

Chapter 17

Engaging Inclusive Excellence: Creating a College With an Equity Mindset

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ABSTRACT

It is the role of community college leaders to guide their campuses in assessing outcomes for students. Additionally, the diversity of our students requires institutions to significantly improve their effectiveness in educating students who have been underrepresented in higher education. Community colleges must more systematically examine their practice in terms of how students experience the campus and how we can intervene to improve student outcomes. Campus initiatives promoting cultural competence, equity, and social justice cannot be delivered to students in isolation. Faculty and staff diversity must increase, and employees must engage in self-reflection to examine their own assumptions and have courageous conversations about race and ethnicity in higher education. The impetus for these initiatives must come from leadership and be articulated at all levels of the organization. This chapter describes the process used to raise cultural awareness, increase cultural competence, and create an equity mindset at a community college.

INTRODUCTION

College initiatives promoting cultural competence focused on increasing global awareness, equity, and social justice in higher education cannot be delivered to students in isolation. As the magnitude and complexity of diversity has grown in the United States, belief in the power of broadened perspectives about diversity has spurred institutions of higher education to reinstate equity and diversity initiatives on their campuses. These efforts are often seen as both a practical and an ethical imperative. Further

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-1933-1.ch017

refinements to diversity and Inclusive Excellence (IE) initiatives must be more comprehensive, as recent litigation and student unrest have forced colleges and universities to rethink their approaches in this area (Milem, Chang, & Antonio, 2005). At campuses with very diverse student populations, it is often assumed that the work has already been done. However, in order to truly achieve the goals of increasing cultural competence and IE, the college-wide efforts must go beyond simply assembling a diverse student body and providing multicultural activities, events, and curriculum.

In the current social and political contexts in which community colleges operate, implementing high-stakes accountability and defined performance outcomes has gained broad support in public and public policy arenas (Bensimon, Dowd, Longanecker, & Witham 2012; Dowd & Tong 2007; Peña, Bensimon, & Colyar 2006). In many states, these outcomes are, or will very soon be, tied to performance funding (Hillman, Tandberg, & Gross, 2014). Performance funding is a higher education funding model that bases allocations or increases in state or federal funds on college outcomes such as student persistence, retention, graduation, and employment (Dougherty, Natow, & Vega, 2012). Performance funding is also seen in K-12 funding models, and although difficult to sustain, it is increasingly popular among politicians and the general public, indicating the context of increasing demand for accountability from state educational institutions (Dougherty et al., 2012). It is the role of community college leaders to guide their campuses in becoming better at assessing their impact on and outcomes for students. This requires community colleges to more systematically examine their practice in terms of how different groups of students are experiencing their college and how institutions of higher education can intervene to improve student outcomes. As the nation's college student population becomes more and more diverse, institutions must also document their effectiveness with educating groups of students who have traditionally been underrepresented in higher education and close equity gaps.

This chapter will describe the efforts of a community college with an extremely diverse student population to increase diversity in faculty and staff, to focus on equity in student outcomes, and to increase cultural competence of all college groups in order to achieve IE. This college created an environment that values IE, first by having a leadership team that supports the development of an equity mindset; developing an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Council; having human resources that creates a structure for inclusion through professional development; and finally by having the Office of Student Life create an atmosphere of inclusion through its programming and leadership development efforts. Increasing staff and faculty IE efforts will lead to more opportunities for students to become culturally competent.

BACKGROUND

The College

The college provides lifelong educational opportunities; prepares the current workforce; and promotes excellence in teaching, learning, and service. Career and technical programs offer state-of-the-art technologies for students to enhance their learning and employment opportunities. Students are provided with the opportunity to choose new and traditional programs, while also offering online classes and degrees via online instruction. College leadership is focused on student success and accountability. The college's service area includes 325,000 people in a 350-square-mile area. The student population, which is about 9,000, reflects the diversity of the community. The college is a majority student of color institution and serves a diverse population of students (Table 1), many of whom are immigrants to the community. After

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