

DATE: March 14, 2015

TO: Dr. Dave Rule, President of Bellevue College

FROM: Erik Herberg, University of Washington

RE: Educational Equity and Faculty Professional Development

Introduction

Community and technical colleges play a unique role in the educational pipeline because they are the most affordable and accessible postsecondary institutions for many marginalized populations (Chang, 2005). Because of this, community colleges have a more racially and ethnically diverse student climate, challenging these institutions to be more actively committed to the achievement outcomes of underrepresented students—student populations with significantly low retention and completion rates (Welton & La Londe, 2013). A model that has been increasing in popularity to combat these challenges in higher education is “Educational Equity” (Zirkel, 2008). Educational equity is based on the idea that institutions can develop an educational experience for underrepresented students in higher education that can help them acquire the skills needed to tackle social issues within the institution and become more actively engaged in their education (Lardner, 2005).

In 2013, Bellevue College put an educational equity training program into affect, giving faculty the opportunity to learn about educational equity’s framework and how to integrate it into the classroom. So far, this program has helped instructors become more culturally aware of the inequities underrepresented students experience in higher education, as well as the way an instructor’s own identity affects the classroom environment. With that in mind, this memorandum lays out a case for equity training

expansion at Bellevue College and championing a movement to design an equity training program that can be used across all King County Community and Technical Colleges (KCCTCs). Moreover, this memorandum explains how invested efforts into understanding educational equity and the effectiveness of equity training at Bellevue College can heighten the quality of faculty (Fox & Gay, 1995), increase the retention rates of underrepresented students, and their continuation along the P-20 pipeline.

Background

Educational Equity, the P-20 Pipeline, & Community Colleges

In recent years, higher education researchers have become increasingly interested in educational equity and how educational equity leadership can improve underrepresented students' academic outcomes (Lardner & Malnarich, 2008; Welton & La Londe, 2013). Educational equity leaders are those who are critically conscious of marginalized students' experiences, believe that anyone is capable of succeeding in academia regardless of their disadvantaged background, focus more on the internal issues that perpetuate inequity, and focus less on the deficits of marginalized students and focus more on their individual, cultural identities (Welton & La Londe, 2013). A growing concern about the need for educational equity leadership in community colleges pertains to the trend of academic underperformance by students of color and the roadblocks preventing them from continuing along the P-20 pipeline (Rendón, 2002). In short, the P-20 pipeline emphasizes the "seamless transition" between educational levels, and ventures to create a system of practices that supports individual student success and college and career readiness. Similar to educational equity, the P-20 pipeline focuses its efforts on the experiences of marginalized student populations, and brings attention to the

ways institutions can foster leadership and develop culturally conscious practices that provide more support to these students.

Historically, students from underrepresented or marginalized populations are at greater risk for dropping out of college or academically underachieving when compared to White students (Welton & La Londe, 2013). Many reasons for this can be attributed to “achievement gaps” that occur in the K-12 pipeline—kindergarten through high school—that are caused by the lack of tools available to disadvantaged students for teaching them *how* to succeed in higher education (Venezia & Kirst, 2005). Because of their accessibility, community colleges offer a pathway for underrepresented groups to continue or re-enter the educational pipeline, and can help improve the persistence of these students in the expanded P-20 pipeline (S. Schrepfer, personal communication, February 10, 2015).

Bellevue College and KCCTCs play a unique role in Washington State’s higher education system and the education pipeline because of their diverse student climates. Table 1 shows that in Fall 2013, of the 160,466 students who reported race in all Washington community and technical colleges, nearly 55,000 were attending KCCTCs (Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges [SBCTC], 2013). Moreover, 50.2 percent of KCCTC students who reported race were students of color, and accounted for 40 percent of all students of color in the State’s community and technical college system. At Bellevue College alone, 46.4 percent of its student body comes from racially underrepresented populations, making it the 5th most diverse community college in King County (SBCTC, 2013). Being institutions with larger underrepresented student populations, community colleges can be more vulnerable to

equity issues, especially issues of students exiting the education pipeline prior to completing a degree or certification (Welton & La Londe, 2013).

