

Equity-Minded Decision-Making Guide Example

Addressing equity on community college campuses requires a systemic approach that permeates the institution. Only by infusing principles of equity more intentionally into daily and strategic decisions that ensure policies and practices are designed to support students in achieving their goals can colleges see gains in their student outcomes. Developing a strong understanding of societal biases, and how they manifest both nationally and locally, is the most effective way for colleges to identify systemic issues that reflect these biases and make decisions that correct these issues.

This guide can be used as an example for colleges interested in building their own equity-minded decision-making guide or as a starting point for colleges to tailor to their own student and institutional context. Your decision-making guide should be grounded in your campus' own definition of equity.

EXAMPLE GUIDE

Definitions

- **Equity:** A concept grounded in the principle of fairness. In higher education, equity refers to ensuring that each student receives what he or she needs to be successful through the intentional design of the college experience (Achieving the Dream, 2016).
- **Historically underserved students:** Identities students hold that were not considered when the system and institutions of higher education in the U.S. were originally designed. Examples include but are not limited to: first-generation; low-income; adult students; students of color; marginalized orientations, gender identities, and intersex students; students with second-language backgrounds; undocumented students; veterans; students with disabilities; students with dependents; foster care youth; formerly and currently incarcerated students.
- **Student success:** The outcome of a personal, rigorous, and enriching learning experience that culminates in the achievement of a student's academic goals in a timely manner and fully prepares them to realize their career aspirations.
- **Opportunity gap:** An alternative to the phrase to "achievement gap" that recognizes the inequality of opportunity in education, or "education debt," characterized by a long history of discriminatory gaps in educational inputs (Ladson Billings, 2006).

Guiding Questions

Based on our definition of equity, we commit to using the following guiding questions as part of the decision-making process for all decisions related to institutional strategy, structure, resource allocation, policies, practices, and culture. This discussion should be embedded into the process at the exploration phase, where data and information is being collected, as well as in review of the final decision being made.

Questions for Identifying Decisions that Needs to be Revisited

- Where are the aspects of the student experience that affect outcomes?
- What are the differential impacts of this aspect of the student experience on historically underserved students at our institution?
- What decisions/actions around this aspect(s) of the student experience may be reinforcing the status quo that leads to current inequities?

Questions for the Exploration Phase of Decision Making

- How does the current reality differentially impact historically underserved students at our institution? Consider their experiences, academic and career outcomes, social mobility, etc.
- Reflecting on the current reality around the topic we are making a decision on:
 - Why was it designed that way? What criteria led to the decision to go with this design? What assumptions were/could have led to this decision?
 - Who was it designed for? What are the defining characteristics and experiences of those students?
 - What differences exist between those who the current reality was designed for and the students we serve today?
- What are the contextual factors affecting our students that are relevant to the decision we are discussing? Consider social/societal biases, historical inequities and biases, power dynamics, and historical resource allocation.
- Consider how the following contribute to inequitable outcomes related to this decision;
 - Institutional policies and practices
 - Programs that serve students
 - Communication mechanisms
 - Strategic goals/direction decisions
 - Resource allocation decisions

Questions for Evaluating Options and Making the Final Decision

- What alternative decisions/designs could produce different outcomes?
- How will those options impact the experience and success of historically underserved students at our institution?
- How will each decision impact the college's ability to achieve our definition of equity?
- Could there be any unintentional disparate impact along lines of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class, ability, access, or power as a result of this decision? Consider both active and passive ways that inequities could be perpetuated by this decision.
- If so, what steps could be taken or what needs to change to make sure this decision supports students equitably? Sometimes equity requires us to allocate additional resources to certain students who have been historically underserved or are/were negatively impacted by structural biases in society.
- What feedback loops and accountability mechanisms can be structured into routine practices to ensure this decision remains in the best interest of equity for our students?

Questions for Individuals Participating in this Process

- How does my identity impact my understanding of the decision point and its potential impact on students?
- How does my role at the institution, and the power that comes with it, impact my understanding of the decision point and its potential impact on students?
- What assumptions am I making about our students and their experience?

Agreed Standards for Entering Decision-Making Discussions

- Enter the discussion with an open mind to others' contributions.
- Challenge ideas, not people, thoughtfully and with grace.
- Embrace and give constructive criticism and ask “why” to uncover the root concern.
- Listen with humility, knowing that one person does not have all the information to make the right decision alone.
- Try to make space and time for the discussions to occur in full.
- Build in time for reflection for those who need it.
- Establish and use mechanisms to get input from key stakeholders who will be affected by the decision.
- Understand that designing for equity is about intentional planning and practices at the college. Help faculty and staff think deeply about college structures that are within the control of the institution.

OTHER TOOLS

The following are also useful tools to help institutions embed equity, with an emphasis on racial equity, into their decision-making process.

- Race Forward's [Racial Justice Impact Assessment](#)
- Racial Equity Tool's [Racial Equity Impact Assessment for Economic Policies and Public Budgets](#)
- Center for Urban Education's [Equity Minded Indicators Guide](#)