Breaking Equity Barriers with Eric Lara, Associate Dean for Student Success and Equity

00:00:00 **Eric**

There is disproportionate remediation within our students, but that's what we're trying to fix. With student equity, with SSSP funding, with SEAP funding, we want to provide services and workshops and activities and programs for our students that are going to make them feel that they are able to achieve whatever goal that they may have.

00:00:19 **Christina**

Hi, I'm Christina Barsi.

00:00:20 **Sun**

And I'm Sun Ezzell, and you're listening to the Magic Mountie Podcast.

00:00:23 **Christina**

Our mission is to find ways to keep your ear to the ground - so to speak, by bringing to you the activities and events you may not have time to attend, the resources on campus you might want to know more about, the interesting things your colleagues are creating, and the many ways we can continue to better help and guide our students.

00:00:40 **Sun**

We bring to you the voices of Mt. SAC, from the classroom to completion.

00:00:45 **Speaker 1**

And I know I'm going to achieve my goals, and I know people here are going to help me to do it.

00:00:54 **Speaker 2**

She is a sociology major and she's transferring to Cal Poly, Pamona! Psychology major, English major ...

00:00:54 **Christina**

From transforming part-time into full-time-

00:00:58 **Speaker 1**

I really liked the time that we spent with Julie about how to write a CV and a cover letter.

00:01:06 **Christina**

Or just finding time to soak in the campus.

00:01:07 **Speaker 1**

To think of the natural environment around us as a library.

00:01:11 **Christina**

We want to keep you informed and connected to all things Mt. SAC. But most importantly, we want to keep you connected with each other. I'm Christina Barsi, Mt. SAC alumni, and producer of this podcast.

00:01:22 **Sun**

And I'm Sun Ezzell, Learning Assistance Faculty and Professional Learning Academy Coordinator.

00:01:26 **Christina**

And this is the Magic Mountie Podcast.

00:01:29 **Christina**

Ever wonder if the word "diversity" might be too broad to describe a gap you want to close? What terms should we be using and what do they really mean?

00:01:41 **Christina**

Hi, this is Christina. And in this episode, Eric Lara, the Associate Dean for Student Success and Equity breaks these things down for us, as well as highlights the centers and programs at Mt. SAC that are designed and designated in helping achieve equity on campus, enjoy.

00:02:03 **Eric**

Welcome everyone, my name is Eric Lara. I am the Associate Dean for Student Success and Equity here at Mt. SAC, and I've been here for just over four years.

00:02:10 **Eric**

So, today, I will talk about, go in-depth on equity equality, kind of on the big scale. And then as we go, tailor it down campus-wide; what are we doing on campus when it comes to equity, specific student programs and services on the student services side, student equity funding, which is across the campus. And then we'll dive deep into what is equity versus equality. A lot of times these words get interchanged when we're talking about them or using them.

00:02:37 **Eric**

Currently, I oversee three of our equity programs. I oversee the ARISE Program, which is our Asian Pacific Islander Center. But we also have the AANAPISI grant on campus. We are an AANAPISI Institution (Asian American Native American Pacific Islander Institution). So, the funding goes through that program.

00:02:57 **Eric**

I oversee the DREAM program on campus for our undocumented students and the REACH program, which is for our current and former foster youth.

00:03:05 **Eric**

All three programs are housed in the Equity Center which is one of our newest buildings on campus. We've been open for a year and a half now. So, all three programs are in there. We have counselors in there, we have computer labs , study space, we have a kitchen, open access area for students to hang out. So, it's a really nice center. Once we're back, you can come visit us.

00:03:26 **Eric**

I oversee the student equity portion of SEAP. So now, we have Student Equity Achievement Plan on campus. These are the four different funded activities that we get from the State of California. We have student equity, we have SSSP credit, SSSP non-credit, and then basic skills funding.

00:03:49 **Eric**

Over the last year, it has been combined into one pot of money, it's called SEAP. And in total, we have roughly $13.5 million in SEAP to fund all these activities.

00:04:01 **Eric**

For student equity specifically, my role specifically, it's about three and a half million across 44 different activities. I am the co-chair for the Student Equity Committee, along with Bruce Nixon, who is a faculty co-chair. I co-lead the monthly mentor meetings. And then I'm also the co-lead for the technology distribution program on campus.

00:04:19 **Eric**

So, ever since we went to remote back in March, we have been lending out computers, laptops, iPads, and hotspots to students. I'll show you some data, but we have spent close to a million dollars on technology for students for all of the monthly services when it comes to the free internet. But we've distributed to over 2,000 students, close to 2,500, over 3,000 laptops, about 1,700 hotspots that we have given out to students.

