

# DELIVERING ON THE PROMISE OF PROGRESSIVE POLICY

## Strengthening the Academic Senate Professional Development in California's Community Colleges

Progressive state-level policies have the potential to deliver on racial equity for students—but implementation ultimately relies on the professional development provided for student-facing faculty and staff.

If that professional development is race-neutral, there's real danger of not delivering on the promise of these policies. Applying a critical race lens, using explicit, equity-minded language, and leveraging racial equity scholars can remedy this.

# Strengthening the Academic Senate Professional Development in California's Community Colleges

**Esmeralda Hernandez-Hamed**

**Megan Chase**

University of Southern California  
Race and Equity Center

**Estela Mara Bensimon**

University Professor Emerita  
University of Southern California

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**Esmeralda Hernandez-Hamed** currently serves as an Associate Director for the Race and Equity Center at the University of Southern California. She has worked with many colleges and universities across the country to close racial equity gaps created by their policies, structures, and practices. She is finishing her Ph.D. in Higher Education at the University of Michigan, and her research interests involve how institutions of higher education change to promote equity and social justice, in particular how administrators mobilize for change on their campuses around undocumented student support.

**Megan Chase** currently serves as the Associate Director of Research for the Race and Equity Center at the University of Southern California (USC), where her research focuses on access and equity for racially minoritized students, in particular the policy contexts in which racially minoritized students succeed in higher education. Dr. Chase received her Ph.D. in Urban Education with an emphasis on Higher Education from USC.

**Estela Mara Bensimon** is a University Professor Emerita in Educational Equity at the USC Rossier School of Education and founder of the Center for Urban Education, which merged with the USC Race and Equity Center in 2020. Dr. Bensimon has published extensively about equity, organizational learning, practitioner inquiry, and change. She is an elected member of the National Academy of Education. After retiring from USC, Dr. Bensimon started a consulting firm, Bensimon & Associates, where she continues to write and research about pressing racial inequities and the actions that might be taken to remedy them.

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# This Report Includes:

## THE POTENTIAL

California has implemented two game-changing policies that could make the state's community colleges a national model for progressive, equity-centered policymaking. One (AB705) addresses the negative impacts of remedial education, the other focuses on Guided Pathways.

## THE CHALLENGE

There is an implicit and genuine promise for racial equity embedded in these policies, but that promise can only be realized if the policies are implemented with a stronger focus on racial equity. Actualizing on the anti-racist potential of these policies depends greatly on the quality of professional development offered to practitioners who will ultimately impact students' experiences and outcomes.

## THE REVIEW

Despite the intent for equity in these policies and their implementation, the professional development content offered by the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges (ASCC) lacks the critical race lens and explicit, equity-minded language to deliver on the idea. Largely led by White presenters, the sessions are for the most part devoid of a meaningful focus on racial inequity—and, looking more broadly, the opportunity for these state policies to work as levers for racial equity is squandered by not training practitioners, via professional development, to be more equity-minded.

## THE NEXT STEPS

Because these policies represent so much potential for positive change, there are a range of proposed next steps, all ultimately focused on transforming first-generation equity practitioners into equity-minded experts by engaging race scholars, enforcing an anti-deficit frame, and actively decentering Whiteness, to name a few steps.

# Introduction

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The 2020 report *Vision for Success Diversity, Equity and Inclusion* from the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office reminds us that while the majority of the state's community college students are from racially minoritized groups, the faculty who teach these students remain largely homogeneous: they are predominantly White. This stark difference in the "color" of the student body and the faculty lead the report's authors to raise questions that rarely get asked publicly or in such a direct manner. They ask:

*If faculty and staff are a main lever in student achievement, how then is achievement impacted when faculty and staff are unlike the students they serve? What does it take to create an inclusive environment where all students are equitably served?*

Following the brutal murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd and the public outrage that led to the intensification of Black Lives Matter protests throughout California, Chancellor Ortiz Oakley responded emotionally in his [Call to Action](#) about the hurt felt by students "because of the systemic racial injustices that still exist" (California Community College Chancellor's Office, 2020). He challenged community colleges to "take action against structural racism." To be authentic champions of equity, we cannot be "afraid to have open dialogue about structural racism."

The purpose of this report is to consider the role professional development can have in advancing the racial equity and racial justice agenda envisioned for California's community colleges. Specifically, we set out to consider in what ways professional development can be a lever for nullifying the practices that create the "separate and unequal" academic caste system that continues to be upheld by structural racism.

## Guided Pathways and AB705 as Anti-Racist Policy Levers

Over 87 percent of Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students are placed into English and Math courses that do not count toward a degree or transfer. This pattern of racial inequality has persisted since California's Higher Education Master Plan was adopted in the 1960s. During the last few years, however, California has enacted higher education policies that, **if implemented with an explicit focus on racial equity**, have the potential to eliminate practices that have thwarted the degree and transfer aspirations of students who are Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and of marginalized sub-groups of Asian American and Pacific Islander descent. Assembly Bill 705, signed into law in 2017, aims to end the practice of placing students in remedial non-credit courses and make transfer-level English and Math the default curriculum for the majority of students. Although AB705 was not explicitly written as a racial justice policy, and subsequent implementation guidelines did not focus on racial equity as a priority (Trinidad & Felix, forthcoming), it is incumbent on us to seize upon its potential to dismantle a system that has been most harmful to racially minoritized students.

The second policy that holds potential to boost academic success for racially minoritized students is Guided Pathways. Consisting of a framework and a set of practices to provide students with clear curriculum maps and support services, the policy maximizes the likelihood of completing a degree, certificate, or transfer to a four-year college. In California, all colleges have been mandated to implement Guided Pathways, with the 2019-2021 legislative budget allocating \$32.1 million for its implementation.

AB705 and Guided Pathways can advance a much needed agenda of reparation for a long history of racial inequity in California's higher education system generally, and in community colleges more specifically.

Actualizing the anti-racist potential of AB705 and Guided Pathways rests heavily on faculty and academic leaders, most of whom are products of graduate programs and professional development programs that typically do not address racial literacy. Though well educated, they have not been socialized as anti-racist practitioners. Moreover, they may not be fully aware of how institutional racism is manifest in the language, practices, routines, artifacts, rules, division of labor, curriculum, governance, resource distribution, hiring, and the myriad of practices that keep colleges running.

