



MINNESOTA STATE
Office of Equity and Inclusion



Equity by Design Campus Team Toolkit

Minnesota State Colleges & Universities

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Preface

Equity 2030 is an approach to intentionally rethink the way Minnesota State and our colleges and universities operate on a day-to-day level. As institutions of higher education, our core mission is represented by teaching and learning. The Equity by Design methodology, therefore, addresses the central and most critical aspect of how we operate.

The work to support equity-minded campus practices, pedagogy, curriculum, and culture has been happening at Minnesota State colleges and universities for decades. Many faculty and staff have been tireless in their efforts to raise and refocus their institutions on addressing equity, on creating culturally responsive and reflective pedagogy, on supporting the needs of Black, Indigenous, Immigrant, and Students of Color, low-income and first-generation students, and additional populations historically prevented from achieving higher education success. This work has been innovative and inspiring but has too often been limited to the walls individual classrooms and programs. The Equity by Design methodology provides a way to expand that innovation at a systemic, sustainable level for faculty and staff to learn with and from each other in structured ways that can lead to seemingly small but practically significant changes in how our students experience their educational journeys. These changes in how we operate *are* the vision of Equity 2030.

How to Use the Toolkit

This toolkit is a guide for Equity by Design Campus Teams to work and approach the content of addressing inequities in academic outcomes in a manner that is efficient, equity-minded, and moves the efforts forward. Campus leads (Campus Diversity Officers and Senior Academic Affairs Officers) should familiarize themselves with the toolkit, its contents, recommended activities, and supplemental readings as they guide the rest of the campus team in implementing the Equity by Design methodology on their campus.

In addition to the toolkit, the Office of Equity and Inclusion will make available additional trainings to build capacity in the areas of equity-minded data analysis, inquiry-based practices for faculty and staff, and developing equity-minded language. Recorded webinars and professional development training opportunities are available online at <https://minnstate.edu/system/equity/prodev.html>.

Essential Readings

The following are recommended readings as pertinent content for the work of implementing the Equity by Design Methodology at your college or university. Please note that this list is not exhaustive, additional resources may be considered by your campus team.

AAC&U (Association of American Colleges and Universities) (2015b). *Step Up and Lead for Equity: What Higher Education Can Do to Reverse Our Deepening Divides*. Washington D.C. Association of American Colleges and Universities.

Bensimon, E. M. (2016). *The Misbegotten URM as a Data Point*. Los Angeles, CA: Center for Urban Education, Rossier School of Education, University of Southern California.

Bensimon, E. M. (2018). *Reclaiming Racial Justice in Equity*. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 50:3-4, 95-98, DOI: 10.1080/00091383.2018.1509623

Brown McNair, T., Bensimon, E. & Malcom-Piqueux, L. (2020). *From Equity Talk to Equity Walk: Expanding Practitioner Knowledge for Racial Justice in Higher Education*. Jossey-Bass A Wiley Brand.

Next Steps and Proposed Timeline

The first phase of the Equity by Design process from initiation through providing recommendations takes approximately eight to nine months but may take longer depending on a campus coalition's capacity. Upon completion of the initial equity-minded data inquiry, campuses should develop a report of their findings and begin the difficult work of addressing disparities. The following process and proposed timeline will ensure your campus coalition stays on track to complete the first phase of the Equity by Design analysis and make recommendations to address equity gaps.

- **Months 1 - 2:**
 - Initial Campus Coalition convening (orientation)
 - Complete capacity building activities with Campus Coalition (“History in Context”, “Building Equity-Minded Language”, “Data-Analysis with an Equity Lens”)

- **Months 2 - 3:**
 - Attend “Equity by Design” training (facilitated by the Minnesota State System Office of Equity and Inclusion)
 - Submit completed planning sheet to the System’s Office of Equity and Inclusion ([Appendix A](#))

- **Months 3 - 6:**
 - Attend “Equity by Design” training (facilitated by the Minnesota State System Office of Equity and Inclusion)
 - Convene the campus coalition and begin Equity by Design Analysis activities
 - Conclude Equity by Design Analysis activities on campus

- **Month 7:**
 - Submit findings from analysis to the System’s Office of Equity and Inclusion
 - Attend “Equity by Design” training (facilitated by the Minnesota State System Office of Equity and Inclusion)

- **Months 8 - 9:**
 - Develop a report, provide recommendations, and disseminate results.

- **Month 9+:**
 - Begin implementations and analyze effectiveness

We recognize that the work of addressing disparities goes beyond the classroom. Equity by Design positions the campus coalition to identify the larger organizational structures and policies that need to be reviewed in order to close equity gaps. Tools and resources are being developed by faculty in partnership with the Office of Equity and Inclusion and Academic and Student Affairs to assist campus teams in the next phases of Equity by Design.

Equity by Design

Conceptual Framework

Background

In 2015, Minnesota’s state legislature established an important goal for increasing the educational attainment of its population: by 2025, 70% of adults age 25 to 44 across all racial and ethnic groups would have attained a postsecondary certificate or degree. At the time the goal was established, around 60% of Minnesota’s population aged 25 to 44 held a postsecondary certificate or higher level credential. However, severe racial equity gaps in educational attainment still exist (See Figure 1 below). Given the demographic shifts within the state, it is critical that these equity gaps be closed in order to reach Minnesota’s 70% attainment goal. It is a moral imperative and Minnesota’s economic imperative to address educational disparities.

Minnesota State colleges and universities is the third largest system of community and technical colleges in the United States and the largest in the state with 30 colleges, 7 universities, and 54 campuses. Minnesota State colleges and universities serve 350,000+ students each year, with more students of color and Native/Indigenous students attending its colleges and universities than all other higher education providers in Minnesota combined. Minnesota State is well suited to address educational disparities and close academic equity gaps.

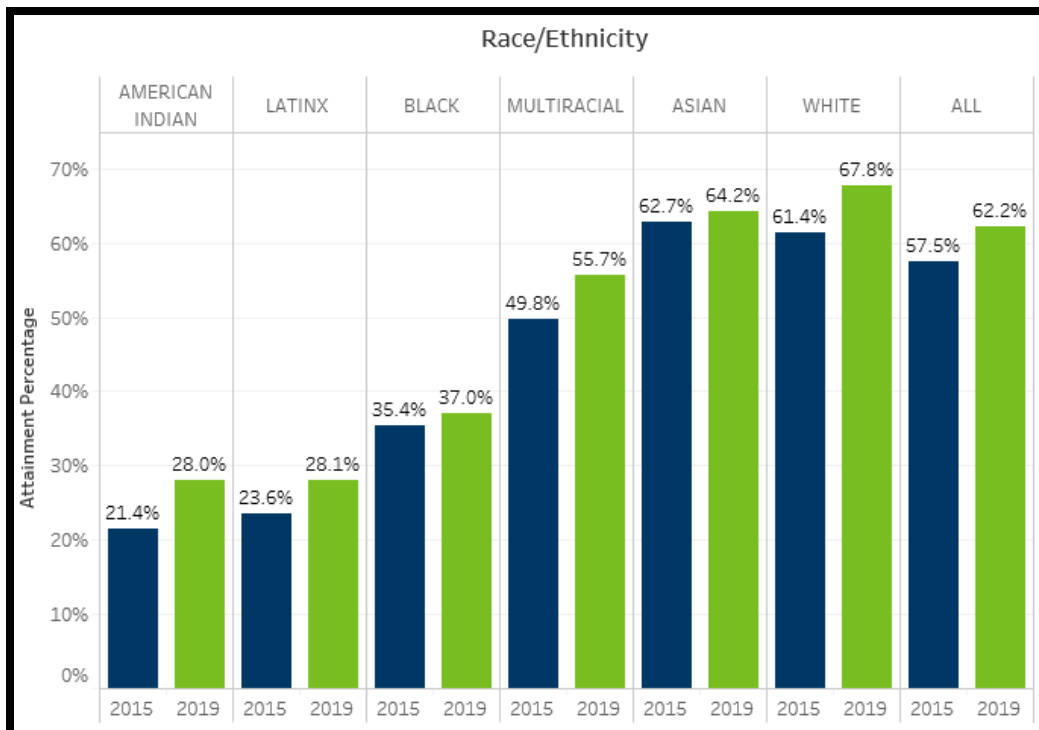


Figure 1. Educational Attainment of Minnesotans Aged 25 to 44, by Race/Ethnicity. 2015-2019. Minnesota Office of Higher Education.

Equity Defined

Equity is the proportional distribution of desirable outcomes across groups. Sometimes confused with equality, equity refers to outcomes, while equality connotes equal treatment. Where individuals or groups are dissimilarly situated, equal treatment may be insufficient or even detrimental to equitable outcomes. Simply put, equity connotes parity in outcomes; or, the proportional representation of historically marginalized groups in outcomes. A visualization of this concept (Figure 2) depicts how an entering cohort, disaggregated by race, has the same rates of completion for each racial group.

According to Bensimon (2019) adopting a definition of equity that is centered on racial justice does not preclude adopting definitions of other kinds of equity related to other identities such as gender, income, or sexual orientation; however, these other forms of equity need to be treated separately because inequities based on race and ethnicity originate from unique historical, socio cultural and socio political circumstances, including enslavement, colonization, appropriation of territories and linguistic hegemony.

Equity is....

When an individual's race, gender, economic status, sexual orientation, etc. do not determine their educational, economic, social, or political opportunities.

Equity Prioritizes...

Leveling the playing field, ensuring the starting line does not determine where one finishes.