00:04:50 **Eric**

So, what is student equity and how do we see it here on campus? So, student equity, the diversity of our students' cultural disabilities, ethnic levels of educational preparedness, linguistic needs, and interests - those economic conditions should dominate our discussion and be pervasive across all of our activities, outcomes, and planning measures.

00:05:08 **Eric**

So, that is the goal, that's the mission of the Equity Committee on our campus. We want to make sure that what we do for our students, all of the programs, services, activities, events, that we provide access to all of our students, regardless of what level they're in, what year they're in, what programs they may be in.

00:05:26 **Eric**

If we're remote, if we're on campus, we want to make sure that it is open access to every single student, it's available to them, they know of the events and activities, and we can support them however we can.

00:05:37 **Eric**

We actually do work closely with Access a lot on all of our activities. Every single flyer that you will see has the Access statement at the bottom. We do provide interpreters if needed for any of our events. Even if it's virtual, we have done that with closed captioning, we've done it with the interpreters on the camera. So, we are a very big Access supporter. The campus is one of the largest deaf and hard of hearing programs in the State. So, we work very close with the Access Program.

00:06:06 **Eric**

So, the first question is what is equity, and what is equality? What is the difference?

00:06:11 **Eric**

So, basically equality, everyone gets the same thing. Equity, it's focused on student outcomes.

00:06:20 **Eric**

Equality is defined as treating everyone the same or giving everyone the same opportunities regardless of their individual attributes. Equity, on the other hand, means accounting for differences in individual attributes and experiences for the purpose of achieving equal outcomes.

00:06:36 **Eric**

So, equality, if we go back to the definition; treating everyone the same or giving everyone the same opportunities regardless of their individual attributes. So, that's the key term - regardless of their individual attributes, where equity means accounting for differences in individual attributes and experience for the purpose of achieving equal outcomes.

00:06:55 **Eric**

So, we are accounting for who they are, what they have, what they bring with them to be able to help them in their path. And that's what we do at Mt. SAC; equality, especially as educators, especially as a community college, our students come from very different backgrounds. We have students coming in with a GED without a high school diploma. We have students coming in with a 4.0 plus out of high school in AP courses, students coming in and so advanced level math and science, students who never took Algebra 2 in high school.

00:07:24 **Eric**

That is what community college is. We are open access to every student and with the new AB 705 that was implemented a year ago, we got rid of, for the most part, for the majority, of all of our basic need courses. And all of our students now are starting at college-level English or college-level math.

00:07:43 **Eric**

So, equality, you imagine the world as being equal. Everybody's starting at the same playing field, they have the same ladder and they are trying to reach that one goal of getting that degree.

00:07:54 **Eric**

But as we know, the world isn't equal. Like I said, we have these students who come in very prepared, they have scholarships, they went to tutoring for their exams. We have students who come from school districts who are poorly funded, right?

00:08:11 **Eric**

You hear the term "Your zip code determines your education." You hear that all the time. And we have schools, especially where we reside in, Walnut - our students come from La Puente, from Baldwin Park, El Monte, Pomona. I grew up in La Puente, I grew up in a single-parent household. I grew up on welfare, I grew up low income, I grew up with food stamps and apartments. I didn't do summer programs, I didn't go to summer camps, I didn't know what any of that stuff was.

00:08:41 **Eric**

Now that I'm in my career, we used to live out in La Crescenta before I moved out to this part of town. And the one thing I noticed in La Crescenta was every other building on Foothill was a SAT Prep, was a foreign language class, was a Kumon, was a STEM center, was horseback riding.

00:09:05 **Eric**

And when I come home to La Puente, you don't see that, you don't see those buildings, you don't see those businesses. The zip code does make a difference, but that should not influence the education that we give our students.

00:09:20 **Eric**

I'm going to do a little plug here; there is a podcast (if you all listen to podcasts) called Gangsters Capitalism. If you listen to season one of Gangsters Capitalism, you're going to hear about the college scandal. So, Gangsters Capitalism is - I think it's like a six or seven-part series on how the entire college admission scandal went down; how it got started, how these very famous and rich individuals paid Rick Singer to falsify the SATs, to talk to these coaches at these universities, to get them in on special scholarships. And it's really, really interesting to see how somebody with a lot of money can get around the system with these major universities.

00:10:04 **Eric**

Felicity Huffman, I think got like 7 or 10 days in prison or something like that. And the podcast starts (if you've listened to the news the last few years) - there was a mom, somewhere back East (I want to say it was Chicago) maybe who used her dad's home address to send her daughter to a better school district. And she got caught and ended up getting like three years in jail and like a hundred thousand dollars fine or something ridiculous like that. Just to try to get her daughter a better education.

