Becoming the "People's College": Advancing Equity in a Climate of Resistance

Drs. Frank Harris III & J. Luke Wood
Professors of Postsecondary Education
Co-Directors, Community College Equity Assessment Lab
San Diego State University

Advancing Racial Justice & Equitable Outcomes in Community Colleges Institutes

Lumina FOUNDATION

ILLINOIS
Office of Community College Research & Leadership
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

CCEAL
THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE EQUITY ASSESSMENT LAB

Toward an Understanding of Equity

Equity refers to a heightened focus on groups experiencing <u>disproportionate impact</u> in order to remediate disparities in their experiences and outcomes.

- **Students of Color**
- **Former Foster Youth**
- **Food and Housing Insecurities**
- **Students with Disabilities**
- **Formerly Incarcerated**
- **Pell Grant Recipients**

CCEAL
THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE EQUITY ASSESSMENT LAB

"You cannot combat inequity with good will . . . . even the best intended people fall over and over again into the traps of their own blind spots."

Davidson (2015)

Equity-Mindedness

According to Bensimon (2007) Equity-mindedness entails:

- recognizing the ways in which systemic inequities disadvantage minoritized people in a range of social institutions or contexts (education, employment, healthcare, the criminal justice system, etc.)

- (re)framing outcome disparities as an indication of institutional underperformance rather than students' underperformance;

- not attributing outcome disparities exclusively to students or perceived deficits in students' identities, life circumstances, or capabilities;

- critically reflecting upon one's role and responsibilities (as a faculty member, student affairs staff, administrator, counselor, institutional researchers etc.).

What are some barriers to *ACTUALLY achieving equity?*

What Derails Equity?

- A culture of compliance
- A culture of complacency
- Deficit perspectives
- A lack of data transparency
- Instability
- Misappropriation and a lack of intentionality
- Poor conceptualization of equity

- Marginalization
- Siloing
- A lack of institutional buy-in
- Exceptionalism
- Toxic resistance
- Toxic support

What Derails Equity?

COMPLIANCE: "Listen. Let's just do what we have to do to secure our funding and get the state/district of our a***s."

COMPLACENCY: "Why do we have to do this? Nothing's going to change. The problem is so much bigger than me/us."

DEFICIT PERSPECTIVES: "Now they want everyone to go right into college level math/English. That's crazy. Some of these students have no chance of succeeding."

DATA TRANSPARENCY: "We have all this data, but what does it mean? What should I make of it?"

INSTABILITY: "We had an amazing VPI who was an equity champion, but she left to be president at another college."

MISAPPROPRIATION AND INTENTIONALITY: "Can we use equity monies to buy this copier? It's not exactly aligned with equity, but everyone will eventually benefit from it."

What Derails Equity?

POOR CONCEPTUALIZATION: "Let's be honest, equity really means lowering standards and rigor."

MARGINALIZATION: "All of our equity work takes place in EOP/Umoja/Puente."

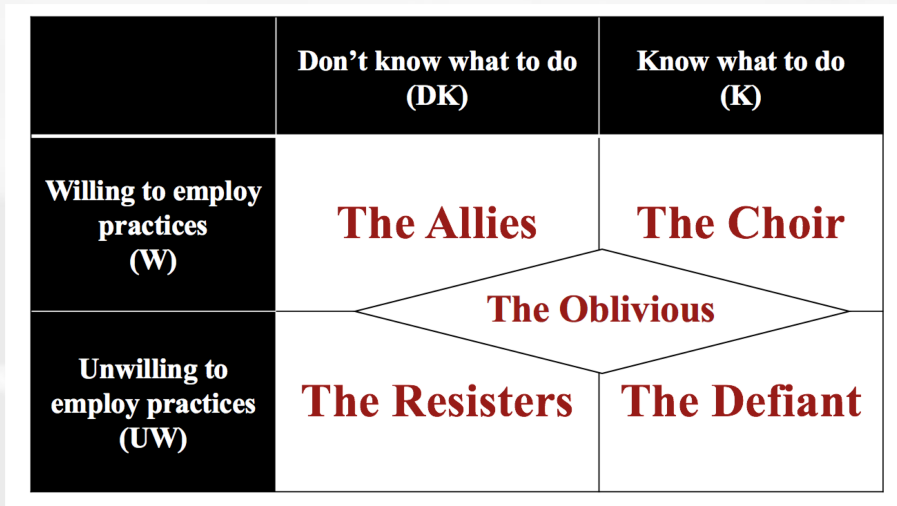**SIOLING:** "Oh no, the equity plan is due soon! Let's have the dean and [one other person] write it."