Community college practitioners and leaders are learning about the intent and implementation of AB705 and Guided Pathways in a variety of ways, including guidance memos from the Chancellor's Office, state-wide conferences, and local professional development opportunities. While the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges (ASCCC) is not the only provider of professional development, as the representative body of the faculty they are highly influential. Additionally, they have considerable resources to support statewide professional development activities. In the last two budget cycles, the Academic Senate has received an annual allocation of \$1,685,000 to support their work, including the delivery of professional development.

In 2019-2020, the Academic Senate, through its Guided Pathways Task Force, hosted a series of professional development webinars. A subset of these webinars are the focus of this report.

## **ASCCC's Guided Pathways Task Force Webinars Through the Lens of Racial Equity**

At a time when professional development opportunities are only available virtually, the offerings by the ASCCC play an important role in equipping practitioners with the knowledge and capacity needed to fulfill the potential for racial justice—albeit implicit—in the aspirations of Guided Pathways and AB705. With this in mind, we reviewed a sample of professional development sessions, guided by three questions:

1. In what ways do the ASCCC Guided Pathways Task Force webinars assist faculty and student support service staff to maintain a focus on racial equity in their implementation practices?
2. In what ways do the instructors leading the ASCCC Guided Pathways Task Force webinars demonstrate expertise in racial literacy and model it through the training they provide?
3. Overall, is a focus on racial equity evident in the curriculum of the professional development ASCCC webinars?

We answered these three questions by reviewing 15 webinars that were offered by ASCCC between September 2018 and June 2020. The webinar sessions we reviewed were selected based on their titles and descriptions: we selected those that made references to equity, mathematics/English, faculty teaching, artifacts/tools, or institutionalization. We created and tested a 23-item protocol to guide the analysis of the language, content, and strategies presented in the 15 webinars. We also took note of the racial identity of the presenters themselves to determine inclusivity in who is offered as having knowledge or expertise that merits exposure to a statewide audience.

# Overview of This Report

According to the ASCCC, “a crucial goal of the Guided Pathways movement is the closing of equity gaps for traditionally marginalized students.” This goal was spelled out in a slide that appeared in a number of the presentations. In view of ASCCC’s equity vision for Guided Pathways, we were surprised that our content analysis of 15 webinars revealed that racial equity was not addressed directly nor was equity defined in race-conscious ways. The term “equity” was mentioned intermittently but typically in very generic terms. For example, some speakers called attention to the need to “amp our game in equity” but apart from saying the word, the closest any of the sessions came to addressing racial equity was a presentation on a transfer study conducted by the Center for Urban Education at East Los Angeles Community College. Overall, it was clear that the presenters were well-intentioned and aware that equity is central to Vision for Success (2020), but they lacked the knowledge and expertise to speak about the enactment of racial equity within the requirements and principles of AB705 and Guided Pathways. Generally, the presenters’ equity stance leaned toward fairness and equality for all.

This is problematic because viewing equity as fairness and equality (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015) will never lead to the eradication of practices, policies, and structures that are academically harmful to Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and Asian-American/Pacific Islander students. “Equity as fairness” ignores institutionalized racism as an enduring condition of colleges and thus leads to a weakened implementation of policies and reforms such as AB705 and Guided Pathways that assumes that their underlying practices (and the practitioners implementing them) are objective, fair, and race-neutral. Failure to ask “the race question” of Guided Pathways and AB705 (and all aspects of institutional operations) preserves Whiteness as the shield that obscures how racial inequality is manufactured through the practices that we think will bring about “equity.”

The findings from our review can be summarized as follows:

1. **Movement toward racial equity is undermined by unclear and race-evasive language.** Important and necessary topics such as racial literacy, race-consciousness, anti-racism, and a focus on racial equity are noticeably absent from the ASCCC webinar trainings. Not only is “racial equity” never uttered by the presenters, the term “equity” is only sporadically mentioned and never specifically defined.
2. **The opportunity for AB705 and Guided Pathways to work as levers for racial equity is squandered by not training practitioners to be equity-minded.** As conducted by the reviewed presenters, the ASCCC webinar trainings focus more on student deficits than

## Equity-mindedness is characterized by:

**Being color-conscious (as opposed to color-blind) in an affirmative and critical sense**

**Being aware that one’s own knowledge, beliefs, and practices assumed to be neutral can have outcomes that disadvantage racially minoritized groups**

**Viewing racial inequities as problems of practice and feeling a personal and institutional responsibility to address them**

**Being aware that while racism is not always overt, racialized patterns nevertheless permeate policies and practices and perpetuate inequitable educational outcomes**

(Bensimon, 2007) (Bensimon, 2012)  
(Dowd & Bensimon, 2015)

on classroom practices and pedagogy, and there is little attention paid to building capacity for racial equity. When the presenters themselves do not clearly demonstrate equity-minded thinking, the practitioners their webinars are serving cannot hope to achieve equity-mindedness.

3. **The absence of presenters from racially minoritized groups and of presenters that demonstrate expertise in racial equity is conspicuous.** The webinar trainings have few racially minoritized presenters, and their inclusion does not appear to be based on having demonstrated expertise on racial equity. This suggests an effort to create an appearance of “diversity” without attention to any actual equity content.

These findings are based on the outputs of our review protocol: TABLE 1 shows the findings for the protocol questions that were specifically about racial equity. With the exception of two webinars, race and race-related topics were invisible in the majority of the sessions.

**TABLE 1: RESULTS FROM QUESTIONS 18-23 OF THE REVIEW PROTOCOL**

Question	Yes	No	Somewhat	Total Webinars
18. Does the training mention the need for racial literacy (e.g., knowledge of institutionalized racism, history of racialization in higher education, critical race theory) to understand racial inequities in outcomes?	0	15	0	15
19. Does the training mention how racialization in the classroom can lead to inequitable outcomes?	0	15	0	15
20. Does the training indicate faculty may be blind to how race is operating in their classroom practices and beliefs?	0	15	0	15
21. Does the training suggest any inquiry that practitioners could engage in to “see” where practices may be contributing to equity gaps?	0	15	0	15
22. Does the training provide concrete examples of equity-minded practices?	1	13	1	15
23. Does the training overall provide a racial equity focus to AB705 or Guided Pathways?	0	13	2	15

This report has three sections:

**Section 1: Summary of the methods used to conduct the review.**

**Section 2: The findings from the review.**

**Section 3: Critical takeaways and recommendations drawn from the findings.**



# Section 1: Methods

## How Were the Webinars Reviewed?

Between September 2018 and June 2020, the ASCCC task force hosted 38 professional development webinars; of those, 15 were reviewed based on their title and content indicating a focus on equity, mathematics/English, faculty teaching, artifacts/tools, and institutionalization.

