# perspectives

**theRPgroup**
Research • Planning • Professional Development
for California Community Colleges

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*Perspectives* covers new developments, discusses emerging ideas, and features practical resources in the areas of research, planning, assessment, and community college leadership. It is sent out to more than 5,000 higher ed professionals every other month.

For more information, or to inquire about submitting work to the publication, please contact us and read "Share Your Findings and Ideas with Our 5,000 Readers," below.

Truly,
Olivia Loy
Director of Communications
The RP Group

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**Articles**

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## The Power of Building Bridges: The Story of the Umoja Diversity Partnership Pipeline

*This article, written by the RP Group, is based on a session delivered at the 2017 Strengthening Student Success Conference, presented jointly by Umoja and the UC Office of the President (UCOP).*

**Presenters included: Donna Colondres, Executive Director, Umoja; Tom deWit, Executive Director, Umoja; Kory Hawkins and Kari Stewart, UC Office of the President**

"In just the last three years, the UC has become a real destination in the minds of black students in Umoja.

This doesn't mean they'll go necessarily, but now it's on their tongue, in their imagination."
    -Tom deWit, Umoja Executive Director

In the recent era of breaking down silos within California Community College (CCC) campuses to improve institutional effectiveness and student outcomes, many organizations and institutions are also examining how to reach beyond campus boundaries to form partnerships and build bridges in order to increase effectiveness, maximize resources, and forge clearer pathways for students to earn a degree or certificate; transfer to a four-year college; or all of the above.

These partnerships range from peer networks, cross-campus networks, businesses, prisons, K-12 schools, CSUs, and the UC system.

The Umoja[1] Diversity Partnership Pipeline is a relatively new, official agreement between Umoja and the UC system that aims to increase the number of African Americans transferring to a UC campus. Modeled after a highly successful Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Umoja and UC Davis, this new umbrella partnership is a "big deal," according to Tom deWit, Umoja Executive Director, and is helping close some major gaps in the minds of – and realities for – black students.

**The Landscape**
Currently, about 150,000 African American students are enrolled in a CCC, however population numbers shrink greatly when peering down the transfer "pipeline" or "continuum." In fact, only 1,800 of the 150,000 students in a CCC will apply for a transfer to a UC, and of that group, only 1,100 are admitted.[2, 2.1]

"I could go a whole day [at some UC campuses] without seeing a black person or another Latina. Why go somewhere that doesn't look like me?" said a Mt. San Jacinto student at the Umoja Diversity Partnership Pipeline Session at the 2017 Strengthening Student Success Conference (SSSC).

In a November article published by the UC Newsroom about a Q&A session between UC President Janet Napolitano and Umoja students, President Napolitano had this to say to the students: "This past year, we saw a 30 percent increase in enrollment among African American students on our campuses. We are moving the needle there, and you can help."

Of the Q&A session, deWit said, "Students asked President Napolitano some profound and tough questions, like if they really belonged at a UC. She was really authentic."

**Pipeline Partnership Means Progress**
Since the MOU, notable progress has taken place, including gains in participation at the UC's Summer Experience Program[3], specifically the fact that the UC is now giving top priority to Umoja students, compared to years prior. UC Riverside (UCR) also just reported that 111 Umoja students applied for admission for Fall

2018. Additionally, the Black Transfer Collective Conference, a one-day event hosted by UC Riverside[4] to showcase programs to black transfer students, showed record-breaking attendance last year with roughly 400 attendees.

"They were all there to find out how to get into the UC system and about 95 percent of them were Umoja students," said Donna Colondres, Umoja Executive Director. "Every workshop was full, from Greek to Engineering. The feeling was electric."

Umoja Regional Coordinators, UCOP, and colleagues working in the transfer centers of each of the UCs have collaborated in cross-training and professional development activities to build strong understanding and relationships, according to Colondres.



*Photos Courtesy of UC Office of the President*

"Last summer we spent a whole day 'Umojafying' and 'UCifying' each other," she said.

**Early Lessons**

*Relationships Matter*
During the SSSC presentation, Umoja leaders emphasized that building trust takes time and commitment.

*Shared Responsibilities and Goals are Key*
It's ok for cultures to be different, say Umoja leaders, as long as the goals are the same. Data sharing is also written into the MOU, according to deWit, and Umoja is currently collaborating with UCOP on how best to do this.

| UC | Umoja |
| --- | --- |
| • Access to UC Transfer Admission Planner<br>• Central listserv<br>• Campus presence at events<br>• Training, PD and info for practitioners<br>• Info-sharing on transition support | • Transfer activities with UC campuses<br>• Monitoring and tracking of transfer-ready participants<br>• Access to UC TransferPrep services<br>• Share student information |

*Examples of Shared Responsibilities and Data*

*Set High Standards*
It's important to hold people accountable. "We have had a critical connection with UC Davis because they are really good about the warm hand-off and staying accountable. Umoja is big on not sending students into the abyss," said deWit. The fact that the initial model (followed now by other UCs) was

exemplary, has been an important key in growing the program in a successful way.

"In just the last three years, the UC [system] has become a real destination in the
minds of black students in Umoja. This doesn't mean they'll go necessarily, but now it's on their tongue, in their imagination," said deWit. "There is now real movement and the UC is supporting our students in an intentional way. This is a real relationship and I'm ecstatic about it."