00:10:35 **Eric**

Where you have Rick Singer over here doing it for multimillion-dollar families and getting into top tier universities. So, if you get a chance, write it down, it's a really quick podcast.

00:10:46 **Eric**

But as we know, the system isn't perfect. We do have issues with the system, regardless of what institution you may be at. There are microaggressions, there is implicit bias that is happening. No matter how much training we go to, no matter how much schooling we go to, it is happening all around, it is happening on our campus. We know that here at Mt. SAC. There is disproportionate remediation within our students, but that's what we're trying to fix.

00:11:13 **Eric**

With student equity, with SSSP funding, with SEAP funding, we want to provide services and workshops and activities and programs for our students that are going to make them feel that they are able to achieve whatever goal that they may have.

00:11:26 **Eric**

We are one of the few campuses in California that have a DREAM Center. We are the first program in California that has a DREAM director. So, other programs have directors that oversee multiple special populations. But we were the first that had a director specifically for the DREAM post. We were the first that had a director specifically for our Foster Youth Center. So, the director only oversees Foster Youth, the director of DREAM only oversees the DREAM program.

00:11:53 **Eric**

We have a very robust Pride Center on our campus. We have a really well-funded honors program. So, at Mt. SAC, we are very hands-on with our students and our funding goes directly to student services and student support.

00:12:06 **Eric**

Now, that we're in the pandemic, we've seen a drastic change, a drastic shift in our student population, in the number of courses that students are taking. And we quickly shift. We try to quickly shift our campus resources to help with virtual environment; both on the faculty and staff side, as well as on the student side.

00:12:25 **Eric**

We started this drive-through computer technology distribution back in March, where we're handing out, like I said, laptops and iPads and hotspots, and it's a drive-through process. We don't mail it, we don't deliver it. The way that we do it, we can't do it that way.

00:12:43 **Eric**

The student needs to come to campus. They need to turn on the computer on the campus Wi-Fi for it to register. So, that way, it's secure, we're able to remote in, there are no issues with the laptop. And we've received emails, we've received quotes from students. And one student said, "If we don't have access to a laptop and Wi-Fi or food at home, what makes you think that we have access to get into a car and wait in line to come get it?" And it's a great quote.

00:13:09 **Eric**

We've had students email us and say, "I have to take two, three buses to get to campus. I'm not going to do that in this COVID time to just come pick up a laptop. What can you do for us?"

00:13:20 **Eric**

We've had to be creative. We've had some staff and say, "Well, I live in that town, I don't mind dropping it off and doing it that way." We allow family members to pick up tech on behalf of the students or friends, pick up tech on behalf of the students. But just the way that we need to register the laptops, the student needs to come to campus, and needs to be distributed through campus. It's not as simple, just open up the trunk and pop it into the trunk type of process.

00:13:48 **Eric**

So, what are we doing when it comes to equity? We're redirecting the resources, we're trying to get those students to do what they need to do to get out, to earn the certificate, earn the degree, go to transfer - whatever their educational goal may be, we want to help them.

00:14:03 **Eric**

Now, the biggest problem I've had, my biggest concern as an Associate Dean for equity, is a lot of our students when we do workshops, when we do events, when we do our Minority Male Initiative, when we do our monthly mentoring programs, we start seeing the same students. And those students are the ones who are part of the EOPS program, who are part of Bridge, who are part of Honors, who are part of the ARISE program, for example - because they're already connected. They're connected to a director, they're connected to a coordinator, they're connected to a counselor.

00:14:34 **Eric**

But how do we attract those students that come to campus, go to class, and then go home? Those that are not part of the special program. And that's where you as a faculty come in, that's where you as a faculty can help us.

00:14:48 **Eric**

I always get asked, "Well, what can we do for our students to let them know about all the resources that we have? The free food, the food pantry, mental health services on campus - we have a veterans program." And my answer is always, we need to train the faculty to know all of the services because you, as faculty, get to see the students firsthand multiple times a week. You see them more than we see them.

00:15:11 **Eric**

So, if you know of all the services, if you know of the programs, of the events, of the buildings, where everything is located, then in your syllabus or in the class or as an activity, you can start promoting it as well. So, that is my request to you is to get to know all of the special programs that we have and just know the name. Because once you hear a student talking, you could just kind of go back to like, "Oh, I remember something, let me look it up really quick." Or, "I remember this guy named Eric. I can point you to him can help you out." And it's as simple as that.