**TABLE 2: WEBINAR SESSIONS BY TITLE AND FOCUS**

Area	Criteria for Inclusion	# of trainings	Webinar Session Titles
Equity	The session title indicated a focus on equity.	1	1. Student Equity and Achievement Plans and Guided Pathways
Math/English	The session title indicated a focus on mathematics/English restructuring, signaling a connection with the AB705 policy reform.	2	2. English and Math Pathways and Noncredit Development 3. AB705 Recoding Project for Mathematics/Quantitative Reasoning and English/Reading/ESL (Renamed: Hidden Figures ... Time to Recode)
Faculty Teaching	The session title indicated a focus on classroom practices.	3	4. Practical Discussions and Solutions to Meet Classroom Needs in a Covid-19 World 5. Orienting Faculty to Teaching in a Guided Pathways Institution 6. Student Learning Outcomes and Assessing Learning
Artifacts/Tools	The session title indicated a focus on an artifact or tool to mediate implementation of policy reforms at the classroom level.	5	7. Guided Pathways and Data: Who has the Data? Where's the Data? What kind of Data? How do we use the Data? 8. Using the SOAA as a Tool of Guided Pathways Reflection, Planning, and Collaboration 9. Guided Self-Placement – Using the Canvas Tool & Parallel Planning for Onboarding 10. Creating a Program Review that Implements Guided Pathways and Works for Student Service Programs 11. Developing Practices and Materials for Counseling
Institutionalization	The session title indicated a focus on sustainability for Guided Pathways through planning and goal/vision setting.	4	12. Year 4 of Guided Pathways: What are we Doing and Where are we Going? 13. Sustaining Guided Pathways through Governance Processes that Work 14. Guided Pathways and Accreditation 15. Integrated Planning, Guided Pathways, and Sustainability

## Review Protocol

Three researchers from the Center for Urban Education and the USC Race and Equity Center designed a review protocol that drew on several sources (Center for Urban Education, 2019a; Chase, Felix, & Bensimon, 2020). The protocol underwent four iterations and was tested for interrater reliability by three reviewers analyzing one session and comparing their ratings.

The final protocol consisted of 23 items. The first item asked the reviewer to summarize the topic of the presentation, and the following three questions asked about equity-related content in the PowerPoint slides.

The remaining 19 items fell into three main categories based on the recording of the sessions:

1. Questions about the perceived identity, racial patterns, and racial equity expertise of the presenters. These items included counting presenters by perceived racial identity and noticing any patterns in who spoke or what they presented by race/ethnicity.
2. Questions about presenters' language about racial equity and whether it was equity-minded, diversity-focused, or deficit-minded. Among these questions, reviewers were asked to count the number of times specific terms that were pre-categorized as equity-minded, diversity, or deficit terms were mentioned by the presenters (regardless of whether the term was in the PowerPoint) and indicate whether a word was mentioned zero times, mentioned once, mentioned two to four times, five to eight times, or more than eight times in that webinar.
3. Questions about whether specific subjects were talked about in equity-minded ways, such as disaggregated data, the need for racial literacy, classroom practices and beliefs, or inquiry as a tool for racial equity. For each of these questions reviewers indicated "yes" when the subject was discussed, "no" when the subject was not discussed, and "somewhat" when the subject was discussed but not in sufficient detail or in equity-minded ways. Three reviewers each analyzed between three to six video sessions and PowerPoint presentations (if made available in the ASCCC website).

### Example questions from the protocol:

**Does the training mention racial equity?**

**Does the training suggest any inquiry that practitioners could engage in to "see" where practices may be contributing to equity gaps?**

**Does the training provide concrete examples of equity-minded practices?**

See full protocol in Appendix A on page 22

# Section 2: Findings

## What Did We Discover?

The content analysis of the 15 webinars revealed the following:

- **The term “equity” was stripped of meaning.**  
Important and necessary topics such as racial literacy, race-consciousness, and a focus on racial equity were noticeably absent from the ASCCC webinar trainings. Although equity came up at least once in thirteen of the fifteen reviewed webinars, it was mentioned generically—as part of an initiative or in reference to a funding formula, or in ways that were not clearly defined. None of the presenters spoke about equity in the context of understanding racism, race-consciousness, or practitioner responsibility for the success of racially minoritized students.
- **The training webinars failed to consider equity from a racial justice standpoint.**  
The phrase “racial equity” was not uttered even once by the presenters. Presenters skirted around race by using language that might connote race without having to actually name it. Typical race-evasive rhetoric strategies included describing students as “disproportionally impacted groups,” “low-income,” “underserved,” and “historically oppressed.” In one of the sessions, equity was mentioned in connection with the need to help “hidden students,” i.e., students who do not want to “out themselves” as needing help. These terms, in addition to leaving too much up to interpretation as to who is being talked about, have a more egregious consequence: by not ever naming students more specifically as Black/African-American, Latinx, Indigenous, Asian-American, and Pacific-Islander, it renders those students invisible.

**TABLE 3:** IDENTITY LABELS APPLIED TO RACIALLY MINORITIZED STUDENTS BY WEBINAR PRESENTERS

Typical terms used in reference to racially minoritized students	Number of times mentioned
Disproportionally impacted (DI) groups	3-5 times
Underrepresented	1 time
Students of color	2-4 times
Other Terms: Historically oppressed groups, marginalized, underserved, students of many different profiles	1-8+ times

- **The training webinars identified race and equity in relation to disaggregated data.**  
The only time presenters directly linked race with equity was when instructing participants on the importance of disaggregating data by race/ethnicity. Certainly, disaggregating data by race is an essential practice to increase awareness of racialization in educational outcomes. However, there is a misconception that data disaggregated by race and ethnicity constitutes an equity action. For disaggregated data to be an instrument of racial equity, practitioners must possess the skills to ask questions of the data that support sensemaking from a critical race perspective. Otherwise, disaggregated data can be dangerous if it is viewed as confirming beliefs about the “underperformance” of Blacks, Latinx, Indigenous, and Asian-American/Pacific Islander students. None of the presenters spoke about disaggregated data as an essential practice to identify and remediate courses, degrees, or services that underperform for Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and Asian-American/Pacific Islander students. None of the presenters addressed the dangers

of stereotypical interpretations to rationalize inequalities. Attributing racial inequities in educational outcomes to students' cultural values, lack of motivation, not having a "growth" mindset, lacking self-efficacy, and other shortcomings is unfortunately not a rare occurrence in unrehearsed talk among practitioners (Bensimon & Harris, 2012).