Table 1: KCCTC STUDENTS BY RACE AND ETHNIC BACKGROUND

King County Community & Technical Colleges (KCCTC)	Total Student Reporting Race (Fall 2013)	Total Students of Color (Fall 2013)
Bellevue College	11,248	5,216
Cascadia College	2,368	900
Green River CC	6,033	2,526
Highline College	7,274	5,214
Lake Washington	3,575	1,240
Renton Technical	3,878	2,241
Seattle Central	5,820	3,339
Seattle North	4,540	1,882
Seattle South	5,063	2,678
Seattle Voc. Inst.	438	383
Shoreline CC	4,619	1,941
KCCTC Total	54,856	27,560 (50.2%)
Washington State Total	160,446	64,962 (40.5%)

Source: Data gathered from Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges [SBCTC], 2013 Fall Quarter Enrollment and Staffing Report

Although policies have been made to help fund and gain access into higher education, they do not tackle equity issues within institutions, nor do they truly help marginalized students continue along the P-20 pipeline (Welton & La Londe, 2013). Internal issues revolving around student engagement and educational equity routinely prevent minoritized students from succeeding along the pipeline continuum (Welton & La Londe, 2013). A growing concern among community college faculty regarding educational equity is that the information regularly presented in classes is part of an existing curriculum that is not equitable (S. Schrepfer, personal communication, February 10, 2015); inequity makes it challenging for underrepresented students to engage and be responsive in class, increasing the likelihood of academic underachievement (Gay, 2002). Without proper instructor knowledge of these inequities and cultural biases in their curriculums, it threatens underrepresented students' education, which continued to go

unnoticed or unreformed, can negatively impact their classroom engagement (Fox & Gay, 1995).

Educational Equity Training

Since 2013, equity training has served as an intervention program at Bellevue College for faculty to make their curriculum more culturally responsive to the institution's increasingly diverse classrooms. The training has also become a marquee professional development program offered on a quarterly basis, and offers a stipend to faculty for completing the training. The workshop has been facilitated by either an administrator or faculty member, and is open to part-time, full-time, and tenured faculty participation. To date, Bellevue College is the only institution to offer this type of program across all 11 KCCTCs. As a professional development workshop, it was specifically designed to educate faculty about the integration of educational equity into both curriculum and pedagogy. Upon completion, the program assesses participants' learning through self-reflection and having faculty create a product (i.e. syllabi) that they must present to their colleagues—one that follows the school's "educational equity criteria" (S. Schrepfer, personal communication, February 10, 2015). So far, faculty leaders at Bellevue College praise the workshop and have noticed positive changes in faculty leadership, as well as an increased awareness of educational equity in course curriculums.

Challenges

Research & Data

Being a relatively new concept, research on Educational Equity is sparse, especially in its relation to the P-20 pipeline, making available data to truly understand its

impact difficult to gather—even more so for understanding effective equity training programs. One of the primary issues concerning data is the information that gives insight to the assessment practices of how to evaluate the student outcomes in regard to educational equity (Núñez & Oliva, 2009). Currently, Bellevue College's equity training has little data on its program's effectiveness, relying heavily on participants' self-reflections upon completing the course. The lack of measurable, quantitative data impacts the program's ability to argue and support its continuation and future development. Moreover, the equity training program at Bellevue College has not set any measurable outcomes to identify what goals the program would like to achieve, and aside from course evaluations, there is no way to assess the performance of instructors who have completed equity training and their students' outcomes.

