

Advancing Equity Through Guided Pathways Series Discussion Guide #3:

*Leading Culture Change to
Promote Equity:
Perspectives from a White CEO*

Bill Scroggins, Mt. San Antonio College,
with Introduction by Kay McClenney,
American Association of Community Colleges

SERIES OVERVIEW

The Advancing Equity through Guided Pathways series aims to foster critical campus conversations about how to close persistent gaps for historically marginalized students. Developed by the National Center for Inquiry & Improvement for the California Guided Pathways Project, the series was generously supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, and the Foundation for California Community Colleges.



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Leading Culture Change to Promote Equity: Perspectives from a White CEO

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By Bill Scroggins, Mt. San Antonio College with Introduction by Kay McClenney, American Association of Community Colleges

Introduction

*Under any set of circumstances, leading an institution in work to attain equity in student outcomes is a task fraught with challenges. Yet, those challenges are different for chief executive officers (CEOs) of color and white CEOs. College leaders of color sometimes report hearing that they “care only about ‘their people,’” or that they are angry or embittered, while “their people” may criticize them for doing too little, or even “crossing over to the other side.” For white leaders, the criticisms may be that they do not or cannot recognize the pervasiveness of racial injustice and their own unconscious bias; that they attend too little—or too much—to inequities embodied in systems, policies, and practices; or that they have appropriated the equity agenda from its rightful advocates. How can leaders lead in this context, particularly as Guided Pathways reforms require particular focus on equity-minded change? We explore both perspectives on this issue in this guide and its companion, *Fostering Culture Change to Promote Equity: Perspectives from a CEO of Color* (Guide 2).*

Rethinking My Understanding of Equity

The meaning of equity has evolved as American society has changed. From the exception clause in the 13th Amendment, to the necessary expansions of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, to today’s debates on immigrant rights, the national understanding of the term “equity” has reflected the challenges of attaining social justice in our culture. This evolution influenced my own approach to leadership as a white male college president and has been a major influence on my implementation of Guided Pathways.

That influence began when I started at University of California, Los Angeles in 1965 and realized that what had

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 creating student connection and belonging upon college entry
- Use the discussion questions to facilitate conversations related to planning and action
- Conduct the research tasks to help better understand your 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 *Fostering Faculty Diversity* (Guide 4) and *Leading Culture Change to Promote Equity: Perspectives from a CEO of Color* (Guide 2).

For all guides and additional information on the series, visit <http://www.ncii-improve.com/>.

come relatively easily for me was a continuing struggle for those who were not white men. The patent inequity struck a chord in me, which eventually led to my career in community colleges.

That journey included leading College of the Sequoias to join Achieving the Dream. The combination of data-driven research and planning with both an outcomes focus and an equity lens was a quantum leap for me as a leader. California's funding of the Student Success Act (2012) and Student Equity (2014) afforded an opportunity to add innovative practices to "move the needle" on the equity gap.

The key data tool of California's Student Success and Student Equity initiatives was disproportionate impact. Early in my presidency at Mt. San Antonio College (Mt. SAC), the institution analyzed six-year graduation rates for six racial/ethnic groups and asked, "Does each group succeed at least 80% as well as other groups?" No group was consistently within 80% of the success rates of white students. Data demonstrated that four years of Student Success and Student Equity support produced measurable improvement for target groups. However, when considering the disproportionate impact data, large equity gaps persisted. Progress was made on performance outcomes, but not on equity. A deeper solution was needed.

The inability to close the racial/ethnic gap presented a challenge for my leadership. My understanding of equity at that point was based on a belief that more resources and support would "level the playing field" and close the gaps across groups. I needed to reassess my understanding of equity.

Shifting My Leadership Approach to Focus on Student Experience

In 2015, Mt. SAC joined the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) Pathways project. The focus was on the student experience and the barriers that students encountered in the journey from first contact to completion. Our Pathways team began to look at how students experienced college processes. Examination of disaggregated data revealed that in many cases, support and interventions provided by students, staff, and faculty who shared the background and life experiences of a particular student group (e.g., undocumented, foster youth, nonbinary gender, veterans, non-native speakers, minority males, etc.) were much more effective in strengthening both persistence and completion. For example, see my presentation [Matching Support to Student Need](#).ⁱ

Based on this work, the Pathways team began fostering a culture of change at Mt. SAC. We needed those across the campus—and new hires—to understand at a deep level the importance of equity and their role in building an equity-minded culture. As president, I supported the work by funding targeted professional development—especially inspiring and disruptive guest speakers—and by improving the equity-based hiring process, particularly through revised job descriptions, Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) training, and national recruiting. Finally, I used every opportunity on campus to speak of my own privileged history and my own equity-mindedness "conversion."