- **Racial illiteracy recenters the meaning of equity in Whiteness.**

The dangers of racial illiteracy were apparent in presentations that centered the meaning of equity in Whiteness. One presenter insisted on a universal redefinition of equity:

*When we say equity we really mean supporting all students. **And that's really how we need to understand equity** (emphasis added). Equity means that all students will be supported to succeed in completion.*

The presenter's argument for a definition of equity that was focused on "all" rather than on "racial and ethnic minorities" was to avoid the risk "of overlooking the former and current foster youth or wards of the state, or students with disabilities or homeless students." The presenter's campus was described as a "predominantly White campus, with also a high Latino and Asian population, a low African-American population." These demographics led the presenter to stress that it is very important "to look at low-income students, White students, veteran students." The presenter justified a reinterpretation of equity that was centered on Whiteness because they were identified as the dominant group on that campus. This interpretation illustrates how a lack of critical racial literacy dangerously distorts and undermines the intent of racial equity.

- **Racial illiteracy misappropriates racial history and experience.**

On March 27, 2019, the ASCCC Task Force presented a webinar titled "Hidden Figures ... Time to Recode." "Hidden Figures" refers to a popular film centered around Katherine G. Johnson, Mary Jackson, and Dorothy Vaughan, as well as other Black female mathematicians—who worked at the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics and NASA's Langley Research Laboratory—and their scientific contributions to the space program that went unrecognized for decades (<http://www.hiddenfigures.com>). We assumed that the inclusion of "Hidden Figures" in the webinar title was an indication that the session would address African Americans generally or African American women more specifically in relation to equity in STEM. However, despite its racially-emblematic title inspired by the historic erasure of Black female scientists, the presenters reproduced racial erasure: they did not mention Black students or any other racially minoritized group at all.

- **Racial illiteracy can promote anti-equity salvationist strategies.**

A particularly problematic presentation was on summer boot camps and the ways in which they can help students see that they are "not really ready" for a course they want to try out. From the presentation:

*Summer boot camps ... are a refamiliarizing process ... to make sure that they are prepared for the course, or to put students in a boot camp and prepare them for a course that they say they want to take to see if they are actually feeling confident in that course. **And maybe a student realizes that they are not really ready for that course** (emphasis added).*

Positing bootcamps as instruments of persuasion to keep students away from certain courses—rather than prepare them for success—goes against the spirit of AB705 and Guided Pathways. Shouldn't bootcamps be about equipping students with the academic knowledge and social tools to navigate their first year of college successfully? One of the more troubling aspects of this reframing of bootcamps is that it communicates an already-formed perception that students' aspirations need to be "cooled out" (Clark, 1980) driving them to impede their own educational success by choosing lower level courses.

- **Racial illiteracy can reinforce boot-strap theories of academic achievement.**

In one of the few presentations that addressed equity directly, the presenter shared with the audience that what was "exciting" about "equity considerations" in Guided Pathways is that they prompted

“philosophical conversations” on what should be the balance between proactively supporting students and the **“cultivation of self-reliance, the cultivation of discipline, personal discipline and so on”** (emphasis added). Characteristics such as motivation, self-regulation, and autonomous behavior have long been associated with the idealized image of the good student (Bensimon, 2007). This presenter considered “equity” as the juxtaposition between helping students but not helping them so much that they become overly dependent. Even though race is not explicitly referenced, equity evokes for the presenter stereotypes of racially minoritized students as helpless and overly dependent on the help of others. Moreover, framing equity as a philosophical consideration between dependency (proactive support) and independence (self-reliance) reinforces conservative stereotypes attributed to racially minoritized populations. Proactive support is not something that only racially minoritized students receive. Students who are viewed as autonomous have been the recipients of all kinds of support and have benefited from the privileges of Whiteness. The difference between them and the “proactive” support that is made available to racially minoritized students is that one kind of proactivity is invisible and not viewed as “special help,” while the other is very visible and associated with deficits. Ideally, equity should prompt conversations on how to dismantle the practices that produce racial inequity and bring an end to narratives that perpetuate implicit theories of racial inferiority.

- **Racial illiteracy leaves racialization undisturbed.**

Our reviewers paid close attention to whether and how the webinars addressed the classroom—the space where instructors have foremost responsibility and where racially minoritized students spend a significant amount of time. We found that suggestions for pursuing equity were more likely to revolve around student services or curricular structures rather than equity-focused teaching practices and classroom cultures. To capture whether the webinar trainings addressed faculty classroom practice, one of the items in the protocol asked “Does the training mention how racialization in the classroom can lead to inequitable outcomes?” Racialization in the classroom was not mentioned even once in the fifteen webinars. We also found that the presenters did not speak to the problem of faculty blindness to racial dynamics within their classroom.

- **Guided Pathways: race-neutral equity considerations.**

Guided Pathways attempts to make the college-going trajectory—from the first day in college to degree completion—seamless, transparent, and simple, using four pillars, labeled as 1) Clarifying the Path, 2) Getting Students on the Path, 3) Helping Students Stay on the Path, and 4) Ensure Learning.

In a guidance memo from the Chancellor’s Office, Pathways teams are advised to discuss connections between pathways reforms and equity goals as follows:

*We hope the questions help initiate or advance conversations about whether and how institutional practices are having differential impact on historically underserved groups and how your college can leverage your pathways work to close equity gaps by identifying and addressing causes of inequity, removing systemic barriers, and focusing design decisions and resource allocation in ways that more effectively address needs of underserved groups (California Community Colleges, February 2019).*

Even though the Chancellor’s guidance does not mention racial equity specifically, language such as “differential impact on historically underserved groups,” “leveraging pathways to close equity gaps,” “closing equity gaps,” and “systemic barriers” suggests that addressing racial inequities should be at the forefront of pathways.