Commitment & Collaboration

When speaking with a Bellevue College representative, commitment and collaboration are key challenges facing the development of equity training. Right now, faculty leaders agree that community colleges have been making respectable steps toward incorporating equity into the schools' values, missions, and strategic plans, yet the active efforts toward integrating equity into everyday practices has been suboptimal (S. Schrepfer, personal communication, February 10, 2015). Moreover, an educational equity leader at Bellevue College believes that equity training should be seen across multiple institutions, making the challenge of commitment and collaboration even more evident. Issues concerning educational equity are not unique to Bellevue College and are ubiquitous to all community colleges (Welton & La Londe, 2013). And just as the lack of research hurts the advancement of equity training, the lack of commitment and dialogue

between KCCTCs concerning educational equity can thwart its advancement as well (S. Schrepfer, personal communication, March 4, 2015).

Funding

After the 2014 – 2015 academic year, Bellevue College's equity training will no longer have the funding to operate. The department that funds equity training is currently funded by a three-year programming grant (\$372,000) from Bellevue College, which is on its final year. Due to limited state funding to the institution, funding professional development programs has become a salient issue within higher education as institutions continue to see decreased state budgets and increased competition for program funding (Perna, Klein, & McLendon, 2014).

Recommendations

The recommended course of action for increasing educational equity awareness and the continuation of equity training at Bellevue College considers taking a regionally collective approach at improving the local environment. Specifically, this memorandum suggests that Bellevue College serve as a “backbone support organization” for a educational equity collective impact group by appointing Bellevue College leaders to spearhead the advancement of equity training, and then reach out to surrounding KCCTCs to join as stakeholders (Kania & Kramer, 2011). Collective impact groups have been shown to make positive differences in communities on a variety of social issues (Hanleybrown, Kania, & Kramer, 2010), and by assembling a collective impact group, Bellevue College can tackle all of the current challenges facing educational equity and equity training development while constructing a platform for a larger, static equity training model. The goals of collective impact groups are to bring leaders together from different agencies that share a common agenda and want to solve a particular problem

(Kania & Kramer, 2011), and a collective impact group composed of equity leaders across KCCTCs can help manage the issues of educational equity across their institutions in the following ways:

- (1) *Data sharing* (Kania & Kramer, 2011). As a collective group, leaders can discuss the ways in which they can rigorously assess the educational equity needs of their campuses, and reach agreement on what measurable outcomes will be most indicative of an effective and successful equity training. After collecting the agreed upon data, the impact group can design an effective, coherent training curriculum that can be used across institutions. Further, after implementing their curriculum, continued data sharing can include discussing the strengths and vulnerabilities of their processes, and can help restructure the curriculum where it is needed. This data can be collected via course evaluations, needs-assessment surveys (Neuber et al., 1980), and reflective surveys for faculty after completing their equity training.
- (2) *Commitment, collaboration, and accountability*. Collective impact groups reinforce a sense of accountability and rely on continuous communication as a means to motivate each stakeholder and support one another's efforts (Kania & Kramer, 2011). Cultivating trust based on the commitment to a common vision is the cornerstone to maintaining the urgency of an issue and the action that needs to be taken to find solutions. Additionally, continuous communication and accountability reinforces the reciprocity of sharing data and the continued development of effective programming (Levielle, 2006).

(3) *Funding*. With Bellevue College as the “backbone support organization”, they can provide the foundational funding (Kania & Kramer, 2011), however, the group would need to seek additional funding sources as the number of stakeholders increases. With multiple institutions involved, funding options such as the Faculty Learning Community (FLC) grant through SBCTC’s Assessment Teaching and Learning Department can help finance a portion of its operations. In the grant’s description, SBCTC encourages multiple institutions to apply for a single FLC grant noting, “while an FLC may focus strictly on building a campus-based or department-based cohort of colleagues committed to an area of common professional learning, SBCTC encourages application from multiple colleges as a way of strengthening cross-campus collaboration” (SBCTC, 2014, p. 1).

Conclusion

Bellevue College, along with all KCCTCs, plays an important and unique role in Washington State’s higher education system. As reported earlier, 50.2 percent of KCCTC students who reported race were students of color, with Bellevue College’s students of color accounting for 46.4 percent of its entire student body. Because of the issues and concerns related to educational equity and underrepresented students exiting the education pipeline due to educational inequity, there is a need for rigorous assessment and evaluation of educational equity in community colleges. The discontinuity between the students who *do* and the students who *do not* feel they are able to engage in course curricula is alarming, and equity training gives Bellevue College the opportunity to improve the experiences and academic outcomes for nearly half of its student body—all while investing in the professional development of its faculty as well.

