Equity Focus Groups:
What Students Are Saying and How You Can Engage Them

Strengthening Student Success Conference
October 13, 2017
Agenda

• Overview of Equity Focus Groups
  – Why we did it. How we did it. What we found.
• Group Activity
• From Research to Practice
• Facilitated Discussion about the Use of Focus Groups
Outcomes

Participants will:

• Be able to describe how qualitative data can augment quantitative measurements of equity gaps and inform equity project implementations

• Understand how to plan, conduct, analyze, share, and respond to findings from student equity focus groups

• Recognize how student voices can inspire action
Overview of Equity Focus Groups

Why we did it. How we did it. What we found.
Why We Did It

To increase colleges’ understanding of the experiences and perceptions of students, faculty, and staff regarding matters related to equity.

To inform colleges’ efforts to address equity gaps and create more equitable educational experiences that facilitate the success of all students.
Participating Colleges

Cabrillo College
Cuyamaca College
Los Angeles Valley College
Monterey Peninsula College
Mt. San Jacinto College
Reedley College
Riverside City College
Research Quick Facts

From 2015 to present, we have conducted:

• 47 student focus groups
• 11 faculty/staff focus groups

Which gathered voices from:

• 266 students
• 57 faculty/staff members
### Who We Heard From: Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>Academic Probation</td>
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<td>Asian</td>
<td>First Generation</td>
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<td>Chaldean</td>
<td>Non-First Generation</td>
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<td>Latino</td>
<td>Students with Disabilities</td>
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<td>Native American</td>
<td>Low-Income</td>
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<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td>Former Foster Youth</td>
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<td>Male</td>
<td>Veterans</td>
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<td>LGBTQIA+</td>
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### Who We Heard From: Faculty/Staff

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<th>Faculty/Staff</th>
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<tr>
<td>Full-time Faculty</td>
<td>Classified Staff</td>
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<td>Adjunct Faculty</td>
<td>Admissions &amp; Records</td>
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<td>Counselors</td>
<td>Financial Aid</td>
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<tr>
<td>African-American Faculty and Staff</td>
<td>Outreach &amp; Recruitment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Latino Faculty and Staff</td>
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College Perspectives
Why We Did It

• What were some of the motivations we had for conducting equity focus groups?

• What did we hope to gain?
How We Did It

• Developed research questions with RP Group

• Identified focus group participants
  – Students, faculty, and staff

• Recruited participants
Activity 1

1. How would your students describe the culture at the college?
2. What challenges do your students face?
3. What motivates your students to succeed?
4. What is your college currently doing to help students succeed?
Overall Findings
Themes Across the Colleges

• Overall Themes Across Participating Colleges
  – Students and Faculty/Staff

• Themes Unique to Specific Student Groups

• Themes Unique to Cabrillo and LAVC
Overall Themes: Students

- Motivation to Attend College
  - Myself and my family

- Connection to the College
  - Connecting to *that one person*
  - Not feeling connected to or represented at the college
  - Commuter culture
  - Limited food options
Overall Themes: Students (continued)

• Perspectives on Student Services
  – Categorical and special programs providing needed support and resources, and dedicated counseling
  – Limited awareness of and accessibility to resources
  – Mix experiences in general counseling
Overall Themes: Students (continued)

• Mixed Experiences with Academics
  – Positive and negative experiences with faculty
  – Positive experiences with academic resources (tutoring)

• Financial Barriers
  – Textbook costs
  – Transportation costs
  – Balancing the need to work with school
Overall Themes: Faculty/Staff

• Lack of Faculty/Staff Involvement Affecting Student Life

• Need for Professional Development

• Culture of Feeling Undervalued and Underappreciated
Overall Themes: Faculty/Staff

- Disconnected from Equity Plan

- Unspoken Student Services Policy for Special Populations
  - Placing the responsibility for URM groups and students facing language barriers on the shoulders of a small number of college personnel
Common Perspectives between Students and Faculty/Staff

• Lack of Awareness of Resources/Services
  – Students not knowing where to go and what is available
  – Learning about resources from other students instead of the college
  – Faculty/staff not knowing where to direct students to go and what resources are available to students
Common Perspectives between Students and Faculty/Staff (continued)

- Communication Barriers and Breakdowns
  - Vertical and horizontal communication
  - College communicating with students
  - College personnel communicating with students
Differing Perspectives

What we see...

Student Services

Instruction

Special Populations Programs

What the student experiences...

the teacher who believes in me

the dean who helped me get into Math 1A

the students I study with

the counselor who helped me with my ed plan

the patient tutor

the man in the cafeteria who asks how I'm doing

the nice woman in financial aid
Activity 2

• How do your answers to Activity 1 compare to the findings shared?

