Student Equity Focus Groups:
Listen, Learn, and Lead

Strengthening Student Success Conference
October 12, 2017
Agenda

• Overview of Equity Focus Groups
  – Why we did it. How we did it. What we found.

• From Research to Practice

• Planning for Focus Groups
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>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaldean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBTQIA+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Who We Heard From: Faculty/Staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty/Staff</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full-time Faculty</td>
<td>Classified Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjunct Faculty</td>
<td>Admissions &amp; Records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselors</td>
<td>Financial Aid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American Faculty and Staff</td>
<td>Outreach &amp; Recruitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino Faculty and Staff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overall Findings
Themes Across the Colleges

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

• Themes Unique to Specific Student Groups
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
  - Negative 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
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 student I study with
- The dean who helped me get into Math 1A
- The counselor who helped me with my ed plan
- The man in the cafeteria who asks how I'm doing
- The nice woman in financial aid

theRPgroup
Research • Planning • Professional Development
for California Community Colleges
Think-Pair-Share

Reflecting back on the themes and challenges:

1. Were there any that surprised you?
2. Were there any that reminded you of your students?
3. Were there any that you personally connected with?
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)
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)

- 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
Planning for Focus Groups
Planning for Focus Groups at Your College

• 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

Dr. Darla Cooper
Interim Executive Director/Director of Research and Evaluation
dcooper@rpgroup.org

Alyssa Nguyen
Associate Director of Research and Evaluation
anguyen@rpgroup.org
Thank you!