By engaging the student in cultural relevance through discourse in "sequence of thought, expressed in participle language functions, that are used in recognized types of instruction" (Carpenter & Hunter, 1981, p. 426). The student can then draw parallels to personal and cultural knowledge, allowing critical thinking skills.

The results of the research study showed a connection between cognitive skills and writing skills. The researchers did not collect data on the success of teaching approaches. Access to language and learning can take place when the student has a connection to his or her background and there is cultural meaning. When students are able to reflect on content and how it fits into their cultural framework they are able relate it to the purpose of learning (Atkinson, 2014).

Equity minded institutions should invite all stakeholders and use a data driven approach to close the gaps in ESL and Basic Skills courses. A content approach that takes into account background and cultural significance could offer students meaning, language and purpose in learning.

References

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