• Were there any surprising themes?
Findings by Student Group
Themes by Student Group: African Americans

• Feeling negative attitudes and stereotypes directed at them
• Motivated by desire to dispel the stereotypes
• Lacking a community, sense of belonging, and representation (specifically faculty)
• Sensing a lack of cultural awareness and understanding of their unique challenges
Themes by Student Group: Latinos

• Cultural values as an influence on students’ educational attainment
  – Expectations from family and community
• Motivated by desire to dispel the stereotypes
• Challenges related to being an immigrant or being undocumented
Themes by Student Group: Students with Disabilities

- Sensing a lack of awareness and understanding their unique challenges
- Dealing with stereotypes
- Lack of awareness and understanding of students’ rights for accommodation
- Lack of role models among faculty and staff
Themes by Student Group: Veterans

- Finding a sense of belonging within their group, but not the campus community
- Sensing a lack of cultural awareness and understanding their unique challenges
- Feeling unable to relate to younger students
- Experiencing a difficult transition to civilian life
- Lacking an awareness of resources
- Lack of knowledge about veteran benefit requirements
Themes by Student Group: Former Foster Youth

• Feeling supported through support services or connecting with an understanding faculty member

• Mirrored challenges emerging for all target student populations; these challenges are often exacerbated for former foster youths
  – Lacking a support network at home
  – Needing to have basic needs met (e.g., unstable housing)
College Perspectives
What Did We Find?

• What were the specific themes found at our college?
  – Cabrillo
  – LAVC
Cabrillo College’s Equity Efforts: Findings
General Findings

Financial Concerns

Connection with the College

Academics

Student Support

Motivation
LAVC Focus Group Findings
Overarching Themes

➤ Communication Barriers and Breakdowns
  ➤ Breakdown in Vertical Communication
  ➤ Barriers to Horizontal Communication
  ➤ Impact of Communication Barriers on LAVC Students

➤ The Cost of Education
  ➤ Textbooks and Impact of Faculty’s Choices
Overarching Themes

- **Student Awareness of and Access to Resources**
  - Limited Student Awareness
  - Inability to Access Necessary Resources

- **LAVC Culture and Identity**
  - Positive Perspectives on LAVC Culture
  - Lack of Connection to LAVC
  - What Is LAVC’s Identity?
Group Activity

Do you hear your students’, staff’s, or faculty’s voices in these themes?
Activity 3a

• Pick a quote that highlights something your college is doing well to address the challenge identified
Activity 3b

• Pick a quote that highlights an area where your college can improve to better address the challenge identified
From Research to Practice

What We Did With the Findings
Six Success Factors
Recommendations

• Institutionalize a process for gathering students’ voices to inform college practices through focus groups or similar activities

• Inform faculty about the impact of their textbook decisions

*Nurtured, Valued*
Recommendations (continued)

• Clearly and broadly communicate available resources at the college to ensure all students know where to go for support and are connected to available programs and services

• Increase the availability of key resources and align them with student needs

*Directed, Focused, Connected, Engaged, Nurtured*
Recommendations (continued)

• Foster a deep connection to the college for all students
• Facilitate social connections among students
• Creating a physical space at the college to encourage engagement and connection

Connected, Engaged, Nurtured, Valued
Recommendations (continued)

• Create opportunities for faculty/staff to engage in cultural sensitivity training designed to increase empathy and understanding of how to support students

• Establish a culture that empowers everyone to be a source for student success and support

Engaged, Connected, Valued, and Nurtured
College Perspectives
What Now?

• What has the college done or is planning to do with the results and recommendations?

• How did or are you planning to share the findings with the rest of the college?
Agenda

- Focus groups findings
- Survey findings
- Equity data update
- Implications for integrated planning
- Evaluation planning
- Next steps and close
Today’s Outcomes

- Understand findings from focus group, equity and survey research
- Identify implications from these findings for activities identified in the college’s integrated plan for equity, BSI, and SSSP
- Draw connections between plan activities and plan goals, specifically demonstrating how each activity helps meet specific plan goals
- Recognize the importance of evaluation planning for each activity identified in the integrated plan
- Identify next steps towards developing an integrated plan that takes research findings into consideration and includes meaningful evaluation
Cabrillo College’s Equity Efforts: Reaction and Action
Reaction and Action

- Office of Student Equity
- Faculty Senate
- Counseling & Educational Support Services
- Dean of Student’s Office
- Accreditation Team
Reaction and Action

• Established an Office of Student Equity with a Full-time Director and Equity Program Coordinator
  – Director: Provides leadership and direction, and recommends improvements to policies and practices that hinder student success to cabinet, faculty senate, instructional deans, and student services deans
    • Developing an equity-lens through professional development; institutionalizing this commitment
    • Reframing student needs from “complaints” to institutional shortcomings
    • Incorporating the student voice (i.e., RP Focus Group Study) in Accreditation, Program Planning, Integrated Planning, etc.
    • Equity-centered Data Based Inquiry: Where can we create the greatest impact, for the most amount of students, with the greatest need?
Reaction and Action

• Established an Office of Student Equity with a Full-time Director and Equity Program Coordinator
  – Coordinator: Direct Student Support
    • Addressing specific student needs
    • Increasing student engagement in equity efforts through leadership, programs, support
    • Supporting equity student clubs and groups (Black Student Union, Suenos Club, Accountable Intersectionality)
Reaction and Action

- **Faculty Senate**: Incorporated Equity as one of its ROCKS and priorities. Director of Student Equity Report=a standing item

- **Counseling**: Schedule follow-up appointments with the same counselor to improve consistency of information

- **Dean of Students Office**: Student services fair at beginning of each term to promote awareness of programs and services
Planning for Focus Groups
Activity 4

• What do you want to know?
• Why do you want to know?
• Who do you want to know it from?
• How will participants be identified and recruited?
• How do you plan to use the results?
For more information on Equity Focus Groups

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Thank you!