The college continues to address this evolved understanding through "equity mindedness," that is, the importance of providing to each student both academic and life support to achieve their full potential. Find examples of work directed at this outcome from Mt. SAC in the table below. This list might serve as a tool to inventory equity mindedness strategies at other colleges, helping to evolve approaches to equity beyond providing equal *opportunity* to supporting each student's ability to travel the pathway to completion—the Guided Pathway model.

Mt. SAC Efforts to Foster Equity-Mindedness

Revised the college [Mission and Core Values](#)ⁱⁱ

Resolved each student's [financial aid eligibility](#)ⁱⁱⁱ

Created faculty equity-minded [communities of practice](#)^{iv}

Revised [recruiting materials](#)^v to emphasize equity

Provided student success and equity [support for need-based cohorts](#)^{vi}

Used all-college meetings to highlight implicit and institutional bias (see examples [here](#) and [here](#))^{vii}

Trained [hiring committees on evaluating job performance](#)^{viii}, not job history

Provided academic [support integrated with instruction](#)^{ix}

Offered [academic support centers, supplemental instruction, tutors in the classroom](#)^x

Supported [authentic messaging](#)^{xi} with peer tutors, advisors, and mentors, particularly in bridge and learning community programs

Disaggregated [student data](#)^{xii} for college planning and strategy development

Held a [college summit for critical conversations](#)^{xiii} about embracing student equity

My leadership now involves facilitation of equity mindedness, inspiration in telling my own story, and conviction in providing opportunities for the campus to face the reality of implicit and institutional bias. Also key is support for professional development, improved hiring processes, and most importantly, design of Guided Pathways that provide each student with academic and life support to reach their full potential.

How to Get Started...

Campus leaders can use the following Discussion Questions to reflect on their own efforts to lead culture change to promote equity, particularly in the context of Guided Pathways implementation.

Discussion Questions

1. What revisions in our college mission and goals statements would better express a central commitment to equity?
2. How might we revise “student-facing” materials (e.g., recruitment brochures, website, etc.) to more fully reflect the college commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion?
3. How can we embed discipline-appropriate academic supports into the metamajors developed through guided pathways work?

4. How and when will we provide college-wide professional development to address unconscious bias?

Endnotes

ⁱ https://www.mtsac.edu/president/cabinet-notes/2018-19/Matching_Support_to_Student_Need_101818.pdf

ⁱⁱ https://www.mtsac.edu/president/cabinet-notes/2019-20/Draft_Mission_Core_Values_Revision_Highlighted_111519.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.mtsac.edu/financialaid/>

^{iv} https://www.mtsac.edu/president/cabinet-notes/2019-20/Faculty_Coordinators_Fall_2019_AB_705_Community_of_Practice.pdf

^v https://www.mtsac.edu/president/cabinet-notes/2019-20/Faculty_Recruitment_Brochure.pdf

^{vi} https://www.mtsac.edu/president/cabinet-notes/2018-19/Matching_Support_to_Student_Need_101818.pdf

^{vii} https://prodweb.mtsac.edu/prodapex/f?p=205:15:::NO:15:P15_ACTIVITYID:9122,
https://prodweb.mtsac.edu/prodapex/f?p=205:15:::NO:15:P15_ACTIVITYID:9630

^{viii} https://www.mtsac.edu/president/cabinet-notes/2019-20/Screening_Committee_Member_and_EEO_Representative_Training.pdf

^{ix} https://www.mtsac.edu/president/cabinet-notes/2019-20/Academic_Support_Centers_Report_041119.pdf

^x <https://www.mtsac.edu/asac/tutorialservices.html>

^{xi} https://www.mtsac.edu/bridge/bridge_spring_fall.html

^{xii} https://www.mtsac.edu/president/cabinet-notes/2019-20/Student_Equity_Plan_2019-22_Mt_SAC.pdf

^{xiii} https://www.mtsac.edu/president/cabinet-notes/2019-20/Equity_Minded_Inclusion_Summit_Meeting_Student_Needs_FINAL.pdf