The concept of equity within Equity by Design recognizes both the institutional and accountability dimensions of the work. Institutional racism is an entrenched characteristic of colleges and universities that has to be dismantled with strategies that are color conscious, informed by critical race theory and systemic. In addition, we expect proportional representation of historically marginalized groups in educational outcomes (e.g., access, retention, and degree completion) and participation in enriching experiences within higher education.

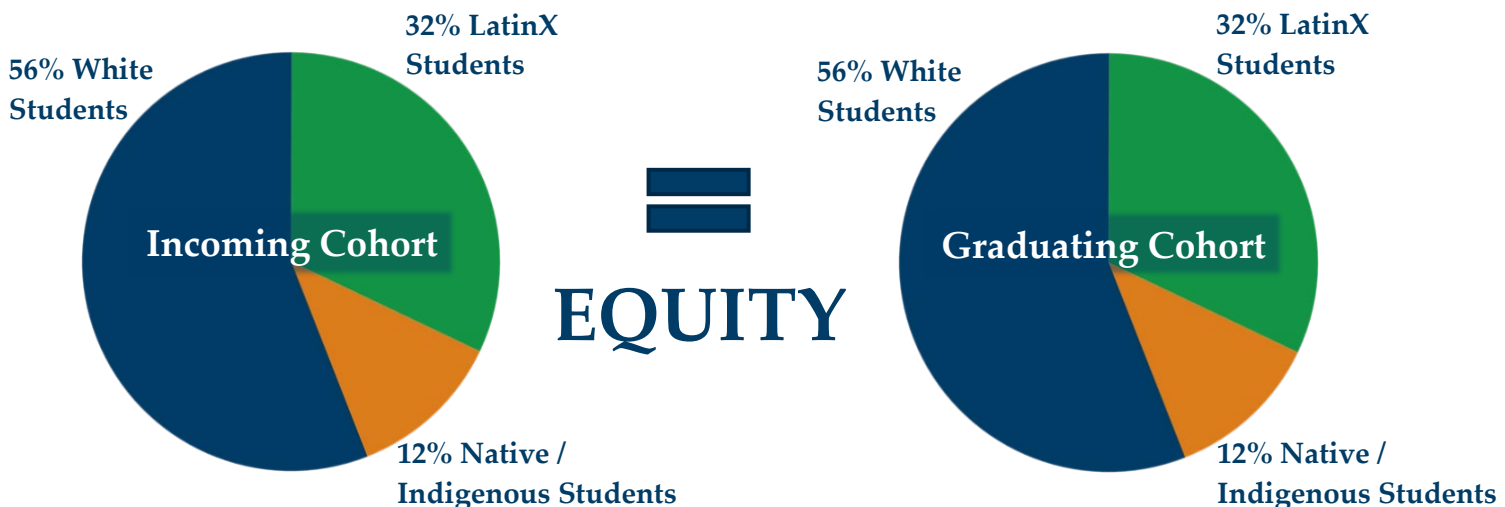


Figure 2. Equity as depicted when having the same completion rates for entering and finishing cohorts.

Minnesota State Equity 2030

Minnesota’s moral and economic imperative necessitates that educational equity gaps be eliminated. Minnesota State’s guiding principle of Equity 2030 aims to eliminate educational equity gaps at all Minnesota State colleges and universities by 2030. Equity by Design is one of many tools available to campuses to aid in actualizing the goals of Equity 2030.

Equity by Design: What Is It?

Equity by Design is a methodology that equips higher education leaders to address educational disparities and to move beyond policy and planning to institutional equity-minded practices. The methodology is influenced by the research and literature of Dr. Estela Bensimon at the Center for Urban Education, University of Southern California. Furthermore, this work:

- Is data-informed.
- Influences organizational development.
- Influences talent management strategy.
- Influences change management strategy.
- Prepares institutions to be **student-ready**.
- **Prioritizes equity in academic outcomes.**

How Does Equity by Design Work?

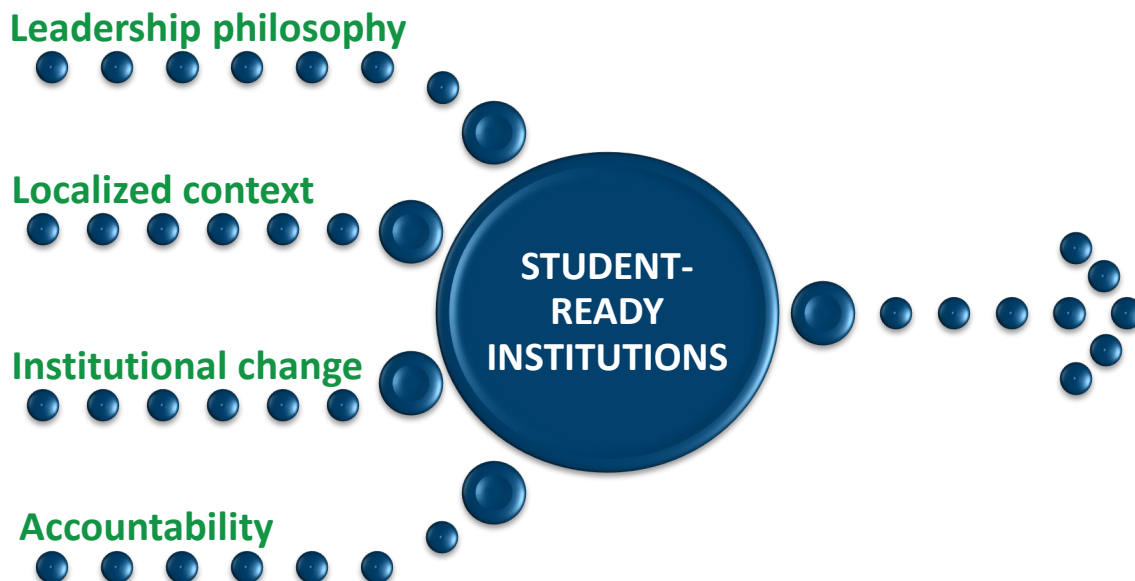


Figure 3. Minnesota State Equity 2030 Framework

Elements of Success

The following elements are critical to a successful implementation of the Equity by Design methodology:

1) Leadership Philosophy: Higher education leaders (i.e. Presidents, Campus Diversity Officers, and Senior Academic Officers) who wish to engage their campus teams in this methodology are committed to understanding equity and have the ability to lead in intentional equity-minded ways. More importantly, these leaders support data disaggregation and analysis close to practice; in doing so they support faculty and academic leaders to take an in-depth view of department and course success rates to illuminate disparities. Key components for leadership philosophy include:

- Commitment to understanding equity.
- The ability to lead a campus team through the methodology in an intentional and equity-focused way.
- Support data disaggregation and analysis close to practice.
- Lead and support faculty and academic leaders to take an in-depth view of course success rates.

2) Localized Context: The Equity by Design methodology considers the institutional readiness to implement the work on campus. Such readiness includes the campus level of maturation on equity and inclusion, and its capacity to collect, analyze, disaggregate data in actionable and meaningful ways. Furthermore, campuses implementing Equity by Design must consider the socio-cultural environments of the institution and surrounding communities.

Consider the institutional readiness to implement this work. What is the organization's:

- Level of maturation (equity & inclusion)?
- Campus and community context (socio-historical)?
- Capacity (data, research, and equity infrastructure)?

3) Institutional Change: Equity by Design requires higher education to make changes at the institutional level as campuses strive to be student-ready spaces. As a result of engaging in an Equity by Design process, campuses apply a magnifying glass to data, practices, and policies that illustrate academic equity-gaps. In doing so, campus teams and leaders will drive change in said organizational structures, practices, and policies. Essential to ensuring institutional change are the following concepts:

- Changes occur at the campus level
- Moving from college-ready students to student-ready colleges
- Apply a magnifying glass to data and practices that illustrate academic equity gaps.

4) Accountability: Equity by Design tools and resources necessitate data-informed analysis of equity gaps at the academic department or course level and they lead teams to understand disparate impact of policies and practices and move to address such disparities. Lastly, this work ensures that campus leaders take responsibility to determine campus-based solutions that address academic equity gaps. Overall, accountability occurs through:

- Data-informed analysis of equity gaps at the course level.
- Understanding disparate impact of policies and practices and move to address such disparity.
- Responsibility to determine campus-based solutions that address academic equity gaps.

In order for Equity by Design to be successfully implemented, strategies and approaches take place both from a macro (system) and micro (campus) level.

The system-level approach includes the development of tolls and resource activities, broad-level impact, and accountability; while the campus approach requires that local stakeholders implement the Equity by Design-related activities, provide opportunities for capacity building, and develop a strong partnership between academic and non-academic stakeholders moving the work forward.

Principles for Enacting Equity by Design

According to the work of Bensimon, Dowd, Witham (2016) and the Center for Urban Education, there are five key principles for building the infrastructure necessary to enact Equity by Design.

Principle 1: Provide clarity in language, goals, and measures.

Principle 2: Center the work around equity-mindedness.

Principle 3: Ensure practices and policies are designed to account for and accommodate contextual differences in student learning among different groups.

Principle 4: Disaggregate data, monitor patterns, and enact systems for continual learning. Institutional change requires ongoing commitment and the capacity to learn from failure.

Principle 5: Institutional commitment to equity work must be embedded as a foundational principle for the college or university.