INSTITUTIONAL BUY-IN: "We have an equity plan, but no one really takes it seriously. We did what we had to do to get the money."

EXCEPTIONALISM: "We aren't like the other colleges in the State. We have the highest transfer rates to the UC so we don't need to worry about equity."

TOXIC RESISTANCE AND SUPPORT . . . . .

Taxonomy of Educators' Perspectives

	Don't know what to do (DK)	Know what to do (K)
Willing to employ practices (W)	The Allies	The Choir
	The Oblivious	
Unwilling to employ practices (UW)	The Resisters	The Defiant

Culture eats **strategy for breakfast.**

— *Peter Drucker* —

Institutional Equity Taxonomy

	CULTURE	
STRATEGY		

Institutional Equity Taxonomy

	CULTURE	
STRATEGY	• Leadership • Mission and Values • Embedded Practices • Psychological Climate (Hurtado et al.) /Beliefs/Attitudes/Assumptions about Equity • Physical Environment • Governance • Faculty/Staff Composition • History/Legacy of Racism/Exclusion (Hurtado et al.)	

Institutional Equity Taxonomy
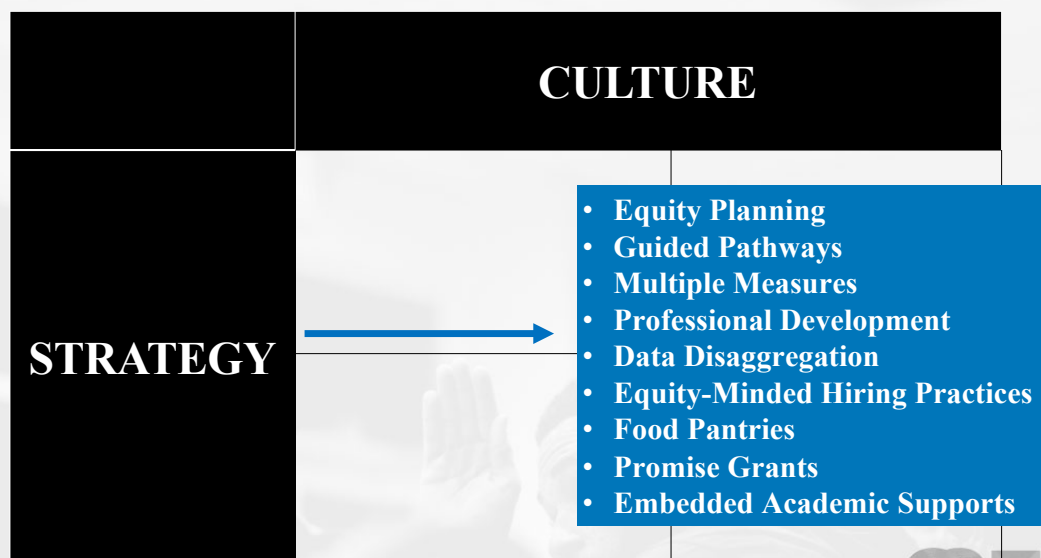
	CULTURE	
STRATEGY →	• **Equity Planning** • **Guided Pathways** • **Multiple Measures** • **Professional Development** • **Data Disaggregation** • **Equity-Minded Hiring Practices** • **Food Pantries** • **Promise Grants** • **Embedded Academic Supports**	

Institutional Equity Taxonomy

	Equity Deprived Culture (DC)	Equity Enriched Culture (EC)
STRATEGY	**DC**	**EC**
	DC	**EC**

Equity Enriched	Equity Deprived
1. Equity is seen as an asset/institutional strength/necessity	1. Equity is seen as an annoyance/liability/burden
2. Equity is seen as attainable	2. Equity is seen as unattainable
3. Equity is seen as an indicator of institutional performance (an institutional responsibility ethos)	3. Equity is seen exclusively as an indicator of student performance
4. Equity is valued	4. Equity is not valued beyond compliance and funding
5. Equity is widely embraced and embedded throughout the institution	5. Equity is embraced by a few and on the margins

