Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence: Intentionality and Accountability

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ABSTRACT (ENGLISH)

To help build capacity at higher education institutions to address inequities in student outcomes, AAC&U launched a multiyear institutional change effort, Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence: Campus-Based Strategies for Student Success, funded by Strada Education Network and Great Lakes Higher Education Corporation &Affiliates. The thirteen campus teams represent various institutional types, and the projects activities focus on addressing equity gaps through the following objectives: * Increase access to and participation in high-impact practices (HIPs). * Increase completion, retention, and graduation rates for low-income students, first-generation students, adult learners, and minority students. * Increase achievement of learning outcomes for underserved students using direct assessment measures, including AAC&U s VALUE rubrics. * Increase student awareness and understanding of the value of guided learning pathways that incorporate HIPs for workforce preparation and engaged citizenship. At the Equity Academy, campus teams examined institutional data and addressed the following questions: * How can we build capacity for educators to ask and respond to questions about equity that can lead to campus change? * How can we move the dialogue about student learning and success from deficit-minded approaches to asset-based approaches? * How do we motivate faculty and staff to address equity as intrinsic to higher educations mission? * What does it mean to be an equity-minded practitioner?

FULL TEXT

Shirley Chisholm, the first black woman elected to US Congress, once said, "You don't make progress by standing on the sidelines, whimpering and complaining. You make progress by implementing ideas." In 2015, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) released a series of publications focused on the equity imperative in higher education. One of these publications, Step Up and Lead for Equity: What Higher Education Can Do to Reverse Our Deepening Divides, highlighted the continuing (and in some cases expanding) inequities in educational outcomes and served as a call to action.

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* Increase access to and participation in high-impact practices (HIPs).

* Increase completion, retention, and graduation rates for low-income students, first-generation students, adult learners, and minority students.

* Increase achievement of learning outcomes for underserved students using direct assessment measures, including AAC&U s VALUE rubrics.

* Increase student awareness and understanding of the value of guided learning pathways that incorporate HIPs for workforce preparation and engaged citizenship.

AAC&U, in partnership with the Center for Urban Education (CUE) at the University of Southern California, is helping

campuses identify baseline evidence about existing campus efforts to track, improve, and close equity gaps in the achievement of key learning and achievement outcomes for all students.

The educators participating in this initiative are leading change on their campuses and building institutional capacity to ask and to address the difficult questions about equity and student success. In October 2015, campus teams participated in an Equity Academy, facilitated by AAC&U and CUE, in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Prior to the equity academy, the teams (I) collected data, based on the previously stated objectives, to examine equity gaps; (2) utilized AAC&U's Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence: A Campus Guide for Self-Study and Planning; and (3) read a number of equity-focused publications, including America's Unmet Promise: The Imperative for Equity in Higher Education (written by CUE and published by AAC&U).

At the Equity Academy, campus teams examined institutional data and addressed the following questions:

* How can we build capacity for educators to ask and respond to questions about equity that can lead to campus change?

* How can we move the dialogue about student learning and success from deficit-minded approaches to asset-based approaches?

* How do we motivate faculty and staff to address equity as intrinsic to higher educations mission?

* What does it mean to be an equity-minded practitioner? What does it mean to have an equity-minded pedagogy?

Addressing equity and inclusive excellence requires clarity in language and goals, intentionality, and accountability. Those who engage in this endeavor must ask themselves: How are equity and excellence defined at our institution? 7 does our campus define and model inclusion? Who is currently excluded from achieving excellence?

Without a clear understanding of how the institution and educators define and value equity and inclusive excellence as priorities for student learning and success, a campus risks the possibility that the work will be done in isolation of strategic goals and visioning. Without clear equity goals to promote accountability to monitor progress, the aspiration of addressing equity and making excellence inclusive may not translate into sustainable improvements in campus practice.

Through the vision and practice of inclusive excellence, AAC&U calls for higher education to address diversity, inclusion, and equity as critical to the wellbeing of democratic culture. Making excellence inclusive is thus an active process through which colleges and universities achieve excellence in learning, teaching, student development, institutional functioning, and engagement in local and global communities. The action of making excellence inclusive requires that we uncover inequities in student success, identify effective educational practices, and embed such practices systematically for sustained institutional change.

The campus teams that are part of this institutional change effort are prioritizing definable and measurable equity goals as a key part of accountability and shared visioning. After 2015's Equity Academy, each campus team developed campus action plans that include quantifiable equity goals and interventions to alleviate the gaps in student achievement and learning outcomes.

In this special issue of Peer Review, the campus teams share their evolving strategies for examining equity and how they are accelerating broad systemic-change efforts. We invite readers of this publication to join in the continuing conversation on what it will take to advance equity and make excellence inclusive.

Sidebar

"While postsecondary institutions are becoming more diverse, the degree attainment gap for low-income individuals is widening. In 2013, individuals from high-income families were eight times more likely to earn a bachelor's degree by age twenty-four than were those from low-income families. In 1970, the high-income individuals were more than six times more likely to earn a bachelor's degree. In the intervening 43 years, bachelor degree attainment among those from wealthy families nearly doubled while it barely moved for those in the poorest families. "

Source: Pell Institute for the Study of Opportuni ty in Higher Education and PennAHEAD, Indicators of Higher Education Equity in the United States (2015)

"The vast majority of undergraduates felt safe and comfortable being themselves at their institution, and at least three-quarters felt valued and part of a campus community. However, certain populations-such as those with a gender identity other than man or woman as well as African American, Alaska Native or American Indian, and multiracial students-expressed less agreement with statements about safety and belonging."

Alexander C. McCormick, Indiana University-Bloomington

Source: National Survey of Student Engagement, Engagement Insights: Survey Findings on the Quality of Undergraduate Education (2016)

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LINKS

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