Outcomes

Campuses who implement the Equity by Design methodology should expect the following outcomes to be achieved:

- The identification of student populations that are impacted by the completion gaps.
 - Such groups disaggregated by relevant indicators at the local/campus level.
- The creation of a network of equity agents equipped in using data and inquiry to close racial equity gaps in student outcomes.
- Utilization of an equity-lens approach to impact retention and/or completion gaps throughout Minnesota State.
- Recommendations for equity-minded approaches to address student retention, completion rates, and/or other areas of focus. Especially in the areas of curriculum and pedagogy.
- Re-mediate practices and policies that are found to be detrimental to equity in outcomes.
- A renewed focus on institutional-level policies, culture, and structures that aim to achieve equity in academic outcomes.

“BEING EQUITY-MINDED THUS INVOLVES BEING CONSCIOUS OF THE WAYS THAT HIGHER EDUCATION—THROUGH ITS PRACTICES, POLICIES, EXPECTATIONS, AND UNSPOKEN RULES—PLACES RESPONSIBILITY FOR STUDENT SUCCESS ON THE VERY GROUPS THAT HAVE EXPERIENCED MARGINALIZATION, RATHER THAN ON INDIVIDUALS AND INSTITUTIONS WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY IT IS TO REMEDY THAT MARGINALIZATION.”

WITHAM et al. (2015)

Common Obstacles to Overcome

Throughout this work, campus teams may encounter numerous obstacles which will require capacity building, thoughtful & transparent dialogue, and additional training to address these challenges. It is important to plan for these obstacles and to be prepared to address them as they arise. A few examples as highlighted by McNair, Bensimon, and Malcom-Piqueux (2020) include:

- Claiming to see no race or individuals claiming to be “color blind”.
- Not being able or willing to notice racialized consequences.
- Skirting around race.
- Resisting calls to disaggregate data by race and ethnicity.
- Substituting race talk with poverty or socioeconomic talk.
- Pervasiveness of white privilege and institutionalized racism.
- Evasive reactions to racist incidents.
- The incapacity to see institutionalized racism in familiar routines.
- The myth of universalism.
- Seeing racial inequities as a reflection of academic deficiency.



Equity by Design Workgroup Overview

Building a Coalition on Campus

Minnesota State colleges and universities who undertake Equity by Design work must form a campus coalition to guide their team throughout the process of identifying and addressing academic equity gaps. Campus coalitions can utilize Equity by Design activities and protocols to navigate from best practices to best practitioners. Equity by Design aims to address the following questions:

1. Will equity-focused policy translate into equitable outcomes for Black, LatinX, and American Indian and Indigenous students and other underrepresented populations?
2. How can we bridge the gap between equity as a policy intent and institutional readiness for implementation?

Campus coalitions actively work to identify programs within their college or university and then conduct a deep dive into analyzing equity gaps among underserved and underrepresented student populations, with a specific focus on racial disparities. Once the data analysis is complete, the coalition will formulate recommendations to address current practices, routines, and structures that act as barriers to achieving educational equity.

Campus Coalition Outcomes

- **Identify student populations that are impacted by the completion gap.**
 - *Each participating institution will identify its student populations impacted by the gap.*
- **Utilize an equity-lens approach to impact completion gaps throughout Minnesota State.**
- **Provide recommendations to college/university leadership for equity-minded approaches for curriculum and pedagogy.**

Forming the Team

Because every Minnesota State college and university is unique, it is important to consider who the right stakeholders are at your respective campus. The team should be broad based and inclusive in its representation, bringing together various constituents from across the campus. We recommend your team be comprised of 6 – 10 individuals, including representation from: Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion; Academic Affairs; Faculty, Student Affairs; Institutional Research and/or Institutional Effectiveness; and the general Student population. Once the team is formed, the campus coalition team leader will need to fill out the Campus Coalition Planning Worksheet ([Appendix A](#)) and submit it back to the Office of Equity & Inclusion.

Best Practices

- Select the appropriate team members – change agents and campus influencers.
- Include members with both technical expertise and good interpersonal skills.
- Have diverse representation on the team (consider multiple dimensions of diversity such as gender, gender identity, race/ethnicity, age, ability status, etc.)
- Clearly outline the mission, goals, roles and responsibilities (create a project charter).
- Establish a clear timeline and communication plan.
- Remain objective throughout the process
- Partner with and communicate with faculty & students.
- Ensure campus leaders vocalize and visualize their support for this work.

Team Orientation

Since this may be a new undertaking for many members of your campus coalition, it is a good idea to spend some time orienting your team. The following are suggested activities to bring the group together prior to undertaking the process of Equity by Design:

- 1) Convene the team.
- 2) Conduct some icebreakers or other activities to build rapport and trust.
- 3) Present the toolkit and walk through it to get an orientation on the process.
- 4) Reflect on challenges or barriers the team may face.
- 5) Discuss the benefits of conducting Equity by Design.
- 6) Establish a timeline for coalition meetings (frequency).
- 7) Discuss expectations of team members, stakeholders, and others involved in the process.
- 8) Brainstorm resources the team will need to complete Equity by Design. Consider reaching out to other institutions who have completed the Equity by Design process to serve as mentors to your coalition.

Personal Reflection

Individuals participating in Equity by Design should take time to conduct personal self-reflection on their own understanding of, and commitment to, equity. Conversations about race, disparities, and equity can be challenging. Calling attention to whiteness, highlighting biases in how we describe students, examining how we *perceive* reality, and looking at the ways in which we engage with data can be uncomfortable and may lead to tension within your team. It is okay to be uncomfortable; in fact – you will likely get uncomfortable! How you sit with that discomfort and what you do next is the first step in becoming an equity-minded practitioner.

*Start by reviewing and understanding the definition of equity provided earlier on in this toolkit (page 8).

Throughout this process, be mindful of when your own biases arise and challenge yourself to address them when they do. Take time to reflect of how your viewpoints were formed through your lived experiences and be open to seeing how your own privilege (especially for those who hold the privilege of whiteness and able-bodiedness) shaped your experiences and/or understanding of equity.

Becoming equity-minded and anti-racist is a journey which takes time, commitment, and intentional practice. McNair et al. (2020) offer the following questions to begin on the path of self-reflection:

“How do you define equity? What is your understanding of how equity and equality intersect or are codependent? What are specific examples of how equity is a value for you and your institution? What motivates you to ensure equity at your institution? How does your understanding of equity translate into your values, beliefs, and actions? Do you have an equity talk and an equity walk?”

- McNair et al. (2020)

Team Reflection

Once your campus coalition is formed and oriented, teams should spend some time together reflecting on equity and contextualizing equity to their respective campus. Building common understanding and engaging in conversations about equity, race, diversity and inclusion is an important step prior when launching Equity by Design efforts on your campus. Some questions to consider include:

- What equity efforts or initiatives has your campus participated in previously? What were those efforts focused on (i.e., course success)? Did they achieve the intended outcomes?
- What is your campus mission statement? Is the mission widely understood and tied to mechanisms of accountability, or is the language racially ambiguous and/or centered on universalism?
- How is your campus currently addressing issues of racial equity in student outcomes?
- How is your campus defining diversity, equity, and inclusion?
- Does the campus culture promote equality or equity, or both? Do those attributes intersect?
- Are there barriers or resistance to discussing race and racism?
- Is your campus ready to engage in conversations about race and to be honest about why inequities exist? Are they open examining structures, practices, and procedures which contribute to equity gaps in student outcomes?
- Does your team have broad support to advance this work and are key campus leaders / change agents involved and committed?



Equity by Design Activities

Once the campus coalition is formed, the team will begin the process of undertaking the following activities:

- ✓ Creating a History in Context Map
- ✓ Developing Equity-Minded Language
- ✓ Conducting the Observation Protocol
- ✓ Using the Equity Gap Calculator
- ✓ Identifying Focus Areas and Goals
- ✓ Conducting Equity-Minded Data Analysis
- ✓ Developing Equity-Minded Recommendations to Impact Outcomes

History in Context Activity

This activity was adapted from Center for Urban Education. (2017). Equity Policy Toolkit. Los Angeles, CA: Rossier School of Education, University of Southern California.

An important first step for your campus work group is contextualizing equity at your college or university. This practice helps guide your team in becoming aware of the historical and social context of exclusionary practices and policies within higher education, and more specifically, within your own institution. Use the following questions to help guide your understanding and lay out the answers along a linear timeline for visualization.

