Educating with an Equity Mindset Across the CSU

Over the past five years, Graduation Initiative 2025 has served as the California State University's guiding beacon to help more students earn a high-quality, life-changing college degree and eliminate equity gaps. As we reach the halfway point of the initiative, CSU campuses have dramatically improved graduation rates among all groups of students, and many campuses have made substantial progress in closing equity gaps. While the CSU works tirelessly to improve the educational outcomes of all students, to close equity gaps we need to bolster intentional efforts to accelerate the progress of those from historically underserved backgrounds.

This paradigm shift—which is already occurring at some campuses—is critical to the CSU’s commitment to end systemic racism and classism and will help us ensure that students from all backgrounds have equitable opportunities to achieve their academic goals. To that end, this report offers a set of recommendations that may assist CSU faculty, staff, and administrators in advancing an equity mindset for championing student success. We encourage CSU leaders to leverage this report to promote university-wide conversations about how their campus communities can drive lasting institutional change that reinforces our collective commitment to put equity at the forefront of everything we do.
Modifying institutional policies and practices with a lens toward the needs of historically underserved students.

- Look beyond traditional data sources to learn more about the lives of historically underserved and low-income students to serve them more intentionally. Closely examine leadership strategies, curricular and instructional practices, and institutional data to ensure that campus efforts are promoting equity throughout the institution.
- Analyze and consider amending retention, transfer, return, and graduation policies and practices that may have differential impacts on historically underserved and low-income students.
- Review and consider revising traditional strategies for increasing graduation rates to be more consistent with the needs and strengths of underserved and low-income students.
- Explore opportunities to partner with community-based organizations and service providers outside of campus lines to create more holistic support structures for all students, particularly those from historically underserved and low-income backgrounds.

Recognizing the critical importance that faculty, advisors, and other staff play in promoting the success of historically underserved students.

- Develop targeted, proactive advising and implement early alert systems that warn staff and faculty when a student is falling behind or in danger of stopping out.
  - Ensuring that automated systems are overlaid with personalized, targeted messaging is critical. Embedding these systems within identity-based student centers (e.g., Black Student Center or Dream Center) can help establish credibility with students of color, as well as increase the cultural relevance of communication outreach efforts.
  - Adopting a case management model is particularly effective for promoting holistic student success.
- Leverage campus data to determine which support programs and strategies might be implemented, enhanced, or redesigned to help improve persistence among historically underserved, first-generation, and low-income students. Strategies may include:
  - Developing and expanding summer programming designed specifically to support students from historically underserved communities.
  - Enhancing tutoring and expanding peer mentoring.
Reimagining the first year of college to improve the quality of learning and foster a deeper sense of belonging for students from historically underserved communities.

Reviewing all programs and activities to ensure that staff have a demonstrated capacity to engage in a culturally responsive manner and promote inclusion in learning contexts.

Collect and examine participation data for various programs and services designed to improve student success.

- Ensure that program leaders regularly examine participation data to identify gaps in student access to campus programs and services, and that they implement strategies to increase equitable participation.

- Look beyond the data to try to understand students’ stories. Survey and/or interview students who stop attending to find out why; interviewers should be trained or have the demonstrated capacity to develop trust with historically marginalized students.

- Consult external sources of data, such as the California Student Aid Commission COVID-19 Survey, to better understand why students are not returning to campus. These factors may include the toll being taken on students’ financial and physical well-being as well as their mental health. Evaluate if and how current programs and services are addressing these needs.

Implement initiatives aimed at ensuring an inclusive campus climate.

- Examine and regularly assess campus culture and climate from the students’ perspective. Do historically underserved, first-generation, and low-income students feel a sense of belonging on campus? Do they have access to faculty, staff, administrators, tutors, and others who understand the issues they face and are familiar with the communities from which they come? Do faculty, staff, and students feel that the campus culture is committed to and supportive of diversity, equity, and inclusion?

- Examine hiring and promotion trends among faculty, staff, and administrators to ensure that there is equitable distribution across all ranks and classifications, reflective of the students serviced by the campus. If differences are identified, follow up with further inquiry and adopt strategies to rectify the gap.

- Examine hiring, evaluation, and accountability practices for administrators. Do recruitments focus on the demonstration of equity-minded leadership? In performance evaluations, are equity and inclusion integrated into review and reward processes?

- Dedicate resources to provide space, programming, and staff to support students from underserved communities and to promote a sense of belonging and connection to the campus community.
• Ensure that culturally sensitive professional development opportunities are available to all faculty, including lecturers. Design the programs to focus on how to incorporate pedagogies and learning strategies that decolonize education and promote inclusion. Ensure that adequate time is allotted for participation, and partner with faculty to integrate equity and inclusion into evaluation processes.

• Implement programs to better inform and engage parents and families about their students’ education. If not already doing so, enhance new student and parent orientation programs by offering them in languages of the parent community.

**Encourage faculty to conduct analyses of course requirements and sequencing within majors to identify opportunities to better prepare historically underserved students for courses with high DFW rates.”**

• Seek to understand the factors contributing to disparate outcomes in courses and majors with the largest equity gaps. Are they resulting from technical or academic bottlenecks that may have a disproportionate impact on underserved groups?

• Support faculty in the implementation of equity-minded pedagogies and in the creation and strengthening of faculty learning communities aimed at identifying and advancing strategies for closing equity gaps in the classroom.

**Focus on providing needed financial support for students from historically underserved and low-income communities.”**

• Implement programs to increase students’ financial literacy and help them make informed decisions about planning course schedules and graduation timelines.

• Offer emergency funds, retention grants, and summer grants to students in need.

• Increase the number of student job opportunities on campus.

• Create initiatives to ensure the affordability of course materials.

Remember that the need to close equity gaps will not end in 2025; the CSU will continue to educate historically underserved students for many years to come. Your continued efforts to educate with an equity mindset are critical to those students as well as to the families and communities from which they come.