Advancing Equity Through Guided Pathways Series Discussion Guide #5:

Reframing Classroom Instruction to Engage a Diverse Community of Students

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Introduction

Community college classrooms can be a profoundly intimidating learning space for first-time, new, or returning adult learners who seek a new credential, degree, or career path. These unique classroom environments challenge community college instructors to adapt how they instruct these diverse students.[i] [ii] Within this dynamic educational setting, community college systems face unprecedented expectations to educate and prepare a student population that is increasingly diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, native language, and age.[iii] As part of Guided Pathways implementation and other reform efforts, committed educational leaders, policymakers, and faculty members are working to create policies and programs that address and improve educational outcomes for these diverse learners by focusing on the instructional paradigm.

There are compelling reasons to examine community college instruction practices. First, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, the demographic racial/ethnic profile of community college faculty often fails to reflect the students they serve.[iii] Next, faculty instructors may often lack sensitivity to the learning needs of racially and ethnically diverse learners.[iv] [v] Furthermore, educational outcomes disparities remain between racial/ethnic groups by gender and other individual identity-based traits (e.g., age, veteran status, first-generation). [vi] [vii] [viii] [ix]

Strategies for Reframing Classroom Instruction

Guided Pathways Pillar 4, Ensure Learning, emphasizes the importance of an active, relevant, and student-centered pedagogy. By implementing innovative instructional techniques, instructors can moderately create better relationships with their students, improve classroom

How To Use This Guide…

The *Advancing Equity through Guided Pathways* series aims to foster critical campus conversations about increasing student equity under a Guided Pathways umbrella. Institutional redesign teams can…

- Read the introductory framing on capitalizing student strengths and experiences throughout their college onboarding

- Use the discussion questions to facilitate conversations related to planning and action

- Conduct the research tasks to help better understand their students' experience of this topic

Some guides, including this resource, address issues in the student experience aligned to the stages of the [Completion by Design Loss/Momentum Framework](#), while others address issues of culture and leadership. Across all guides, authors bring their own unique perspectives on and approach to the issue. No guide is intended as the definitive word on its topic.

For related content, discussion questions, and research tasks, review *Creating Active and Culturally-Responsive Learning Environments* (Guide 6).

For all guides and additional information on the series, visit www.ncii-improve.com.

dynamics, and strengthen learning outcomes. However, community college instructors need to develop a commitment to caring, supporting, and inspiring diverse learners to achieve their educational goals and aspirations. Towards that goal, faculty can focus on five areas to reframe the instructional paradigm.

Accept our implicit bias.
While there is unprecedented access to community colleges and enrollment of diverse student learners, the demographic profile of instructional staff does not reflect these students. This suggests that there are community college instructors who are teaching students who are different from their own identity-based traits (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity, economic status). Therefore, instructors need to accept that they possess implicit biases that affect how they engage and work with diverse learners. In order to reframe the instructional paradigm, faculty members need to address how their implicit bias may affect their understanding of students in their classroom.

Build awareness of complex student identities.
Coupled with the acceptance that we all possess implicit bias, faculty members need to develop an awareness of their diverse learners. The concept of diverse learners has evolved into a recognition of complex intersectional identities. These differences include identity-based traits that are invisible (e.g., financial, food, and housing insecurities; parental duties; veteran status; mental health and learning challenges) and visible (e.g., phenotype, weight, appearance, language dialects) traits that we all possess. In order to reframe the instructional paradigm, faculty members need to know their students' names and show genuine interest in learning who they are and knowing their story, which are especially important for historically marginalized student learners. Most importantly, diverse learners care less about an instructor's expertise and simply want to know that the instructor cares about them as a person and learner.

Address classroom learning dynamics.
There is ample education research that highlights the deleterious effects of a chilly climate, micro-aggression behaviors and language, and outdated didactic approaches.[x] Faculty members need to proactively address classroom learning dynamics to encourage students to learn from both the instructor and their student peers. In order to reframe the instructional paradigm, faculty members need to increase micro-affirmation behaviors and language, enhance positive peer learning opportunities, and create learning lectures that engage different learning styles.

Advance a student-centered learning philosophy.
Beyond the broader notions of classroom dynamics, faculty members need to empower students through a student-centered learning philosophy.[xi] This requires that faculty embrace that course learning outcomes should not be limited to subject-matter competency. Consideration should also be given to how students experience the content of a course and include subject matter application, self-directed inquiry, diverse scholar voices, and passion projects to inspire and empower them as lifelong learners.[xii] In order to reframe the learning paradigm, instructors must incorporate a student-centered philosophy that shifts away from faculty-centered teaching and empowers students to take greater responsibility in their learning.

Advocate for faculty professional development.
The final area expands outside classroom boundaries and focuses on professional development for faculty members. Unfortunately, few faculty members have the opportunity to learn about instructional design, development, and delivery. When faculty members embrace the need to learn critical concepts that enhance and expand their instructional capabilities, they advance the likelihood that all students can learn in their courses. This professional development can include concepts such as classroom conflict management, learning disability awareness, improved assessment and evaluation methods, and interpersonal communication. Reframing the instructional paradigm requires a commitment to being a lifelong learner of instructional

improvement and the recognition that faculty members never truly perfect the complex process of being an effective instructor.

Guided Pathways provides a framework for community colleges to adapt and thrive with an increasingly diverse student population. The most critical aspect of improving educational outcomes for these traditionally marginalized student groups is for faculty members to examine their instructional paradigm. There is no panacea to address this complex layered educational issue, but the strategies outlined above can serve as a catalyst for discussions, institutional reflection, and academic instruction improvements. The composite of these efforts validates the voices of our marginalized students and bolsters our work to increase their college credential, degree, and career outcomes.

How to Get Started…

Campuses can use the following Discussion Questions and Research Tasks to advance planning and action to reframe classroom instruction through Guided Pathways implementation.

Discussion Questions

1. When you think of your own identity-based (invisible and visible) traits, what demographic or personal aspects are most important to you? Where do these characteristics align with your students? What types of implicit bias do you bring to your classroom? How could these biases influence how you interact and teach these students?

2. How well do you know your students? What has helped you to better understand the unique experiences and strengths each one brings to your classroom?

3. How do you foster a positive learning environment? What types of micro-affirmation behaviors and language, positive peer learning opportunities, and diverse learning styles engagement could you integrate into your classes?

4. What types of learning outcomes do you emphasize beyond academic content? How could you help students apply the subject matter, engage in self-directed inquiry, and pursue passion projects? How can you include diverse scholar voices and empower lifelong learners?

5. What types of professional development would enable you to be more effective in engaging your students and addressing implicit bias?

Research Tasks

1. Determine the demographic make-up of your student population. How similar is it to the demographic make-up of your faculty? Of your financial aid and admissions counselors and academic advisors? Of your senior-level administrators?

2. Identify educational completion rates based on intersectional identities (e.g. African American and Latinx male students, veteran women, or part-time enrolled students).

3. Assess how many classes include learning outcomes that go beyond subject-specific topics. What types of learning outcomes address the way in which students learn?

4. Determine which academic or technical programs graduate the greatest number of marginalized students. What programs or policies do they implement to achieve student success?

5. Review the types of teaching-focused professional development currently offered by the college. Who participates in these professional development sessions?

Endnotes

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