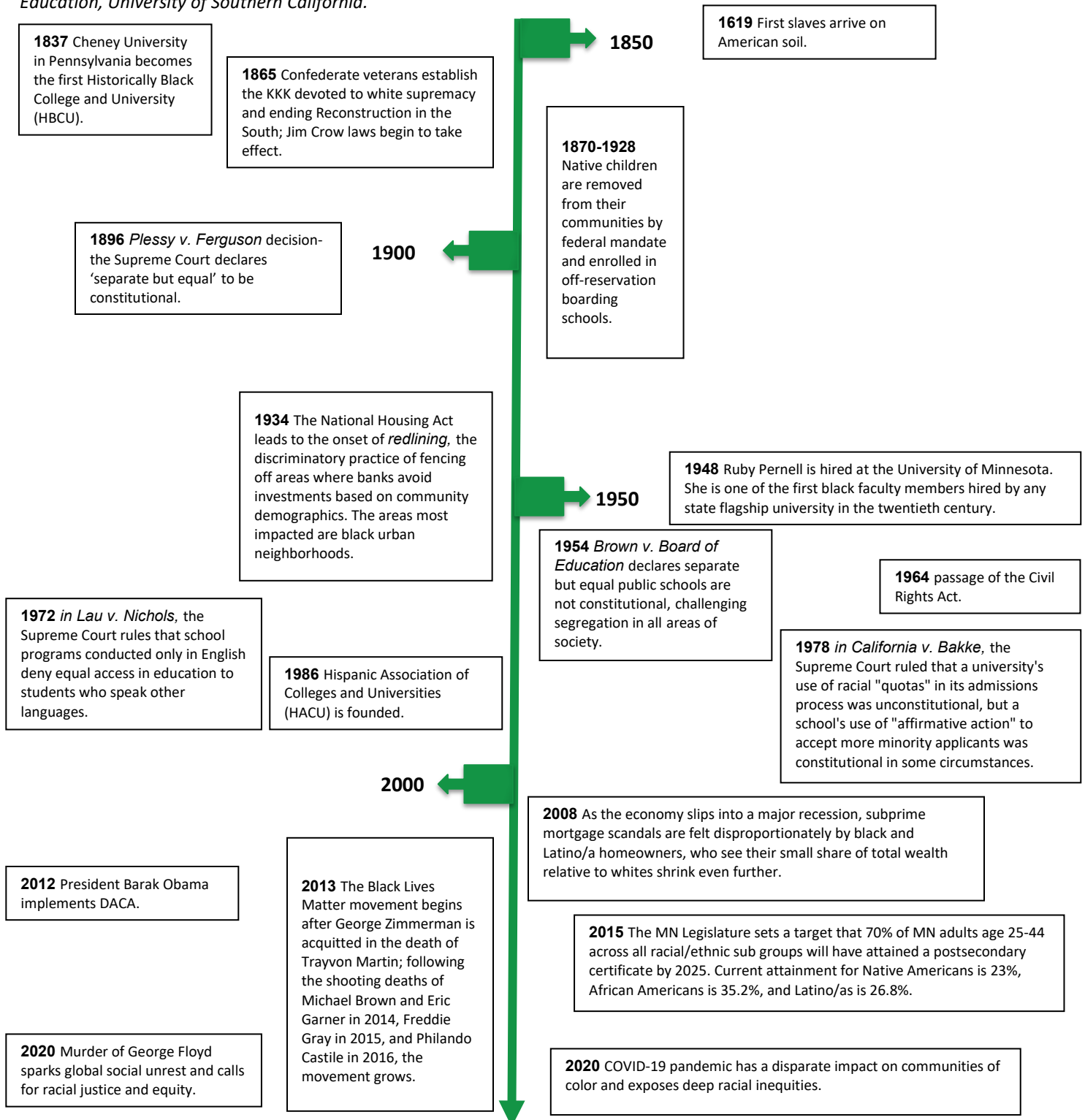
1. When was your campus founded?
2. What significant events have impacted diversity and equity at your campus or in the surrounding community?
3. What significant state and/or national events have impacted diversity and equity at your campus?
4. What efforts have been made on campus to address equity and diversity related issues?
5. What were/are the outcomes / impacts of these efforts?
6. Where is power held on campus and how has this changed over time?
7. Who are the allies now on campus working to advance and improve equity?

As a group, reflect on important insights raised through this activity.

Racial Equity Timeline

The timeline below serves as a guide to get your campus team thinking about some key social and political milestones which have impacted higher education in Minnesota. Contextualize this timeline to fit your campus and community and add relevant items to help frame equity in context.

This activity was adapted from Center for Urban Education. (2017). *Equity Policy Toolkit*. Los Angeles, CA: Rossier School of Education, University of Southern California.



Developing Equity-Minded Language

Building common language allows us to speak more clearly and effectively, thereby creating a shared sense of identity and culture – leading to more inclusive and efficient campus environments. Being equity-minded means focusing our perspectives and thoughts to call attention to patterns of inequity, and requires practitioners to be race-conscious.

To be equity-minded, individuals must understand how institutional practices and policies have perpetuated the disparities reflected in their student outcomes. Equity efforts, while they may be well-intentioned, often fail to fully embrace and recognize the power of whiteness in historical power structures and its impact on institutional racism. This understanding, however, is crucial to developing holistic solutions aimed at achieving racial parity in student outcomes.

Equity-Mindedness

Equity-mindedness refers to “the mode of thinking exhibited by practitioners who are willing to assess their own racialized assumptions, to acknowledge their lack of knowledge in the history of race and racism, to take responsibility for the success of historically underserved and underrepresented student groups, and to critically assess racialization in their own practices as educators and/or administrators” (McNair et al, 2020).

Having an awareness of how underrepresented groups have been historically, and often deliberately excluded from educational opportunities is a critical component to becoming equity-minded. This inequality has often been hidden through the use of language. Taking the time to

ensure your team (at a minimum) has a common understanding of equity and race-related definitions will maximize effectiveness and ensure you don’t unintentionally erase the differences between various racial groups.

“Equity-Minded Individuals are...

- *Color-conscious (as opposed to color-blind).*
- *Aware that beliefs, expectations, and practices assumed to be neutral can have outcomes that are racially disadvantageous.*
- *Willing to assume responsibility for the elimination of inequality.”*

Bensimon, Dowd & Witham (2016).

Campus teams can utilize [Appendix B](#) for an equity-minded language activity

Reframing Language: Deficit-Minded versus Equity-Minded

How we use language and in what ways we discuss data can have a profound impact on framing our understanding of equity gaps and in what ways equity gaps may emerge. A common pitfall is the utilization of deficit-minded language, especially when referring to students. Deficit thinking or deficit-minded language often places the responsibility for “deficits” on the group in question.

“If institutional leaders and practitioners use deficit-minded language when discussing equity challenges, access to data will do no good for advancing equity because such language communicates the expectation that students are expected to create equity for themselves.”

McNair et al., (2020)

A common example of deficit-minded language often used in higher education is the examination of “achievement gaps.” By characterizing disparities as “achievement gaps”, it places the onus on the students (typically from marginalized groups) by implying they are somehow failing to “achieve” (McNair et al, 2020). An equity-minded approach to the same data would characterize the disparities as “equity gaps”, thereby placing the onus on correcting the disparities on the college or university.

A central tenet of Equity by Design is engaging students in the work, which goes beyond mere engagement and instead understands that students are assets to the work and their experience on campus. Informed by Yosso’s (2005) Model of Cultural Wealth, we remind ourselves that Minnesota State students:

- Possess cultural knowledge nurtured by family and community.
- Have the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for their future, despite perceived barriers.
- Have bicultural/multicultural skills attained through communication and experiences in more than one language or style.
- Hold networks of people and community resources.
- Have developed skills for maneuvering social institutions.

Common Deficit-Minded Phrases

Students don’t come here prepared.
 They don’t know how to be college students and treat this like high school.
 They lack discipline.
 They aren’t studying in the right ways or studying enough.
 They read assignments but don’t understand them.
 Their English language skills are lacking.
 They are not motivated.
 They come from a place which doesn’t value education.
 They don’t understand how much work they need to do.
 They don’t know how to take notes.
 They don’t spend enough time outside of class studying (i.e. 3 hours of studying for every 1 hour in class)
 They lack the fundamentals to succeed in this course.

Observation Protocol

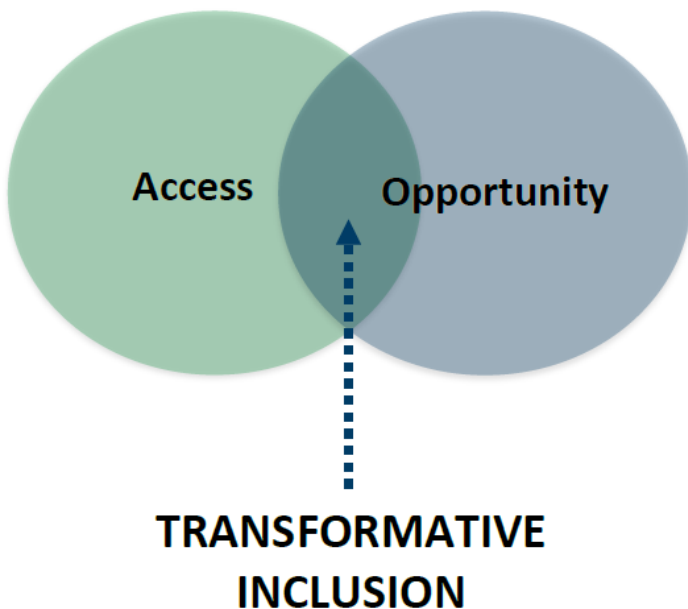
Activity

Equity Observation Protocol

An essential component in developing a holistic picture of the campus environment involves taking the time to observe the physical and virtual spaces on your campus using an equity lens. The campus action team may conduct this process on their own, enlist the help of, or designate other parties from either on or off campus. Either way, the observations recorded must be taken into consideration by the campus action team when developing the college/university's action plan.

Understanding the Equity Observation Protocol

The Equity Observation Protocol is a coaching tool that can be used to sharpen your individual and your organization's ability as practitioners to apply equity practices and principles to the observation and review of campus spaces (both shared and restricted) within your campus community.



Define an Observational Focus Area

Before beginning the process, you should take some time to define a focus area, also known as a focus question. This ensures that the process focuses on an area within the campus that you have a vested stake in improving or that could potentially benefit from equity-centered practices and procedures (i.e. all spaces). The area selected should reflect your desire to learn more about the opportunities or challenges that could serve as a milestone (critical point) or a monument (road-block) for the students/faculty/staff your campus serves. Be intentional about aligning the focus area(s) with that of the strategies identified within the classroom. Once you've selected an area, spend time observing what happens in that space and how students interact with that space. Are there patterns? Do you notice any differences between varying student populations?