**Additional Resources/Articles on Intersegmental Partnerships**
Strengthening Student Success 2017: Beyond Campus Boundaries:

- Focusing on Social Justice Issues to Create Relevant and Meaningful Lessons: Curricular Innovation in Math Pathways
- How Can Peer Networks in the Community Colleges and CSU Work Together to Improve Student Success?
- Mana Program "We are Ocean:" Connecting the Pacific Islanders to Higher Education
- Serving Our Formerly Incarcerated Students
- Student Food Pantry: How to Get Started
- Community College in Prison Town USA

What Makes Educational Partnerships Work?
Building Cities by Degrees

**Notes/References**

1 Umoja, (a Kiswahili word meaning unity), is a close knit community made up of – and of service to – primarily African American and other minority students in our CCCs. The community, which dates back nearly a decade, provides a myriad of "culturally responsive" resources and support to colleges and students across the state in order to close the achievement gap for African Americans and all students. Over 30 California Community Colleges and more than 4,000 students currently participate in Umoja programs.

2 Umoja Diversity Partnership Pipeline Session

2.1 It is interesting to note, however, that when looking at the data of who is transferring, via the Through the Gate Transfer Study, 75 percent of African Americans who completed transfer requirements (most do not), achieved transfer (aka they made it "through the gate") – a far higher rate of success, compared to other race/ethnicities. Though, as the pipeline numbers, above, reflect, most African-American students never make it this far on the transfer continuum.

3 The Summer Experience Program includes information sessions at various UC campuses to introduce prospective students to the admissions process and undergraduate experience.

4 UCR has one of the smallest racial achievement gaps in the nation and has the highest African American graduation rates in the state of California.

## Listening to Students: A Blueprint for Inspiration

**Donna Knifong**

### Lecturer, California State University, Sacramento; adjunct faculty at Sierra College

*Donna Knifong has taught Communication Studies at various institutions of higher education in the greater Sacramento region of California for more than a dozen years, and currently is a Lecturer at California State University, Sacramento, and adjunct faculty at Sierra College of Rocklin, California.*

*Listening to Students* is a project, implemented to date at two separate institutions, that brings the power of student voices directly to those who serve them, and to one another, in order to expand minds, touch hearts, and contribute in meaningful ways to inclusivity, student success, and institutional transformation in the name of diversity. It provides a way forward for other institutions to follow, in whole or in part.

The project is based on a very simple premise - that one of the best ways to learn about students is to hear from them directly.

It seeks to (1) enhance diversity awareness on campus and in the classroom, (2) provide useful information and concrete suggestions for working with different types of students, (3) increase knowledge of campus resources applicable to different types of student groups, and (4) inspire faculty and staff to more fully understand and appreciate the perspective and diversity of their students.

In addition to the student voices, the project includes various sections such as (1) general information, with references to key national organizations' reports on different types of student groups, along with campus facts and figures, (2) suggestions for faculty and staff to teach or work with each student group, and (3) a list of applicable campus programs and services for each student group. The student groups include:

New and Re-entry Students
Students with Physical Disabilities, Learning Disabilities, and Psychological Disabilities
Students from Around the World
Multilingual Students
Minority Underrepresented Students
Student Athletes
Student Parents
Student Veterans
LGBTQQ Students
First Generation College Students
Dreamer Students
Other Student Groups

### The Project at Work
The project was first implemented at Sierra College in 2010 where close to 800 student responses were collected via survey on topics including student trials and tribulations, hopes and aspirations, and opinions and beliefs about their college education. The project was conducted again in 2014 at California State University Sacramento (CSUS), where more than 1,500 student responses of the same nature were collected. So far, the work has been used in a number of ways including:

Faculty and staff training and workshops
Institutional reports and campus web pages
Committee work and reform efforts
Student course readings and assignments

Both schools shared each section (listed above) of the project on a weekly basis with the campus community. Go here to view the project at work at CSUS.

This work can be implemented at any institution of higher education, in a number of different ways, to any degree, by any department or individual on campus. If you are interested in learning more about how to launch *Listening to Students* on your own campus, or you would like a copy of the full compilation, email Donna Knifong. Also, read on for a small sample of the student responses collected.

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"It is hard to be a student... because people tend to look at me differently because of my race and I have to work harder than most to get respect. Whenever I am in the classroom and I am the minority I have to work harder to show that I am serious in the class."
    -Young African American (Sierra College)

"Being a student who is Mexican American gives me so much pride and motivation to keep moving forward because I want to be a successful Latina and prove statistics wrong."
    -18 year-old Mexican American (Sierra College)

"I sacrificed my life for my country but don't always feel like people really get that."
    -Vet (Sierra College)

"It's a challenge because I have no family members whom I can count on when it comes to college education. Also, because of my language barrier and because I'm the first person in my family to go to college. Not an easy experience. It's difficult."
    -23 Year-old first Generation Mexican (CSUS)

"Being black really makes me feel like there are many odds against me to try to keep me down but I just wake up everyday knowing that I want to make a difference in my life

and my families life. Something I notice is that people really take stereotypes into their daily lives. I like how... many different nationalities and backgrounds (are here). It makes me want to know where people are from and how their stories are different from mine."

-19 Year-old Native American and African American (CSUS)

## Share Your Findings and Ideas with Our 5,000 Readers

Do you have a story, discovery, or tool – based on evidence or data about community college student success or transfer success – that would inspire our **5,000 higher ed** readers? Submit your proposal here and our editing team will respond to you shortly.

## Connect to your peers, resources, and knowledge: join us on social media!