Equity Enriched	Equity Deprived
6. Leadership is public, transparent, and unapologetic about prioritizing equity	6. Leadership is fearful of or ashamed to embrace equity
7. Commitment to rethinking and re-envisioning the institution to achieve equity	7. Commitment to the status quo
8. Equity is viewed as an urgent issue	8. Equity is viewed as negligible or negotiable
9. Institutional researcher shares data and facilitates equity-minded sensemaking	9. Institutional researcher hoards data and sees themselves as a gatekeeper
10. "Equity" is prominently featured throughout the institution (buildings, signs, banners, documents)	10. "Equity" is invisible throughout the institution

Institutional Equity Taxonomy

	CULTURE	
Strategy (S)	S	S
No Strategy (NS)	NS	NS

Strategy	Bad/No Strategy
1. Equity plan goals are present in other important institutional documents and processes	1. Equity plan goals are relegated to the equity plan
2. Equity-minded hiring practices are used across the institution	2. Equity-minded hiring practices not used
3. Intrusive and equity-minded professional development occurs throughout the year and is accessible to all campus personnel and required when possible	3. Professional development is passive, does not build capacity to achieve equity, and only available to full-time faculty and managers; strictly voluntary
4. All student outcomes data are routinely disaggregated by disproportionately impacted groups	4. Data are not disaggregated

Strategy	Bad/No Strategy
5. Qualitative and "non-traditional" data are collected and used to inform sensemaking	5. Only quantitative data are collected and used
6. Efforts and interventions to "fix" educators and the institution	6. Efforts and interventions to "fix" students
7. Voices/experiences/perspectives of disproportionately impacted students are intentionally sought and valued in institutional decision-making	7. Voices/perspectives/experiences of disproportionately impacted students are absent or tokenized in decision-making
8. Intentional efforts and spaces are created to facilitate difficult and critical conversations about race/racism and equity	8. Conversations about race and racism are muted and disconnected from equity

Institutional Equity Taxonomy

	Equity Deprived Culture (DC)	Equity Enriched Culture (EC)
Strategy (S)	DC S	EC S
No Strategy (NS)	DC NS	EC NS

Institutional Equity Taxonomy

	Equity Deprived Culture (DC)	Equity Enriched Culture (EC)
Strategy (S)	**Conventional College**	**The "People's" College**
No Strategy (NS)	**Colonial College**	**Unintentional College**

Institutional Equity Taxonomy

	Equity Deprived Culture (DC)	Equity Enriched Culture (EC)
Strategy (S)	• **Students with Disabilities** • **Formerly Incarcerated**	• **Food & Housing Insecure** • **Foster Youth** • **Low Income Students**
No Strategy (NS)	• **Men of Color** • **Undocumented Students**	• **Veterans** • **LGBT Students**

Assess the Institution's Disposition Towards Equity

Assessing the Institution's Disposition Toward Equity

- What is the current status of our equity culture? In what ways are we enriched? In what ways are we deprived?

- Where is equity valued at our institution?

- Where is equity visible at our institution?

- How public are we about our equity efforts?

- To what degree is equity a salient aspect of our institutional identity?

- How can we start to shift our culture to become more equity enriched?

Align Strategies with Culture

Develop a Transparent Vision of the Campus Culture with Equity at the Core

Engage in Strategic **Messaging** to Align Institutional Values and Priorities with Equity

Embed **Tangible** Indicators of Equity Throughout the Institution

Create Shared <u>Accountability</u> for a Commitment to Equity

---

Key Take-A-Ways

- Strategies alone do not close equity gaps, attention to equity culture is essential.

- Spend more time on culture—especially during the rollout phase of any equity effort.

- Culture is most visible when it is observed organically

- Most equity cultures are "inept" or resistant to engaging racial equity than they are on other equity issues.

- Toxic support is just as bad, if not worse, than toxic resistance

Thank You!

Q&A

Drs. Frank Harris III & J. Luke Wood
Professors of Postsecondary Education
Co-Directors, Community College Equity Assessment Lab
San Diego State University
@fharris3
@drlukewood