Examples of focus areas could include:

- » Campus student support offices.
- » Entrances to administrative offices.
- » Student leadership or other student activities centers.
- » Student Health Services.
- » Online and virtual spaces (websites, social media pages, virtual learning spaces, etc.).

Equity-Minded Data Analysis

Reference [Appendices C-D](#) of this toolkit for additional information regarding data confidentiality, and considerations for data analytics.

Data Conversations

Having the *right* conversations about data is key when conducting equity-minded inquiry. It is important that campuses spend time building capacity for practitioners undertaking equity-minded data inquiry to ensure that everyone understands how to use data in equity-minded ways and determining which areas may need further analysis.

Data conversations can be uncomfortable for some of your colleagues, particularly when applying a racial lens to examining equity gaps. The discomfort with discussing data disaggregated by race can, in turn, lead to pushback and an inclination for the data to be examined in an aggregate level (i.e. students of color). Challenge your campus teams to work through this discomfort and remind colleagues that data disaggregation is a critical step and tool to advance equity and a critical component to revealing inequities.

Getting Started

Conducting data inquiries into racial-ethnic equity gaps, allows for campuses to begin to understand the magnitude of disparities which exist across programs and/or the college/university. Ultimately, the question campuses should strive to answer is: “Are we improving equity in educational and student success outcomes through our programming and policy?”

The first step toward understanding which student populations experience disparities is to disaggregate the data. Doing so may reveal inequities that have not been obvious before and allow them to come into a much sharper focus.

Why Disaggregate Data?

Examining disparity patterns in students’ experiences and outcomes is critical for identifying, understanding, and narrowing equity gaps for underserved, unrepresented, or marginalized student populations. Limiting analysis to the large aggregate population of student of color obscures from consideration the substantial variations in outcomes and experiences of many ethnic and race groups encompassed in the category. We must be able to see the group-level differences in our data. The differences in outcomes are a function of a variety of different factors, which also include pedagogical practices, curriculum design, and institutional (in-classroom and out-classroom) engagement support practices.

Collapsing all racial and ethnic groups into a single aggregate category of “students of color” does not allow for consideration of the tremendously varied experiences, histories, socioeconomic positions, and political factors that have, and continue to shape their disparate outcomes. For example combining African American and Asian students together into a single category of “students of color”, does not allow for viewing and divergent outcomes for these groups, let alone consideration of the differing factors that shape their outcomes. Simply put, not all students of color or those of Native/Indigenous background/ancestry are the “same.”

Collapsing all racial and ethnic groups into a single aggregate category for “students of color”, does not allow for consideration of the tremendously varied experiences, histories, socioeconomic positions, and political factors that have, and continue to shape their disparate outcomes.

Accessible & Meaningful Approaches to Student Data

Educators and administrators have long known that sizable disparities exist in the outcomes of students of color and American Indian students. Yet, the ability of our institutions to close those gaps has been limited. New approaches are necessary to impact and narrow gaps. New approaches entail looking at more granular data points that are disaggregated and readily digestible by educators, administrators, and other stakeholders.

Patterns observed in the data are often viewed as abstract, numerical artifacts, and as figures that represent negligible mathematical differences between student groups. **It is critical that we make the inequities in student's outcomes and experiences less abstract or theoretical, and more relatable.** For many of our colleagues, looking at data and patterns for retention and completion is a conceptual exercise and not tangible or readily translatable to the experiences and lives of their students. The abstractness of looking at metrics does not lend itself to understanding how we as practitioners shape and impact student's experiences and outcomes.

We need to place an emphasis on examining subject, discipline, and program level equity gaps in student outcomes. Broad institutional level metrics and outcome measures are more abstract and harder to relate to than measures that are more proximal or closer to our faculty, staff, and administrator stakeholder's area of work and expertise. That is to say, examining an institution's annual retention rates for all students is less relatable and comprehensible than examining the retention rates for a specific discipline, subject, or program, such as chemistry or automotive technician.

In an effort to mitigate equity gaps in student outcomes, we need to closely examine their course level outcomes, which serve as the building blocks for increasing higher level of aggregations of academic outcomes, namely: term to term persistence rates; year to year retention rates; and completion rates. It is of critical importance for those institutional professionals whom work the closest with students, to examine course level outcomes disaggregated by race and ethnicity in the interest of meaningfully consider and understand how they may shape the disparate experiences and outcomes of students. This topic is further discussed in [Appendix C](#) of this toolkit.

Some Common Data Obstacles

Having conversations about data can be difficult. Here are some common examples of what may come up when discussing data:

- Fear of what data will reveal (and how that effects sense-of-self).
- Concern about how the data will be used (i.e. punitive?).
- Deficit-minded deflection (focus away from self-change).
- Criticism of the data itself (in some cases another deflection).
- Discomfort with talking about race.
- Reluctance or unwillingness to examine gaps from any perspective other than student deficit explanations.

Before beginning, campuses will need to consider:

- ***Whom or what entities are responsible for evaluating student success metrics at the institution and program/ department levels?***
- ***Who has access to the campus data? How are student outcome metrics presented/shared?***
- ***Are these data routinely reviewed to identify opportunities for improving student outcomes?***

Determining Areas of Focus

As institutions move forward with Equity by Design, the campus team will have to determine which subjects (disciplines and/or programs) and courses will best serve their efforts to examine equity gaps in student academic outcomes. The campus team's administrator, faculty, staff, and student members will have the latitude and discretion to determine the scope of the work to advance greater equity in student success. That said, however, the Minnesota State Office of Equity and Inclusion recommends that campuses **start by examining "gateway courses"** which serve as stepping stones for students as they progress towards their educational goals. Furthermore, we advocate for data disaggregation by race and ethnicity as a minimum standard of practice to advance equity.

Focus Area Options: "Guardrails"

Many students encounter hurdles in their first-year (freshman) courses which may be disadvantageous for their chosen course of study and their persistence/retention at the institution. Additionally, examining course success outcomes disaggregated by race *across all course offerings* for a subject, discipline, or program may become rather overwhelming.

There are certainly many factors, dynamics, and processes that can shape course success rates up through the sequential progression of courses offered by a program or discipline. That is to say, it can become difficult to facilitate conversations about equity gaps and equity minded inquiry when trying to analyze courses that are offered at the freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior levels. Campus certainly have the latitude to look at higher level courses, if they feel meaningful inquiry and actions to impact equity gaps are feasible.

Gateway Course Criteria

Use this list as a guide to help your team identify which courses at your college/university are "gateway courses."

1. Foundational courses that are credit bearing and may serve as prerequisite courses for higher level courses within the field of study.
2. Courses taken by students from a wide range of majors to meet general education (MNTC) requirements.

Considerations for Selecting Subjects, Programs, Disciplines, & Courses

Some key considerations when determining focus areas include:

- Level of Faculty engagement in Equity by Design.
- Strategic importance to institution's administrative & academic leadership.
- Strategic importance to institution's Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion (EDI) goals.
- Inclusion of development learning course
- Delivery mode: Face-to-face, online, hybrid.
- Subjects taught by adjunct or temporary faculty.
- Student populations: PSEO, regular admits, and transfer admits.

3. High enrollment courses as measured by the number of students enrolled across sections of the course(s). (Courses within highest/top 15% in terms of enrollment).
4. Certain developmental courses (less than 1000 or 100 level) may be categorized as a "Gateway Course" when there is an interest in courses with high non-success rates (D or lower), or an interest in students at "risk" for not completing the course or being retained by the college.

Common subjects/disciplines which offer "gateway" courses include:

- General Education: English, Math, Statistics
- Sciences: Biology, Chemistry, Earth Science, Physics, Health
- Social & Behavioral Sciences: Economics, Geography, Political Science, Psychology, Sociology
- Liberal Arts: Art, Communications, History, Humanities, Music, Philosophy
- Other: First Year Experience, CTE courses of strategic interest

Data Metrics

In general, Equity by Design focuses on examining equity gaps in course success outcomes, where success entails earning a letter grade of C or better. A few examples of other metrics can include:

- Persistence, Retention, Completion Rates (PRC Rates)
- Course Success Rates
- Post-Graduate Outcomes
- Outcomes in online learning
- Participation in High-Impact Practices (HIPs)
- Enrollment in remedial courses / Completion of remedial courses

Why Focus on Course Success?

Generally, for many colleges /universities, all degrees, diplomas and certificates awarded by the institution require a minimum grade point average (GPA) of 2.00. Likewise, for many colleges/universities, coursework being transferred into the institution generally require a minimum cumulative GPA of 2.00 from each transferring institution.

Earning a letter grade of “C” for a course, arguably lends itself to a student realizing success in subsequent courses that sequentially build on knowledge/skill foundations laid in prior (prerequisite) course work. Earning a letter grade of “D” or lower, may result in a student not sufficiently acquiring the required knowledge/skills to be successful in subsequent course work. Courses that are transferred in the institution may sometime be accepted with a letter grade of “D”, however “D” letter grades may not be accepted towards certain credentials and majors/disciplines.

Recommended Course Success Metrics

Course Success Grades: A, P, C, P, or S

Course Non-Success Grades: D, F, FN, FQ, FW, NC, U, or W

Colleges/universities have the latitude to define course success metrics which best fit their needs. Some considerations may include:

- Creating a separate outcome for withdrawals (W grades)
- Creating a more stringent course success metric for certain academic programs or disciplines that include letter grades of “B” or better

Data Disaggregation

Using equity-minded data analysis, campuses may find areas that the data requires further disaggregation. For example, after reviewing retention rates by racial groups and identifying a disparity for a certain population, campuses may want to further disaggregate that population’s data based on gender or first-generation status to identify if there are more pronounced disparities within a given group.

