

Equity Principles

The equity principles that follow are framed with the premise that institutions of higher education are responsible for student learning, creating equitable systems to ensure all students achieve success, with particular attention to systematically excluded students. The principles draw from existing equity research and best practices, but are not meant to be exhaustive, and were created to provide a guidepost for institutions who are committed to pursuing equitable outcomes for all students. To be clear, ensuring equity requires that we disavow the one-size-fits-all approach and that we intentionally consider institutional context and capacity for engaging in equity-minded work.

These principles serve as a supplement to the equity statement and will be supported by a toolkit that guides the execution of these principles. The toolkit will be released in 2023.

Principle 1: Develop an equity mindset

Achieving educational equity is an ongoing, collaborative journey. It is important that institutional leaders embrace an equity mindset and focus on how to set a foundation for the college to commit to equity. Developing an equity mindset will require that the institution also embrace and provide stakeholders with opportunities for self-reflection and the opportunity to develop new perspectives, mindsets, and skill sets.

Principle 2: Interrogate institutional practices, structures, and policies and replace those that are inequitable

Inequities persist because they are ingrained in the operations and traditions of an institution. Interrogating institutional practices, structures and policies must be an intentional exercise conducted by committee. Even the most talented educators cannot singlehandedly dismantle or reform institutions that have been historically designed to favor one group of people by upholding dominant culture. Educators can work together, however, to redress specific components of institutional barriers by using an equity-minded approach that replaces structures, processes, and resources with those that are inclusive and prioritize the needs of all students.

Principle 3: Integrate holistic supports throughout the student experience

Integrated support involves ensuring that stakeholders from across campus are well equipped to connect students proactively to the supports that meet their unique needs. Colleges must deepen their understanding of the unique populations of students they serve, recognize how students' intersectional identities influence how they engage at the institution, and then redesign structures and policies to meet the needs of historically marginalized students in higher education.

Principle 4: Embrace cultural competence and culturally responsive pedagogy

Institutions must engage in the challenging but necessary process of becoming culturally competent by implementing culturally responsive pedagogy. Culturally responsive pedagogy acknowledges, respects, and integrates students' cultural identities in relation to their learning experiences. To achieve this, the institution must provide faculty and staff with adequate resources and support such as professional learning, curriculum, and opportunities to engage with experts to better understand how to enhance practices so that they are more reflective of the diversity of the students.

Principle 5: Leverage existing and new data to inform equitable student outcomes

It is important to collect data (such as course-level data, completion and transfer, retention, and more) disaggregated by race and ethnicity each semester to identify where inequities exist. Understanding the nuances relative to student performance by disaggregated groups will allow institutional leaders to make important decisions about how to create, implement, and deploy resources to ensure equitable student outcomes. The standard practice in higher education of using one student group as the reference point perpetuates bias. When disaggregating data, setting student success outcome goals for all student groups (at the institutional, program and course level) is the recommended practice. This ensures that data is equity-based rather than reinforcing intersectional forms of structural discrimination.

Principle 6: Drive positive change through perseverance and power sharing

Equity work is challenging! Institutions will engage in hard work to establish a culture grounded in equity-mindedness, and observable changes will happen slowly and incrementally. Equity work requires leaders who embrace a change mindset and lead by example. Leaders must be comfortable demonstrating vulnerability, embracing humility, creating space for individuals who are typically unseen and/or unheard, and intentionally creating a campus for students to develop a sense of belonging.

Principle 7: Engage with the local community to develop partnerships that lead to economic vitality

Community colleges have the potential to be profoundly accessible hubs of learning, credentialing, and economic mobility that eliminate inequities in educational and workforce outcomes. Institutions need to work with community partners to ensure that students and their families advance their social and economic mobility. To address institutional barriers and disrupt inequitable systems, institutions must strive to deeply understand the community—their dynamics, history, and day-to-day experiences—including the obstacles, resources, and opportunities for innovation.

Principle 8: Acknowledge the pervasiveness of racism and discrimination in the United States of America

The long legacy of racism and systemic oppression in the United States of America must be addressed if the promise of justice and equal opportunity for all Americans is ever to be fully realized. Community colleges exist within systems that entrench privilege and must identify the ways in which historically marginalized students are harmed (e.g., housing and food insecurity, microaggressions, discriminatory practices, limited access to resources, etc.). This principle requires an ability to engage in difficult yet crucial conversations about the systems and structures that continue to persist in educational institutions, creating unequal and inequitable experiences for Black, Latinx, Asian, and Indigenous people.