While all 15 sessions addressed the implementation of Guided Pathways, one in particular, “Using the SOAA as a Tool of Guided Pathways Reflection, Planning and Collaboration,” provided one of the few opportunities among the training sessions to raise practitioners’ awareness of racialization and provide them with more concrete examples of how to develop instructional or advising practices that are grounded in racial equity. However, despite the presenters’ praise for the equity considerations in the Scale of Adoption Self-Assessment (SOAA), they made it clear that they would not delve into them. In fact, in a 60-minute session, just five minutes were dedicated to the equity considerations in the four pathway pillars (see FIGURE 1).

Not only was the opportunity to discuss how to leverage pathways on behalf of racial equity wasted, the presenters' interpretations of the equity considerations contradicted their intent. For example, a presenter pushed back on an equity consideration provided in the SOAA tool that instructs practitioners to “assess whether historically underrepresented and high needs students are disproportionately enrolled in programs that lead to lower remuneration careers” (see Pillar 2 in FIGURE 1, right). This is a critical racial justice consideration because data on degree attainment consistently shows that racially minoritized students, particularly Black, Latinx, and Indigenous, are extremely underrepresented in academic and certificate programs that lead to lucrative careers. This single item could have been the catalyst for an explicit discussion on the connection between degree pathways and corrective justice for racially minoritized students. However, the opportunity was lost. Instead of acknowledging the fundamental economic differences in degree pathways and their impact on racially minoritized students, the presenter's lack of racial literacy led him to misinterpret the intent of the item and diminish the urgency for racial equity by saying it was a “good conversation starter.”

*We want students to know how much it costs to take a class, we have information generally about careers and stuff, but we tend to not **invasively advise students toward specific career pathways according to their ethnic identity** (emphasis added). And that's one of the things that are in this [SOAA equity considerations]. It's a good conversation starter but not necessarily something that we pursue.*

Institutionalized racism is a condition that is not well understood, and this is in evidence when the presenter misinterprets “monitoring” degree pathways by race and ethnicity as a form of undesirable “invasive advising” that could infringe on students' freedom to choose. The presenter does not consider, for example, that there is a significant difference between what he may view as coercive advising versus providing racially minoritized students with the guidance, information, and mentoring to expose them to career opportunities that are predominantly White. National data show that, compared to Whites, Blacks and Latinx are disproportionately underrepresented in what are considered “good jobs” based on hourly wages (Carnevale, et al., 2020).

**FIGURE 1:** SLIDE 23-26 FROM “MARCH 4, 2020: USING THE SOAA AS A TOOL OF GUIDED PATHWAYS REFLECTION, PLANNING, AND COLLABORATION”

### Pillar 1 Equity Considerations

- Equity and Clarifying the Path
  - Website and program pages should be easy to navigate and understand
  - Accessible for historically underrepresented and/or underserved in higher education
    - (e.g., racial/ethnic minority students, lower-income students, first-generation students, students with disabilities, indigenous students, formerly incarcerated students, veterans, undocumented students, etc.).
  - Explain financial costs, potential debt, and economic benefits of program completion

Clarify differences in earnings potential between related certificates and degrees and across levels of educational attainment.

### Pillar 2 Equity Considerations

- Equity and Getting Students on the Path
  - Assess whether historically underrepresented and high needs students are disproportionately enrolled in programs that lead to lower remuneration careers.
  - For critical program courses, disaggregate enrollment, pass rate, and subsequent success data by student characteristics.
  - Proactively partner with feeder high schools that serve predominantly underrepresented and high needs students.
  - Make dual enrollment opportunities available to high school students who are deemed “not yet college ready”.
- Build bridges to high-opportunity college programs for students in adult basic skills programs.

### Pillar 3 Equity Considerations

- Equity and Helping Students Stay on the Path
  - Incorporate engaging, proactive, and culturally relevant advising
  - Ensure that underrepresented students are not disproportionately directed away from competitive, limited access programs.
  - Integrate academic and student support services into pathways
  - Ensure that low-income students' financial stability are being met so they can make progress toward program completion.

### Pillar 4 Equity Considerations

- Equity and Ensured Learning
  - Ensure that underrepresented students participate in program-relevant active and experiential learning opportunities.
  - Align course assignments with program learning outcomes
  - Support faculty to implement pedagogical changes that better support learning outcomes success for underrepresented students
  - Identify opportunities for faculty or advisors to critically examine their role in advancing equity-minded teaching and advising practices
  - Disaggregate program learning outcomes data, program retention and completion data, and other assessment measures by race, income, age, and gender to examine equity gaps.



Pillar 3 recommends that participants “incorporate engaging, proactive, and culturally relevant advising” yet the speakers did not discuss the knowledge that advisors need to deliver “culturally relevant advising” and offered no examples on how to practice “culturally relevant advising.”

- **Racial illiteracy leads to lethal mutations: the case of equity-mindedness.**

The dangers of racial illiteracy were evidenced in the slides provided in FIGURE 2, right. These slides misuse the concept of equity-mindedness and strip it of its roots in critical race theory. “Equity-mindedness” introduced by Bensimon in several publications (2007; 2018; 2020) refers to individuals who are racially literate and are able to assess their racialized assumptions, take notice of racialized practices, and understand that racial justice requires decentering Whiteness in structures, policies, and everyday practices. The term “lethal mutation” was coined by McLaughlin, M. W., & Mitra, D. (2001) as a means to capture the consequences of adopting practices without understanding their conceptual principles. Not having a background in critical racial theory, the presenters in this case strip the critical and anti-racial intent of equity-mindedness and make it unrecognizable from its original conceptualization. In the slides shown at right, equity-mindedness mutates into a mélange of race-neutral “things.”

These webinar trainings did not build the capacity of their audience to address racial equity in Guided Pathways. They rarely offered guidance on the role of faculty, the classroom, or the methods of inquiry to understand the source of racial equity gaps and take action to close them. In steering away from racialization in the classroom, the presenters downplayed faculty responsibility to change their classroom practices to be more responsive to Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and Asian-American and Pacific Islander students. The success of Guided Pathways and policies like AB705 requires pervasive race-conscious changes at the institutional, academic, student services, and governance levels. We need leaders and practitioners to exercise leadership with a focus on the anti-racist potential of policies like AB705 and initiatives like Guided Pathways (Bensimon, 2018).

