Fostering Culture Change on Equity
Bill Scroggins, December 2019

To my community college CEO colleagues:

The meaning of equity has evolved as American society has evolved. From the exception clause in the 13th Amendment, to the necessary expansions of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, to today's debates on immigrant rights, our national understanding of the term "equity" has been a reflection of the extent of social justice in our culture. This evolution influenced my own approach to leadership as a white male college president and has been a major influence on my implementation of Guided Pathways.

That influence began when, as a 17-year old, I started at UCLA in 1965. I realized that what had come smoothly for me was a continuing struggle for those who were not white males of the dominant American culture. This patent inequity struck a chord in me that eventually led to my career in community colleges.

That journey included leading College of the Sequoias to join Achieving the Dream. The combination of data-driven research and planning with both an outcome and equity lens was a quantum leap for me as a leader. Being at the inception of our state's funding of Student Success (2012) and Student Equity (2014) was an opportunity to add innovative practices to "move the needle" on the equity performance gap. I encourage my fellow CEOs to find new and reallocated resources to apply in the data-research-planning model to implement transformational change in your college's understanding of equity and to be both the inspiration and the facilitator for that transformation.

The central data tool of California's Success and Equity initiatives was disproportionate impact. Mt. SAC analyzed six-year graduation rates for six racial/ethnic groups and asked, "Does the group succeed at least 80% as well as other groups?" No group was consistently within 80% of the success rates of white students. (See link to the 2014 study.) Students participating in targeted services showed equity performance gains (See link to 2018 Student Equity Progress Report). From 2014 to 2018 (link to data) overall completion rates improved for all groups except Whites. This data demonstrates that four years of Success and Equity support made measurable improvement in target groups. However, when considering the disproportionate impact data, large racial/ethnic performance gaps persisted. Progress was made on performance outcomes but not on equity. A deeper solution was needed.

The inability to close the racial/ethnic gap presented a challenge for my leadership. My understanding of equity at that point was based on a belief that more resources and support would "level the playing field" and close the racial/ethnic gap. I needed to reassess my understanding of equity.

In 2015 Mt. SAC joined the AACC Pathways project. The focus was on the student experience and barriers that students encountered at each of the steps in the journey from first contact to

completion. Our Pathways team began to look at how Success and Equity cohorts of students experienced the college processes. By looking at data disaggregated at this level (undocumented, foster youth, gender expression, veterans, non-native speakers, minority male, etc.) we found that support and interventions that had been developed in the cohorts were delivered in ways that met the specific needs of that population. In many cases, we noted that providing that support and guidance with students, staff, and faculty who shared the background and life experiences of that cohort were much more effective in producing both persistence and completion. See for example my presentation, "Matching Support to Student Need" ([link](#)).

Based on this work, our Pathways team began fostering a culture of change at Mt. SAC. We needed those across the campus—and our new hires—to know, at a deep level, the importance of individual student equity and their role in the equity mindedness culture change. As president, I supported and facilitated that work by funding targeted professional development—especially inspiring and disruptive guest campus speakers—and by improving our equity-based hiring process, particularly job descriptions, EEO training, and national recruiting. Finally, I used every opportunity on campus to speak of my own privileged history and my own equity-mindedness "conversion."

We are continuing to address this evolved understanding of equity as "equity mindedness," that is, providing to each student both academic and life support to achieve their full potential. Below are some of the activities and processes that are directed at this outcome. This list might serve as a tool to inventory equity mindedness strategies at your college—and to evolve your own approach to equity beyond equal opportunity to supporting each student's ability to travel the pathway to completion—the Guided Pathway model. (Mt. SAC examples are linked.)

1. Revised your college Mission and Core Values ([link](#))?
2. Resolved each student's financial aid eligibility ([link](#))?
3. Created faculty equity minded communities of practice ([link](#))?
4. Revised recruiting brochures to emphasize equity ([link](#))?
5. Provided Success and Equity support for need-based cohorts ([link](#))?
6. Used all-college meetings to highlight implicit and institutional bias ([link1](#) [link2](#))?
7. Trained hiring committees on evaluating job performance not job history ([link](#))?
8. Provided academic support integrated with instruction ([link](#))?
9. Offered academic support centers, supplemental instruction, tutors in the classroom ([link](#))?
10. Supported authentic messaging with student peer tutors, advisors, and mentors ([link](#))?
11. Disaggregated student data for all college planning and strategies ([link](#))?
12. Held a college summit for critical conversations about embracing student equity ([link](#))?

My leadership now involves inspiration and facilitation of equity mindedness. Inspiration in telling my own story and providing opportunities for the campus to face the reality of implicit and institutional bias. Support in providing resources for professional development, improved hiring processes, and, most importantly, Guided Pathways that provide each student with academic and life support to reach their full potential.