Examples of data disaggregation inquires include:

- Race and ethnicity
- Gender
- Socio-economic status
- First-generation status
- Ability status
- Age
- Enrollment status
- Parental Education Attainment level
- LGBTQIA+



Key Principles to Use Data as a Tool to Advance Equity

The Association for Institutional Research (AIR) has shared overarching principles regarding the use of data to facilitate insights and improve decision making. These principles guide the work of Equity by Design teams as they promote the use of data, analytics, information, and evidence to move towards equity in higher education.

To access the AIR full statement, go to:

<https://www.airweb.org/ir-data-professional-overview/statement-of-ethical-principles/principles>

Calculating Equity Gaps

Use the Equity Gap Calculation Exercise ([Appendix E](#)) within this workbook to guide the campus team through a demonstration aimed at making sense of data in equity-minded ways. One of the goals into conducting equity-minded data inquiry in this manner is to humanize the data by making it relatable – reaching down to the small “N”.

After completing the exercises in this workbook and determining where to focus, campuses can begin the journey of facilitating Equity by Design. The next section will describe what to do after conducting campus-level equity-minded data analysis to begin building and sustaining practitioner action to address equity gaps.

“An institution can be said to have achieved equity when institutional data show no disparities in educational outcomes... and reflect the proportional participation of racially minoritized students in all levels of an institution.”

McNair et al., (2020)

Data to Action – Developing Equity-Minded Recommendations

Achieving equity in outcomes does not mean—in fact cannot mean—treating all students as though they are the same. Rather, [equity-focused] policies and practices in higher education recognize and accommodate differences in students’ aspirations, life circumstances, ways of engaging in learning and participating in college, and identities as learners and students (Witham et al. 2015b, 31).

Once your campus teams have undertaken examination of disaggregated student outcome data, the challenge becomes what to do next. Data analysis alone will not lead to equity. There is no single approach that will work for every college/university, but rather campuses must reflect on what types of barriers are preventing equity in outcomes in their respective area of focus at their individual campus. Moving forward, campus teams and campus leadership should also begin to reflect on the processes and programs both inside and outside of the classroom which give rise to equity gaps. The Minnesota State Office of Equity and Inclusion is in the process of developing training modules and resources aimed at assisting campuses through this inquiry. We recognize that in order to achieve equity in outcomes, it requires new institutional:

- ✓ Structures (aligning strategic priorities)
- ✓ Cultures (building a campus culture of equity-mindedness)
- ✓ Practices (assessing equity)
- ✓ Routines (institutionalizing equity-minded practices)

Beware of Deficit-Mindedness

When examining disaggregated data for disparities, remain continuously vigilant so as to not revert to deficit-minded thinking. To be clear, colleges/universities should examine their practices, procedures, policies and structures and not fall into the trap of blaming students for lack of proficiency, engagement, or preparedness as being the cause of inequities.

Become Equity-Minded Practitioners

Dr. Bensimon (2020) speaks of first-generation equity practitioners as a key to making progress in building equity-minded learning spaces. As higher education professionals, it is critical to call attention to patterns of inequity in student outcomes and to take personal and institutional responsibility for the success of students. Having implemented the various activities within Equity by Design, it prepares practitioners to be race-conscious and aware of the socio-historical context of exclusionary practices in higher education.

Making Sense of the Data

Examining the data opens the door to examining practices. With the disaggregated data in hand, campus teams and other stakeholders should spend some time reflecting on the questions on the following page to ensure the team remains focused on remediating practices rather than blaming students for the inequities they face. At this point, teams are going beyond looking at the gaps and conducting self-reflection, contextualization, and beginning to interpret equity gaps as a signal that practices are not working as intended. Determining how and why current practices aren’t working is critical to creating actionable strategies.

Data Reflection Questions

Do not presuppose what causes equity gaps and jump to solutions. Instead, develop a culture of inquiry that is guided by evidence to identify practices, processes, and mechanisms that contribute to and exacerbate equity gaps.

1. What patterns do you notice in the data?
2. What courses contribute to course success gaps?
Are there particular courses that have very sizeable gaps?
3. Which racial groups are experiencing inequity?
4. Which racial groups would you prioritize for goal setting and why?
5. What are your equity goals?
6. What are your hunches about what might be contributing to the equity gaps?
7. What equity-minded questions might you pursue with further inquiry?
8. What additional data (if any) do you want to collect to better understand the gaps?

Examine Academic Structures and Institutionalized Policies from an Equity Perspective

Once the inquiry into the data close-to-practice (i.e.: course success data) has been completed the team can engage in a process of discovery with team members acting as researchers. In doing so, team members can further illuminate ways in which institutional structures, policies, and practices impact racial equity. What are the unspoken rules, language, people, and policies that act as either inhibitors or enablers of equity?

Examples of such practices include but are not limited to:

- Creating a map of the practice in question—as espoused and as practiced
- Reviewing documents associated with a particular area of work

- Conducting a web scan for information students rely on in your area
- Observing the practice (like the tutoring center) and who is there
- Interviewing people to learn how things work
- Reviewing data that’s close to practice
- Examining course syllabi for equity barriers
- Examining course advising practices

(Adapted from the *Center for Urban Education. (2017). Equity Policy Toolkit. Los Angeles, CA: Rossier School of Education, University of Southern California.*)

Colleges/universities should create solutions that are the most appropriate for their context – instead of relying on “off the shelf” best practices that can be difficult, if not impossible, to implement without buy-in on campus.

RACE-CONSCIOUS INQUIRY:

- *IT IS NEVER A QUESTION OF, “ARE MY PRACTICES WORKING?” IT IS ALWAYS A QUESTION OF, “WHO ARE MY PRACTICES WORKING FOR?”*
- *WHO/WHAT IS BEING VALUED?*
- *WHAT ATTITUDES, BEHAVIORS, AND EMOTIONS ARE STUDENTS BEING ASKED TO ADOPT?*
- *ARE THERE RACIALIZED PATTERNS?*

Professor James Gray
Community College of Aurora, CO

Appendices

Appendix A: [Campus Coalition Planning Worksheet](#)

Appendix B: [Equity-Minded Language Activity](#)

Appendix C: [Concerns & Considerations for Racial/Ethnic Data](#)

Appendix D: [Sample Equity by Design Data Confidentiality Agreement](#)

Appendix E: [Equity Gap Calculator Exercise](#)



Equity by Design Goals & Reflection

What are the goals your campus team would like to accomplish by undertaking Equity by Design? How does your team plan to build capacity for conducting Equity by Design on your campus? Reflect on what conducting Equity by Design looks like on your campus.

Equity by Design Focus Areas (Initial Draft)

What areas, courses, departments, or programs will your campus coalition focus on for your initial iteration of Equity by Design? Consider key “gateway courses” as a starting point for the scope and focus of your work. Campuses should continue to refine the focus areas throughout the process.

Communication, Training, and Engagement Plan

As you move to implement Equity by Design please provide thoughts and answers to the following:

- What is the campus strategy to communicate and engage with your campus community throughout the process?
- What is the level of understanding for undertaking equity-related work amongst your colleagues?
- Do faculty/staff/administrators at your college/university understand that equity gaps exist?
 - If not, how can you engage with those constituents to institutionalize Equity by Design on your campus?

Appendix B: Equity-Minded Language Activity

For this exercise, members of the campus coalition will be asked to find definitions for racism, antiracism, diversity, equity, and inclusion. Definitions for each word should come from two sources: the person's existing understanding of the word and the Minnesota State Office of Equity & Inclusion's definitions. This is a foundational exercise which can be expanded upon through other activities to increase the campus coalition's understanding of equity-minded language.

Objectives:

1. To help participants build their understanding each word, to explore the intricacies and implications of different definitions for each word, and to become more comfortable discussing issues related to equity.
2. To help participants learn to appreciate the importance of language in discussing equity and social justice issues, and how the *process* of discussing the definitions adds to the understanding of the terms.
3. To create shared understanding for these terms and ensure everyone on the team is operating from the same foundational understanding.

Equity-Minded Language Activity Description:

The campus team lead should divide the team into groups of 2-4 to ensure that everyone will have ample chance to participate. Each group will begin their session by having each participant share their definition for "racism". The group will proceed with the rest of the definitions attempting, if possible, to reach a consensus on one definition for each word. All definitions should be discussed. When the small groups are finished, bring everyone back together for a final discussion.

Facilitator Notes:

Minnesota State Office of Equity & Inclusion Definitions:

- **Racism:**
 - **Cultural:** Refers to representations, messages and stories conveying the idea that behaviors and values associated with white people or whiteness are automatically better or more normal than those associated with other racially defined groups.
 - **Institutional:** Institutional racism refers specifically to the ways in which institutional policies and practices create different outcomes for different racial groups. The institutional policies may never mention any racial group, but their effect is to create advantages for whites and oppression and disadvantage for people from groups classified as people of color.
 - **Structural:** The normalization and legitimization of an array of dynamics – historical, cultural, institutional and interpersonal – that routinely advantage Whites while producing cumulative and chronic adverse outcomes for people of color. Structural racism encompasses the entire system of White domination, diffused and infused in all aspects of society including its history, culture, politics, economics and entire social fabric. Structural racism is more difficult to locate in a particular institution because it involves the reinforcing effects of multiple institutions and cultural norms, past and present, continually reproducing old and producing new forms of racism. Structural racism is the most profound and pervasive form of racism – all other forms of racism emerge from structural racism.