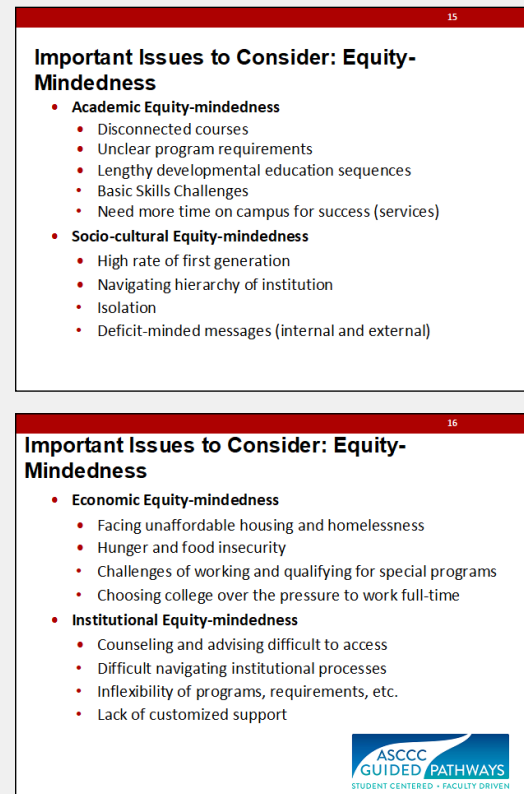
- **Lack of diversity and expertise in racial equity found among presenters.**

White students in California’s community college represent 27% of the student body. Yet across the 15 webinar training sessions, 11 (73%) of the presenters were White. Of the 16 presenters across all the webinars reviewed, ten were ASCCC Guided Pathways task force members. The presenters did not demonstrate critical race perspectives or competencies associated with racial literacy and equity-mindedness. The only presentation that reflected more direct attention to racial equity was based on a study of transfer conducted by researchers at the USC Center for Urban Education (Center for Urban Education, 2019).

A consequence of racially-naïve presenters is to engage in pedagogical practices that conjure oppressive relationships, as in the example below, provided from an ESL classroom as a good application of practical skills:

*The ESL student was sitting in a chair and the faculty member walked up and pretended to be a policeman that had pulled the ESL student over, and began to ask simple questions that are usually*

**FIGURE 2:** SLIDES 15-16—IMPORTANT ISSUES TO CONSIDER: EQUITY-MINDEDNESS FROM “MARCH 20, 2019: STUDENT EQUITY AND ACHIEVEMENT PLANS AND GUIDED PATHWAYS”



*asked when a policeman pulls you over. And the students all commented to me [the presenter] that this was such a great and realistic assessment. They just told me that that assessment was really meaningful to them, **and some of them had found that it was, unfortunately, useful for them in their real life** (emphasis added). So, as we move through this, I just want people to think about assessments that really are real world.*

Even though the students, according to the presenter, found the activity useful because being stopped by a police officer is something they have experienced, the activity is problematic. We do not know who the students in the ESL class were, but for racially minoritized people, being stopped by a police officer can be a traumatic experience that can upend their lives.

Moreover, the recent and ongoing protests against police brutality in the United States and around the world following the 2020 brutal murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor by police, highlight that routine encounters of racially minoritized individuals with police are alienating experiences that can lead to death, deportation, and trauma. Equity-minded practitioners would understand that the police scenario as a practical application of English conversational skills needs to be scaffolded from a critical perspective as experienced by racially minoritized individuals which may be very different from how it is experienced by the White instructor. ESL instructors tend to employ assimilationist teaching methods to introduce a particular and partial view of American culture. As with the police scenario example, ESL instruction does not consider that the experience of non-English speakers with American culture is often replete with microaggressions—from the insistence of speaking non-accented English to exhortations of adopting American cultural practices.



# Section 3: Critical Takeaways

## What Can the ASCCC Do to Encourage Leadership for Racial Justice?

We believe that the ASCCC and its presenters are earnest in their commitment to equity. Their commitment was expressed in symbolic nods towards equity, albeit never in racial terms:

*“we have to amp our game on equity”*

*“being inclusive”*

*“equity considerations”*

*“equity needs to be integrated in the [pathway] four pillars”*

*“attentiveness to microaggressions”*

*“it is all about equity”*

*the importance of “training on implicit bias”*

**What might have led to the absence of racial equity and racialization in the content of the webinars?**

It is possible that the organizers of the training sessions mistakenly believed that equity was addressed because the word appeared in slides and was uttered by presenters. They may have not been aware that there is a difference between equity, racial equity, and racial justice. It is also possible that the overwhelmingly White presenters allowed their lack of racial literacy to blind them to the omission of content that situated racial inequity and racialization as the core problems to be addressed by Guided Pathways and AB705. There is an urgent need for community college leaders and practitioners to learn both how to detect racialization and how to eliminate it. Sincerity and caring are important but, to paraphrase Audre Lord (1984), they are not the tools that are needed to dismantle institutional racism.

The California Community College System is poised to become a model for progressive policy made possible by groups and leaders who pin their hopes for a more economically and educationally just state on its 115 community colleges. We have a well-funded statewide student equity policy; we have the Associate Degree in Transfer that has provided thousands of students a smooth pathway into the four-year campuses of the California State University System; AB705 is finally eliminating remedial education (the biggest barrier to racial equity); and millions of dollars have been invested in the implementation of Guided Pathways. Implicit in these policies and initiatives is genuine promise for racial equity—but that promise can only be realized by centering their implementation in racial equity. The quality of implementation depends greatly on the quality of professional development offered to practitioners who are “first generation equity practitioners” (Bensimon & Gray, 2020). In truth, the majority of faculty and staff in higher education qualify as “first generation equity practitioners,” meaning that as newcomers to this work, they lack the basic competencies that are distinctive to the practice of “equity-mindedness” (see Bensimon, 2007; Bensimon, 2018; Dowd & Bensimon, 2015; McNair, Bensimon, Malcolm-Piqueux, 2020).