00:15:43 **Eric**

Share your story. They see you as faculty, they see you as successful, you've made it - you don't understand their struggle, you don't understand where I came from. Sure, we do. I just haven't shared my story. So, share that story. Understanding the dismantling structural racism, promoting racial equity analysis.

00:16:02 **Eric**

The definition of structural racism; a system in which public policy, institutional practices, cultural representations, and other norms work in various often reinforcing ways to perpetrate racial group identities, inequities - identifies dimensions of our history and culture that we have allowed privileges associated with whiteness and disadvantages associated with color to endure and adapt over time.

00:16:27 **Eric**

Structural racism is not something that a few people or institutions choose to practice. Instead, it has been a feature of the social-economic, and political system in which we all exist.

00:16:36 **Eric**

And then diversity - diversity has come to refer to the various backgrounds and races that compromise the community, nation, or other groupings. In many cases, the term "diversity" does not just acknowledge the existence of diversity of backgrounds, race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, and so on, but implies an appreciation of these differences.

00:16:56 **Eric**

Structural racism perspective can be distinguished from the diversity of perspective, and the structural racism takes direct accounts of the striking disparities in well- being and opportunity areas that come along with being a member of a particular group and work to identify ways in which these disparities can be eliminated from the Aspen Institute. So, glossary for understanding and dismantling structural racism, promoting racial equity analysis.

00:17:23 **Eric**

So, that's the key term; is promoting racial analysis, and we want to dismantle the structural racism, racial equity, systematic racism, white privilege, institutional racism, individual racism. So, individual racism can include face-to-face or covert actions towards a person that intentionally expresses prejudice, hate, or biased on race; diversity, ethnicity, cultural representation, national values, progress and retrenchment.

00:17:53 **Eric**

So, a lot of these terms we use day-to-day or we experience in the workplace, within our communities, with our families, we sometimes don't know or understand or see that we are doing something that may be perceived as racist, may be perceived as derogatory. A lot of times it's, "I grew up that way, I grew up saying that word. I grew up saying that phrase, it came with no mal- intent. I never saw it that way."

00:18:22 **Eric**

But we all need to understand that everybody is different. Everybody grew up in a different society, grew up in a different area, grew up differently. That word that we say, actions that we do make a long-lasting impact.

00:18:37 **Eric**

So, I wanted to come back to the word diversity and we throw out that word a lot. We use the word "diversity" for a lot of different things. We're a diverse campus, we are a very diverse campus. Or there was one instance a few weeks ago in a manager's meeting, in a campus meeting, we were talking about hiring committees. And somebody made the comment of, "We need to have a more diverse hiring committee."

00:19:05 **Eric**

And I spoke up and I said, "No, you are using the word incorrectly. You need to stop using the word 'diverse.' You need to stop using the word 'diversity.' You need to just come out and say it. And don't be afraid to be open and honest and have that space. What do we actually need in a committee? We need a black male in this committee. We need a black female in this committee. Don't say that we don't have a diverse enough faculty in communications department." I'm just throwing something out there. You need to say, "We don't have enough Latino males in the communication department.

00:19:41 **Eric**

Be intentional, be specific when it comes to saying what the issue is. We tend to hide behind the term "diversity" because we don't want to offend anybody. We don't want to piss anybody off on one end. But on the other end, we don't always know what the proper terminology is. Can they actually say "black man" and not offend anybody? Do I say "Latino" or do I say "Latin X?" Which one is the correct term? So, then, we default to diversity because that's kind of the safe term.

00:20:12 **Eric**

But we know for a fact on this campus (and I've done presentations and I've talked about this), we need to hire more black faculty, we need to hire more Latin X faculty, point-blank. That's it, that's the issue. It's not that we need to hire more diversity - no, no. We need to hire more black faculty, we need to have more Latin X faculty. Our numbers show it.

00:20:35 **Eric**

We are a Hispanic serving institution, 60% of our students are Latin X. And if I remember correctly, it's something around 12 to 15% of our faculty are Latin X. We don't equal. I believe it's 6% black and I think it's 5% faculty who are black. So, on that side, we have roughly the same number or same percentage of faculty as students, but that is way too low. It's a problem that we only have 5, 6% of our faculty who are black, African -American. We want you to be very specific when it comes to these things.

00:21:14 **Eric**

As a campus, president Scroggins, our vice presidents have been very supportive when it comes to race and ethnicity on our campus. We have a Pride Center, we have a DREAM Center. We have these centers on campus and we have a campus population and board of trustee members who have supported it, who have put money into all of these efforts. And we are prideful on our campus to have that, to have those opportunities.

00:21:48 **Christina**

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00:22:02 **Christina**

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