- **Antiracism:** “A powerful collection of antiracist policies that lead to racial equity and are substantiated by antiracist ideas” (Kendi, 2019).
- **Diversity:** The concept of diversity encompasses acceptance and respect. It means understanding that each individual is unique and recognizing our individual differences. These can be along the dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies.
- **Equity:** Equity is the proportional distribution of desirable outcomes across groups. Sometimes confused with equality, equity refers to outcomes, while equality connotes equal treatment. Where individuals or groups are dissimilarly situated, equal treatment may be insufficient or even detrimental to equitable outcomes. Simply put, equity connotes parity in outcomes; or, the proportional representation of historically marginalized groups in outcomes.
- **Inclusion:** Authentically bringing traditionally excluded individuals and/or groups into processes, activities and decision/policy making in a way that shares power.
 - **Inclusion (campus context)** - Defined as the active, intentional and ongoing engagement with diversity-in the curriculum, in the co-curriculum and in communities (intellectual, social, cultural, geographical) with which individuals might connect-in ways that increase awareness, content knowledge, cognitive sophistication and empathic understanding of the complex ways individuals interact within systems and institutions.

When discussing any of the terms above, it is vital to bring the issue of **power** into the discussion. For example, a definition of racism might be "prejudice or discrimination based on race, plus the power to enforce it." In that case, think about who holds positions of power, how that power was derived, and in what ways that shapes one's experience. This perspective can have a major impact for individuals who may be inclined to insist that the "other" group can be just as racist as their majority group. This response provides an important opportunity to differentiate between an individual-focused basis of "racism" (which privileges the current power structure by ignoring systemic conditions) and an institutional-focused basis.

Consider spending a lot of time discussing power. Many participants (particularly those of a majority status) may have a hard time understanding it. Have the team reflect on who has power over language, the evolution of language, and how that shapes our understanding and experience. Mention how, when we don't know the meaning of a word, we go to the dictionary and accept its definition as truth. Challenge members of the team to look up definitions for "black" and "white" and notice the connotations. Talk about individual acts of racism, which may be done by anyone, as opposed to institutional acts of racism, which involves economic, class, and social factors which all result from power. Remind the team that some groups in the United States do not have the political, economic, or social power to be racist on an institutional level.

Appendix C: Concerns & Considerations for Racial/Ethnic Data Disaggregation

Equity by Design necessitates the examination of summary data for student outcomes disaggregated by student characteristics, with a particularly emphasis on race-ethnic level disaggregation. Generally, Equity by Design does not focus on examining data at the individual student level.

Data Confidentiality & Anonymity

Under the aegis of FERPA laws (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act 1974) educational institutions must seek to not disclose information about any given student's academic record without the student's consent. FERPA, in board strokes, seeks to protect privacy of the student's academic information. A corollary of this protection is to not disclose a particular student's information in the course of providing summary level information about academic outcomes for a student population. Protecting student confidentiality and anonymity is of particular importance when sharing information about academic outcomes in a public facing manner; that is to say when sharing information which readily available to the general public.

Under FERPA, there are certain exemptions for sharing summary data that have the potential for the identification of students. These exceptions, allow for sharing information with identified "school officials" who have a "legitimate educational interest" in student record information. Equity by Design falls within the parameters of "legitimate educational interest."

It is necessary to safeguard against *unintended* disclosure of student's educational record or identification of a student in summary data. In circumstances where the summary data may include student characteristics for a small number of students, it may be possible to identify individual students from the summary data. When sharing summary information for a small number of students it may be possible to use that information, alone or in combination with other data points, to identify a specific student. In other words, sharing summary information for a small group of students may allow a reasonable person in the school community, who does not have personal knowledge of the relevant circumstances, to identify a student with reasonable certainty. The course success data and summary information utilized for Equity by Design, is not indented to be public facing, rather it is to be shared internally with faculty, administrators, and staff "legitimate educational interest" in student course success patterns.

Why is Confidentiality a Concern?

We do not want to allow third parties to use information about student academic record to take some action (for/against), target the student, or impact the student's ability to go about their public life. Compromising student's confidentiality, anonymity, or disclosure of their private educational record can have unintended consequences for the student and/or the institution.

Legitimate Educational Interest

Under FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, 1974), student information can be shared without the explicit consent of a student when, "school officials" have a "legitimate educational interest" in student record information. Identifying a person as a "school official" does not automatically grant him or her unlimited access to education records; the existence of a legitimate educational interest needs to be established.

School Officials generally encompass:

- a. A person employed by the agency or school in an administrative, counseling, supervisory, academic, student support services, or research position;
- b. Or a support person to these positions; or a person employed by or under contract to the agency or school to perform a special task.

Legitimate Educational Interests encompass:

- a. The information requested is necessary for that official to perform appropriate tasks that are specified in his or her position description or by a contract agreement.
- b. The information is to be used within the context of official agency or school business and not for purposes extraneous to the official's areas of responsibility or to the agency or school.
- c. The information is relevant to the accomplishment of some task or to a determination about the student.
- d. The information is to be used consistently with the purposes for which the data are maintained.

For Equity by Design, faculty, administrators, and staff have a “legitimate educational interest” in examining and understanding academic outcome patterns of race and ethnic groups, given that addressing disparities and equity gaps serves to advance student success, bolster the sustainability of the institution, and realize the college/university and Minnesota State’s mission.

The continuous improvement of student learning, academic outcomes, and experience are central tenets of higher education administration best practices. Part and parcel of continuous improvement is focusing disparities in academic outcomes between student populations, including race and ethnic groups which have been historically underrepresented, underserved, or marginalized.

Going beyond the often examined student academic outcome metrics of first year retention rates or 150% of time completion rates disaggregated by student demographics characteristics, Equity by Design places an emphasis on examining subject, discipline, and/or academic program-level course success.

It is important to acknowledge, an institution’s course success data has the potential for identification of students based on demographic characteristics. Accordingly, for Equity by Design, this information is to be shared in a summary table format which allows for viewing patterns in course success. The course success data and summary information is not indented to be public-facing, rather it is to be shared internally with faculty, administrators, and staff “legitimate educational interest” in student course success patterns.

Access to Course Success Data for Faculty, Staff, and Administrators

Equity by Design places an emphasis on faculty, staff, and administrators examining disparate academic outcomes and experiences of students in effort to better understand how their professional roles, teaching practices, engagements with students, and institutional processes and policies contribute to and exacerbate disparities and equity gaps. More specifically, Equity by Design emphasizes examining disparate student academic outcome patterns for course success, which necessitates the examination of data disaggregated by race and ethnicity at the levels of subject, discipline, academic program, and course.

Of particular importance is the meaningful consideration of how those campus professionals whom work the closest with students, particularly faculty and student support personal, shape the experiences and outcomes of students. Faculty, academic advisors, financial aid advisors, mentors, and orientation staff members, and others work directly are the closest to our students in terms of the student’s points of contact, engagement, support, experiences with the college/university, and learning.

Having those campus professionals whom work the closest with students view and understand academic outcome data and any disparity patterns is important to facilitating discussions, self-reflections, and exploration into how campus and classroom experiences shape disparities in students’ outcomes and experiences.

Working with Small N's & Student Populations

What are Small N's? Small N's refer to relatively small counts of students or cases for a particular demographic group or population. The term "small N's" is a common way of saying small count in mathematics and statistics, where "N" refers to the count of some population.

Depending on the demographic makeup of a college/university's student body, there are going to be small student counts for some race and ethnic groups. As student outcome data is evaluated at increasingly granular or discrete levels, the counts of student for some demographic groups can quickly shrink. That is to say, as we "slice" data to look at some outcome or metric, every level lower level aggregation will result in narrowing the number of cases or students counts.

- a. For example, when looking at institution's fall to fall retention rate for a student cohort, 10% of the cohort maybe comprised of LatinX students. Imagine, the entire cohort included 1000 students; then 10% of the cohort that is identified as LatinX would be equal to 100 students. If we were to look at the course success for the same cohort of students and focus on outcomes of LatinX students in first year science courses, the number of LatinX students under consideration will likely be smaller than the count of from the overall cohort. The course success "slice" of the cohort represents a subset of the original cohort.

Having small n's does not *automatically* preclude our ability and need for examining and critically considering the outcomes of a relatively set of students. Rather, it is essential we be well-informed of the challenges and nuanced issues when working with student outcomes tied to small student populations.

Determining the threshold of what is considered a small n is often a function of several factors of which some are: the data/metric(s) context, timeframe, level of aggregation, and overall student population counts. Generally, small n considerations arise when examining data and outcomes for a particular student group where there are less than 5 or 10 students/cases under evaluation.

Student outcome data that is disaggregated by race and ethnicity often requires careful consideration of challenges that arise when interpreting data patterns and working with small student counts (i.e. small n's) for a given demographic group or population. The sensitives and concerns in evaluating disaggregated data and working with small n's are generally tied to two key substantive topic considerations: **1) Sharing of student information, and 2) Interpretation and leveraging data.**

The first substantive area of consideration is associated with data sharing and confidentiality practices, as well as adhering to FERPA requirements. The second substantive area of consideration is tied to the practices and sensitivities with regard to examining, interpreting, and acting on data for a relatively small set of students for a given population/group.