We trust the ASCCC’s willingness to acknowledge its limitations. A clear agenda of professional development for racial justice requires much more than saying “equity” periodically. It demands giving up the power to set the agenda. It necessitates seeking the assistance of practitioners and scholars who have the expertise and experience to address, for example, how to recognize racialization in Pathways Pillar 1 and how to dismantle it; how to discern racialization in the pedagogy of mathematics and undo it; how to define and prioritize racial literacy as the required competency in the hiring of faculty, staff, and leadership.

Admitting lack of racial literacy should not be viewed as a weakness, particularly as it is a prevailing condition in higher education and among faculty. As Bensimon & Gray (2020) and Harper (2015) point out, “raising race questions, engaging in anti-racism, and learning to be race-conscious is not something higher education professionals have been taught” (69-70). We propose that instead of lamenting the under-preparation of “first-generation” students, energy and effort be invested in addressing the liability of racial illiteracy among practitioners and leaders.

First-generation equity practitioners must be able to:

- Exercise race consciousness (i.e., noticing students’ racial and ethnic backgrounds) in a critical sense, which means constantly paying attention to how racially minoritized students are experiencing the classroom, including interactions with the instructor and peers; noticing racial inequities in educational outcomes and experiences; naming those specific racial/ethnic groups that are experiencing equity gaps (Bensimon, 2007; Bensimon, 2018; Dowd & Bensimon, 2015; McNair, Bensimon, Malcolm-Piqueux, 2020).
- Decipher how Whiteness, symbolically and materially, plays out routinely in the classroom through assumptions about students, social interactions, artifacts of teaching (such as the syllabus, pedagogy, evaluation), and all the routines involved in the delivery of instruction.
- Understand that race, even though socially constructed, produces social realities that have real (and different) effects on individuals and groups racialized as White or “of color” (Bonilla-Silva, 2006).
- Interpret inequitable outcomes as a signal that practices are not working as intended. Instead of focusing on “fixing” students, equity-minded practitioners must continually reassess their own practices and consider how those practices can be remediated to achieve racial equity goals.
- Apply a historical lens to understand the ways in which current racial inequities are related to structural inequalities and the historic and ongoing denial of educational and economic opportunity experienced by African Americans, Latinas/os, Native Americans, and other racially minoritized populations. For example, understanding how redlining housing practices reinforced segregation, underresourced public schools, and caused an inability to build wealth for Black Americans.

To be equity-minded means to be anti-racist. To be anti-racist requires the knowledge and competence to distinguish the difference between overt racism and the racism that is produced and maintained by structures, including those that support professional development, that are ostensibly free of race. It is important to note that institutionalized racism is most often unintentional. Referred to as indirect institutionalized discrimination, this form of racism occurs with no prejudice or intent to harm, but has negative and differential impacts on minoritized populations (Chesler & Crowfoot, 110). To know the difference between overt and institutionalized racism requires a program of education on the history, economics, and politics of race in the U.S.; the analytical strategies of critical race theorists; and the discipline to assess racialization by always asking “Who is present?,” “Who has been left out?,” “Who benefits?,” and “Whose experiences and knowledge are informing decisions?”

# What Can ASCCC Do Next?

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We recommend that the ASCCC develop a comprehensive curriculum of professional development to transform first-generation equity practitioners into equity-minded experts. These are some of the immediate actions that can be taken:

- Identify community college instructors who teach in programs such as Puente, Umoja, Africana Studies, Chicana/Chicano Studies, Native American Studies, and Asian American/Pacific Islander Studies and invite them as advisors to develop a curriculum for anti-racist professional development
- Consult with scholars and practitioners whose focus of work is racial equity
- Examine the articles published in the March/April 2020 Special Issue of *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, *An Unpaid Debt: The Case for Racial Equity in Higher Education* and draw on their content for inclusion in professional development activities
- Engage critical race scholars and practitioners to embed racial equity into Pathways
- Release one or more requests for proposals to commission professional development content with a focus on racial literacy
- Conduct a comprehensive racial equity audit of the ASCCC and develop a plan of action to address racial literacy among the leadership and members

To ensure racial equity is viewed as a responsibility that must be owned by all practitioners, professional development curricula should:

- Present and discuss racial equity gaps as a result of institutional failures
- Be anti-deficit; actively naming and dismantling ideas and statements that center racially minoritized student deficits as the cause of equity gaps, and replacing those ideas with affirming, validating, and asset-based ideas of racially minoritized students
- Place more focus on decentering Whiteness in faculty classroom practices rather than focusing only on student support services. The Center for Urban Education tools website (<https://cue-tools.usc.edu/>) offers inquiry tools that can be used in classrooms by faculty, so that they are better able to explore where their practices are leading to racial inequities in their course success.
- Provide suggestions for routine and race-conscious inquiry into practices and policies to help practitioners identify how their taken-for-granted practices may be centering Whiteness and contributing to racial equity gaps

# Conclusion

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The classroom, according to bell hooks (1994) “remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy” (p. 12). The challenge, not only for ASCCC, but all of us, is to consider the structure, content, and practices that make the ideal of the classroom as a “radical space for possibility” a reality for the thousands of Black, Latinx, Native American, and Asian American/Pacific Islander students for whom community college is the most accessible entry into higher education.

The faculty who teach and serve on academic senates in California’s 115 community colleges are predominantly White; in 2016-17 only 27% of students in the CCC’s were White, however, 61% of tenured track faculty, 72% of the college academic senates, and 73% of the state academic senate were White (Campaign for College Opportunity, 2018). The ASCCC has the power, resources, and will to build a model professional development program for first generation equity practitioners. To own one’s lack of racial literacy may feel uncomfortable, but it is the right thing to do. Making oneself vulnerable is a mark of authentic leadership and an acknowledgment of racial illiteracy that will serve to strengthen ASCCC’s position and influence as leaders of instructional transformation centered on racial equity. The opportunity to lead from a racial equity stance is now, and we urge ASCCC to seize it.

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# Appendix A: ASCCC Guided Pathways Task Force Training Review Protocol

## Worksheet Instructions

To prepare to answer the list of questions below, first read through the list of questions to orient yourself to the content. After you have reviewed the questions, please review the PowerPoint presentation for the training. Answer questions 1-4 based on this PowerPoint. Then access and listen to the recording of the training, paying particular attention who is represented, and how they talk about equity and race (with particular attention to the slides that were identified in the previous sections). Please note that each question requires you to either input a numeric value, choose from a dropdown menu, or type into a text field.