Research has shown that culturally responsive curriculum can be an effective way to improve the classroom experience for underrepresented students (Bedolla, 2010; Change, 2005; Gay, 2002). Through a collaborative group effort, Bellevue College and KCCTCs can devote more time toward specifically focusing on educational equity how it can truly better their institutions by increasing underrepresented students' achievement and retention outcomes. Shifting toward this outlook will prove difficult because it faces many challenges, but over time it can lead to sustainable changes that will enhance underrepresented students' experiences along the education pipeline, and cultivate an equity-conscious faculty that can help refine instructional practices to help systematically marginalized students succeed in the higher education pipeline.

References

- Bedolla, L. G. (2010). Good ideas are not enough: considering the politics underlying students' postsecondary transitions. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 15, 9-26.
- Bellevue College. (2014, December 1). *Faculty Commons Winter 2015 Schedule*. Retrieved from <http://www.bellevuecollege.edu/facultycommons/quarterly-schedules/>
- Chang, J. C. (2005). Faculty–student interaction at the community college: A focus on students of color. *Research in Higher Education*, 46(7), 769-802.
- Fox, W., & Gay, G. (1995). Integrating multicultural and curriculum principles in teacher education. *Peabody Journal of Education* (0161956x), 70(3).
- Gay, G. (2002). Preparing for culturally responsive teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53(2), 106-16.
- Hanleybrown, F., Kania, J., & Kramer, M. (2012). Channeling change: Making collective impact work. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. Retrieved from http://www.ssireview.org/blog/entry/channeling_change_making_collective_impact_work?cpgn=WP%20DL%20-%20Channeling%20Change
- Kania, J., & Kramer, M. (2011). Collective impact. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. Retrieved from http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/collective_impact
- Lardner, E., & Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education. (2005). *Diversity, educational equity, & learning communities*. Olympia, WA: Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education.

- Lardner, E., & Malnarich, G. (2008). A new era in learning-community work: Why the pedagogy of intentional integration matters. *Change: the Magazine of Higher Learning*, 40, 4, 30-37.
- Leveille, D. E. (2006). *Accountability in higher education: A public agenda for trust and cultural change*. Berkeley, CA: Center for Studies in Higher Education.
- Neuber, K. A., et al. (1980). *Needs assessment: A model for community planning*. Beverly Hills. CA: Sage Publications.
- Núñez, A-M., Oliva, M. (2009). Organizational collaboration to promote college access: A P-20 framework. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*. 8(4). 322-339.
- Perna, L. W., Klein, M. W., & McLendon, M. K. (2014). Insights and implications for state policy-makers. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. 655(1). 209-230.
- Rendón, L. I. (2002). A community college Puente: A validating model of education. *Educational Policy*, 6, 642-647.
- Venezia, A., & Kirst, M. W. (2005). Inequitable opportunities: How current education systems and policies undermine the chances for student persistence and success in college. *Educational Policy*. 19(2). 283-307.
- Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC). (2013). *2013 Fall Quarter Enrollment and Staffing Report*. Retrieved from http://sbctc.edu/college/studentsvcs/0entire_report_13_000.pdf
- Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC). (2014). *2014 – 2015 Faculty Learning Community Grants (FLC) Grant Guidance*. Retrieved

from

http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/college/education/2014_15_flc_grant_guidance_000.pdf

Welton, A. D., & La Londe, P. G. (2013). *Facing equity: Understanding P-20 equity conscious leadership for college and career pathways*. Champaign, IL: Office of Community College Research and Leadership, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Zirkel, S. (2008). The influence of multicultural educational practices on student outcomes and intergroup relations. *Teachers College Record*. 110(6). 1147-1181.