For Equity by Design, it is critical both of sets of substantive concerns are understood and discussed by participants working with this framework and approach for impacting equity gaps in student academic outcomes. Many of the considerations that are addressed as part of Equity by Design are also tied to larger conversations and directions for building a culture of data democratization, data literacy, and comfort with evidence informed (based) decision making.

In efforts to advance Equity by Design, a one crucial step to addressing the two critical substantive concerns raised above is providing participants with appropriate and meaningful professional development and training regarding data, analytics, and use of evidence for decision making. Training will be provided by the OEI team leading Equity by Design in partnership with System Office stakeholders and System-wide campus colleagues.

Data Sharing and Confidentiality Practices

It is important to be mindful of potentially compromising student anonymity and identifying specific students through academic outcome data. Much of the “why” and “what” concern around confidentiality and FERPA practices have been discussed in preceding sections of this document. Of particular importance is further discussion of the college/university’s practices for sharing disaggregated data student outcome data.

1. Critical Considerations.
 - a. Ensuring that data is shared only with those campus stakeholders that have legitimate education related needs and interest as it relates to Equity by Design.
 - b. Ensuring those campus stakeholders have been provided with training in fundamental best practices for working with disaggregated data.
 - c. Ensuring those campus stakeholders have consented to adhering to data privacy agreements.
2. Delivery medium & platforms for academic outcome patterns.
 - a. Each campus must determine the appropriate method for providing end users (faculty, staff, and administrators) the summary tables with disaggregated student course success outcome data, which fit the institution’s needs, circumstances, and capacities.
 - b. There currently exists considerable variation in the delivery and access to course success information across Minnesota State. The spectrum encompasses institutions that are beginning the process and practices for reporting course success data, to those that provide such information in static reports, to those institutions that have interactive interfaces for analyzing data.

Interpretation and Leveraging Data

There are important considerations and practices of which to be mindful when interpreting, making sense of, and acting on disaggregated student outcome data. The considerations are of particular importance when working with outcome data for a relatively small set of students for a given population/group. Below is a list of topics and important considerations when working with disaggregated student outcome data.

1. Interpreting outcomes for race and ethnic groups
2. Small changes in successful outcome counts & large fluctuations in success rate percentages
3. Carefully considering the story the data tells.
 - a. Overtime, repeatedly, across courses, modes of course delivery
 - i. *Observing the patterns with same student populations is important in knowing that the patterns exists, not isolated to one term or one course section.*
 - b. Drawing conclusions
 - i. *Implicit and explicit bias*
4. Leverage Data for Action
 - a. Acting on the data
 - b. Cautions for quick responses & “kneejerk” reactions
 - i. *Avoid running to quick fixes*
 - c. Thoughtful & Prudent Responses
 - i. *Developing response strategies, interventions, and practices*
 - (a) *Individual, unit/department, institutional level*
 - ii. *Consultation with colleagues & community of practice*
 - iii. *Consultation with Equity by Design Campus Team*

Appendix D: Sample Equity by Design Data Confidentiality Agreement

The following is a sample Data Confidentiality Agreement that campuses can format to their needs and use:

Equity by Design Data Confidentiality Agreement

I understand that as a member of the Equity by Design/Equity and Inclusion group(s), I will receive information on students that will enable me to identify them personally. I hereby agree to keep such information private and not to disclose the names of or any other information about these students shared in this context outside of the work of the groups listed.

I will protect the privacy of students and maintain confidentiality when collecting, compiling, analyzing and disseminating information in these groups.

I will use accurate and contextualized information and will not knowingly or intentionally mislead others about the information I have access to in this group.

Name (Print) _____

Name (Signature) _____

Chair Signature/Date: _____

Please return to [insert name], Director of Institutional Research, [insert college/university name].

Appendix E: Equity Gap Calculator Exercise

Equity: The Students behind the Numbers

Use this exercise as an example to walk your team through calculating equity gaps and determining how to identify the disparities among varying racial groups. The data used in this exercise is for demonstration purposes only, and focuses on course success for students enrolled in a first-year gateway course.

Course Success Definition

For this exercise, course success is defined as the percentage of students earning a “C” or better letter grade for a given course.

- “Successful” grades: A, B, C, P, or S
- “Not Successful” grades: D, F, W, FW, FN, FQ, NC, or U

Student Group	Starting Cohort	Successful Students
A	B	C
Student Group	Number of Students Enrolled in Course	Number of Students Successful in Course
Black, AA	400	260
LatinX	400	240
White	800	568
Asian	300	246
Native American	10	9
Other	90	77
All Students	2000	1400

Reflection Questions:

1. Is there a descriptive pattern of the cohort composition?
2. Is there a descriptive pattern for the students who are successful?

Step 1: Calculating Group’s Course Success Rate

To calculate the success rate for each racial group, divide column “C” by column “B”, and multiply the result by 100; or $(C/B) \times 100 = \text{Group’s Course Success Rate}$.

Student Group	Starting Cohort	Successful Students	Group's Course Success Rate
A	B	C	D
Student Group	Number of Students Enrolled in Course	Number of Students Successful in Course	Student Group Course Success Rate: $(C/B) \times 100$
Black, AA	400	260	
LatinX	400	240	
White	800	568	
Asian	300	246	
Native American	10	9	
Other	90	77	
All Students	2000	1400	

Reflection Questions:

1. Do you notice a Course Success rate pattern?
2. Which group has the highest Course Success rate? Which has the lowest?
3. What concerns come to mind when seeing the Course Success rate for each group?

Step 2: Calculating the Equity Gaps in Course Success Rates

To calculate the equity gaps for each racial group as a percentage point difference, subtract column “E” from column “D”; $D - E =$ Percentage Point Difference between the Student Group and the Institution’s overall Success Rate.

The Overall Success Rate (column “E”) equals the average of all the student group’s Success Rate. For this example, the overall success rate equals 70%.

Equity Gap Defined

The Equity Gap is the quantified difference in the Course Success rate of a student population relative to the overall institutional success rate.

Student Group	Starting Cohort	Successful Students	Group's Course Success Rate	Overall Course Success Rate	Equity Gap
A	B	C	D	E	F
Student Group	Number of Students Enrolled in Course	Number of Students Successful in Course	Student Group Course Success Rate: $(C/B) \times 100$	Institutional Course Success Rate	Percentage Point Difference Between Student Group & Institution: $D - E$
Black, AA	400	260	65%	70%	
LatinX	400	240	60%	70%	
White	800	568	71%	70%	
Asian	300	246	82%	70%	
Native American	10	9	90%	70%	
Other	90	77	86%	70%	
All Students	2000	1400	70%	70%	

Step 3: Course Success Equity Gaps as “Relatable” Numbers

To calculate the number of individual students required to reach equity for each racial group, first calculate the Equity Gap as a decimal by dividing column “F” by 100; or $F/100 = \text{Equity Gap as a Decimal}$.

Next, multiply column “G” by column “B” to obtain the individual number of students to achieve parity;
Or $G \times B = \text{Number of students to reach parity}$.

Student Group	Starting Cohort	Successful Students	Group's Course Success Rate	Overall Course Success Rate	Equity Gap	Gap as Decimal	Number to Reach Equity
A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Student Group	Number of Students Enrolled in Course	Number of Students Successful in Course	Student Group Course Success Rate: $(C/B) \times 100$	Institutional Course Success Rate	Percentage Point Difference Between Student Group & Institution: $D - E$	Equity Gap as a Decimal: $F/100$	Multiply Equity Gap by Count of Students Enrolled in Course: $G \times B$
Black, AA	400	260	65%	70%	-5%	-.05	
LatinX	400	240	60%	70%	-10%	-.10	
White	800	568	71%	70%	1%	.01	
Asian	300	246	82%	70%	12%	.12	
Native American	10	9	90%	70%	20%	.20	
Other	90	77	86%	70%	16%	.16	
All Students	2000	1400	70%	70%	--	--	--

Step 3 Continued:

A number or a statistic, especially in aggregate form, is sometimes hard to connect with, whereas, calculating down to the individual level becomes more relatable. This is one way to tell a *meaningful* story with the data.

As depicted in the table below, for example, if only 20 more Black Students received a passing grade out of the entire entering cohort, Black students would achieved parity with the rest of the institution’s course success rate. **20 is a Relatable Number!**

Student Group	Starting Cohort	Successful Students	Group's Course Success Rate	Overall Course Success Rate	Equity Gap	Gap as Decimal	Number to Reach Equity
A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Student Group	Number of Students Enrolled in Course	Number of Students Successful in Course	Student Group Course Success Rate: $(C/B) \times 100$	Institutional Course Success Rate	Percentage Point Difference Between Student Group & Institution: $D - E$	Equity Gap as a Decimal: $F/100$	Multiply Equity Gap by Count of Students Enrolled in Course: $G \times B$
Black, AA	400	260	65%	70%	-5%	-.05	-20
LatinX	400	240	60%	70%	-10%	-.10	-40
White	800	568	71%	70%	1%	.01	8
Asian	300	246	82%	70%	12%	.12	36
Native American	10	9	90%	70%	20%	.20	2
Other	90	77	86%	70%	16%	.16	14
All Students	2000	1400	70%	70%	--	--	--

Other Data Metrics

The relatable numbers approach can be applied to a multitude of metrics, including (but not limited to): Persistence, Retention, and Completion Rates (PRC Rates); Course Success Rates; Post-graduate Outcomes; participation in honors programs; and participation in high-demand majors.

Areas to apply equity-minded data inquiry can include analysis by: Major; Subject; Credential; Student Demographic Groups; Strategic Initiative; and others.

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