Training Title	Date	Link to PowerPoint	Link to Recording
		<a href="#">PPT</a>	<a href="#">Recording</a>
1. What was the training about?			
<b>POWERPOINT Questions</b>	<b>Responses</b>		
2. How many slides mention equity or race?		Indicate the slide number(s) if available.	
3. Overall, is equity used in the PowerPoint in equity-minded ways? See Answer definitions tab for examples of equity-minded and non-equity-minded uses of equity		Please provide examples	
4. How many slides show disaggregated data by race/ethnicity?		Indicate the slide number(s) if available.	
<b>RECORDING Questions</b>	<b>Responses</b>		
5. Indicate the perceived race/ethnic groups of the presenters (e.g. If two presenters were perceived to be Latinx place a 2 next to the Latinx box) (If presenters are not visible try looking them up by name and institution online).	Asian/Asian American		
	Black/African American		
	Latina/o/x		
	Native American/Indigenous		
	Multi-Race/Unknown		
	Pacific Islander		
	White		
6. What do you perceive were the gender of the presenters?	Woman		
	Man		
	Gender non-binary/gender non-conforming		
7. Are there patterns in presenters roles, based on race/gender? (e.g. Is the Black presenter speaking/ taking on the labor to address equity issues and White presenter talking about all students only?)			
8. Based only on the training, do any of the presenters seem explicitly race-conscious, racially literate, or equity-minded?		If yes or somewhat, explain why. Indicate the presenter's racial/ ethnic and gender identities.	
9. Does the training mention equity?			
10. Does the training mention racial equity?		If yes, in what context is racial equity mentioned?	
11. Overall, is the term equity used by the presenters in equity-minded ways? See Answer definitions tab for examples of equity-minded and non-equity-minded uses of equity		Please provide evidence of how it was used	

12. Were any racial/ethnic groups mentioned specifically throughout the training?		Please provide any additional examples, explanation, or context for your answer	
12a. If you answered "Yes" to question 12 indicate which groups were mentioned to the best of your ability.	Racial Ethnic Groups		
	Asian/ Asian American/ Pacific Islander		
	Black/ African American		
	Latina/o/x		
	Native American/ Indigenous		
	Multi-Race		
	White		
	Other:		
13. Was any equity-minded language mentioned in the training?		Please provide any additional examples, explanation, or context for your answer	
13a. If you answered "Yes" to question 13 indicate which terms were mentioned to the best of your ability.	Equity-Minded Language		
	Equity-Minded		
	Racial equity		
	Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI)		
	Race		
	Racism		
	Minoritized		
	Culturally relevant or responsive		
	Whiteness		
	Privilege		
Other Terms:			
14. Was there any diversity language used in the training?		Please provide any additional examples, explanation, or context for your answer	
14a. If you answered "Yes" to question 14 indicate which terms were mentioned to the best of your ability.	Diversity Language		
	Disproportionally impacted (DI) groups		
	Targeted groups		
	Identified groups		
	Underrepresented		
	Students of color		
	Other Terms:		
15. Was there any deficit language used in the training?		Please provide any additional examples, explanation, or context for your answer	



15a. If you answered “Yes” to question 15 indicate which terms were mentioned to the best of your ability.	Deficit Language		
	At-risk		
	All students		
	High-need		
	Underprepared		
	Untraditional		
	Underprivileged		
	Learning style(s)		
	Achievement gap		
	Other Terms:		
16. Does the training indicate a need to monitor who by race and ethnicity is being placed in transfer-level English and Math rather than non-credit developmental/remedial courses?		If yes, provide evidence of how it was indicated.	
17. Focusing on the disaggregated data slides in question 4. Does the presenter/training frame inequitable data as a problem with institutional practice, faculty practice, student services practice, or students?		Provide evidence of your answer.	
18. Does the training mention the need for racial literacy (e.g. knowledge of institutionalized racism, history of racialization in higher education, critical race theory) to understand racial inequities in outcomes?		If yes, provide evidence of your answer.	
19. Does the training mention how racialization in the classroom can lead to inequitable outcomes?		If yes, provide evidence of your answer.	
20. Does the training indicate faculty may be blind to how race is operating in their classroom practices and beliefs?		If yes, provide evidence of your answer.	
21. Does the training suggest any inquiry that practitioners could engage in to “see” where practices may be contributing to equity gaps?		If yes, provide evidence of your answer.	
22. Does the training provide concrete examples of equity-minded practices?		If yes, provide evidence of your answer.	
23. Does the training overall provide a racial equity focus to AB705 or Guided Pathways?		Please explain your answer.	

## Appendix B: Ensuring Equity in Policy Implementation Grant Overview

The Ensuring Equity in Policy Implementation project is an investment by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation that allows the Center for Urban Education (CUE) and the Race and Equity Center (REC) to support California college leaders in driving an equity focus as they implement AB705 and Guided Pathways. The primary goals for the project include:

1. To identify how racial equity is/is not embedded in the policies and practices being deployed to implement AB705, Pathways, and Faculty Hiring;
2. To develop a long-term plan to build leadership capacity for equity-minded implementation practices;
3. To create tools to support equity-minded policy implementation;
4. To hold capacity-building convenings for key stakeholders in the implementation processes;
5. To inform the field of needed modifications to policy and practice to ensure equity is at the center of policy reforms.

### Ensuring Equity in Policy Implementation Advisory Board Members

Michael Gutierrez (chair)  
President | Sacramento City College

Christopher Nellum  
Deputy Director of Research and Policy | Education Trust-West

Daisy Gonzales  
Deputy Chancellor | Community College Chancellor's Office

Eric Felix  
Assistant Professor | San Diego State University

Gustavo Ocegueda  
Dean of Student Equity | Norco College

Katie Hern  
Executive Director | California Acceleration Project

Lena Carew  
Chief Operations Officer and Co-Founder | The Justice Collective

Marisol Cuellar Mejia  
Senior Research Associate | Public Policy Institute of California

Michele Siqueiros  
President | Campaign for College Opportunity

Sara Arce  
Vice President of Policy and Advocacy | Campaign for College Opportunity

Sonya Christian  
President | Bakersfield College