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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. The publication is sent out to more than 5,000 higher ed professionals every other month. For more information, or to inquire about becoming a contributor, please [contact us](#), or [submit your proposal, here](#).

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### [FAFSA Challenge and SB 940 Remove Barriers to Foster Youth College Success](#)

***Debbie Raucher***

***Project Director, California College Pathways / John Burton Advocates for Youth***

When Xavier crossed the stage to receive his bachelor's degree, he did so knowing that his journey had not been a typical one. He had been removed from his parents at age two, only to be adopted into an abusive home situation that landed him back in the foster care system as a teenager. Within a six-month period, he moved to five different high schools and had six different placements during his final three years in foster care.

Despite these obstacles, Xavier graduated from high school and enrolled in San Joaquin Delta College. Newly emancipated from the foster care system, however, he was left to fend for himself with no family support. His ultimate success – receipt of a bachelor's degree in sociology from the University of the Pacific – would not have been possible had he not had access to financial aid.

Like Xavier, the vast majority of foster youth do not have family to rely on as they try to make their way through college, and yet they often do not receive the financial aid necessary to fill this gap. This is because foster youth often lack the support needed to navigate through the FAFSA application process, and the state deadlines and eligibility standards don't take into account that foster youth often take non-traditional routes into and through college. For example, foster youth are more likely to require remediation upon entry than other students and more likely to repeat classes, therefore delaying their time to completion. This holds true even when compared to other special populations such as first-generation students.

As a result of these barriers, less than half of foster youth enrolled in California

Community Colleges receive a Pell grant and just 9% of foster youth receive a Cal Grant despite the fact that virtually all qualify as low-income. The resultant consequence is that although over 90% of foster youth express a desire to go to college, just 8% have earned a bachelor's or associate's degree by age 26, compared to 46% of those of the same age and not in foster care.

## Two Roads to Improved Outcomes for Foster Youth

Two efforts currently underway show promise for changing these dismal statistics. The first is the [California Foster Youth FAFSA Challenge](#), in which John Burton Advocates for Youth is working with county offices of education and the California Department of Education to provide support for an unprecedented push to reach high school seniors who are foster youth and help them apply for financial aid.

Thousands of foster youth in California high schools have been given a guiding hand through the application process over the past several months in an effort to increase the number of foster youth who complete the FAFSA.

County offices of education have used this opportunity to develop new strategies for engaging foster youth. For example, in Kern County, 12th graders who complete the FAFSA have been invited to serve as FAFSA ambassadors to their peers. In Los Angeles County, the county foster youth program is partnering with Cerritos College to host FAFSA workshops specifically for foster youth, and are providing gift cards to each student who completes the FAFSA.

The second is [Senate Bill 940](#), introduced by Senator Jim Beall. Foster youth not only are less likely to have family support than other students, but also are often struggling with the long-term impacts of childhood trauma. This can include the trauma associated with severe abuse or neglect by their biological families, the disruption that occurs upon removal from the home, and frequent moves between placements and schools while in foster care.

This trauma impacts not only academic preparedness but also social and emotional readiness for the college experience and often results in both delayed entry into community college, where 85% percent are enrolled, and longer time to completion compared to other students.

SB 940 seeks to level the playing field for foster youth by extending the Cal Grant application deadline for foster youth who plan to attend community college, lengthening the time a foster youth is eligible for a Cal Grant from four to eight years, and expanding the window of eligibility from the current one year after high school graduation to up until age 26.

SB 940 will be considered by the Senate Appropriations committee on May 25, 2018 and an allocation of funding to implement the bill is also being considered by both the senate and assembly budget committees.

These two important efforts will make college — and dreams — more accessible for one of California's most vulnerable student populations.

To express your support for the budget request to expand access to the Cal Grant for foster youth, calls can be made to Chairs of the Budget Subcommittees on Education, Senator Anthony Portantino and Assembly Member Kevin McCarty.

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## Breaking the Silence: The Importance of Collecting Data on LGBTQ+ Students

*This article is based on a presentation delivered at the 2018 RP Conference. Presenters/authors: Latisha Jett-Dias, Research Analyst within the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness, San Joaquin Delta College; and Ricky Gutierrez-Maldonado, Student Program Specialist, San Joaquin Delta College's Pride Center*

California's Central Valley region has the lowest lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer or questioning (LGBTQ+) college completion rates, and the lowest level of LGBTQ+ acceptance (40%) in the state, according to the 2016 UCLA Williams Institute report on the well-being of LGBT people in California (Kastanis, 2016). While the region is a poor performer, it is also leading the way in improvement efforts that could benefit all of our California Community Colleges.

One of the major steps to improving equity and success for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, and other sexual orientations and gender identities (LGBTQ+) is to collect and integrate data from these groups into institutional initiatives, according to Latisha Jett-Dias, Research Analyst at San Joaquin Delta College.

"We here at Delta College think this process is, in fact, vital for advancing equity and creating an inclusive campus climate for all students," says Jett-Dias.

### **New Data-Informed Model Combines Three Sources of Data, Discovers Two Limitations**

Delta, located in the heart of the Central Valley, is pioneering a data-informed model to decrease disproportionate impact on LGBTQ+ students. This model combines recently released Chancellor's Office data, student achievement data, and campus climate data.

*Through the process of creating this model, researchers discovered at least two limitations of relying solely on Chancellor's Office data and the need for colleges to collect institutional data on their own LGBTQ+ population.*

The system-wide initiative to include data on gender and sexual minority students is a critical first step toward inclusivity. However, the first limitation shows how Chancellor's Office data alone may not tell the whole story. CCCApply began including sexual orientation and gender identity questions in late 2015, but students who applied before 2015 were not given the opportunity to self-disclose their identities. Additionally, students who would not be age 18 by the end of their first semester were not given the questions.

For these reasons, Delta College was only able to identify the sexual orientation and gender identity of less than 20% of its students within the 2015-2016 academic year when CCCApply began offering the opportunity for students to self-disclose.

The second limitation discovered is that not all students are "out" at the time of applying, or may not feel comfortable disclosing their LGBTQ+ status on an application. Students may come-out later and decide to self-disclose on campus climate surveys or other forms of data collection. For example, multiple students who did not identify as LGBTQ+ on the CCCApply application, *did identify* as LGBTQ+ on Delta's campus climate survey that was offered at a later point during their time at Delta.

*The two limitations above leave colleges with an incomplete picture of their LGBTQ+ students and creates a need for colleges to internally collect data to supplement data collected from CCCApply.*

While there are certain risks in students disclosing their LGBTQ+ identity, namely the outside stressors of sexual prejudice and transphobia that may affect their mental health, there is a greater risk in not providing internal options for student to self-disclose.

If colleges fail to provide the opportunity for students to identify as LGBTQ+, they fail to understand the specific experiences and needs of these students.

"Making student sexual orientation information visible to faculty, staff, and students is important because colleges have historically excluded this community from all aspects of campus culture," says Jett-Dias. "Publishing data on these students helps them feel included and welcomed on campus despite their unique struggles. It sends a clear message to students saying 'we care about your success, too!'"

### **Acceptance, Stress, and Safety Tied to Academic Performance**

For many LGBTQ+ students, safety concerns and a lack of support creates a stressful environment. One study looked at lesbian, gay, and bisexual college students who reported higher rates of discrimination and harassment that negatively impacted their

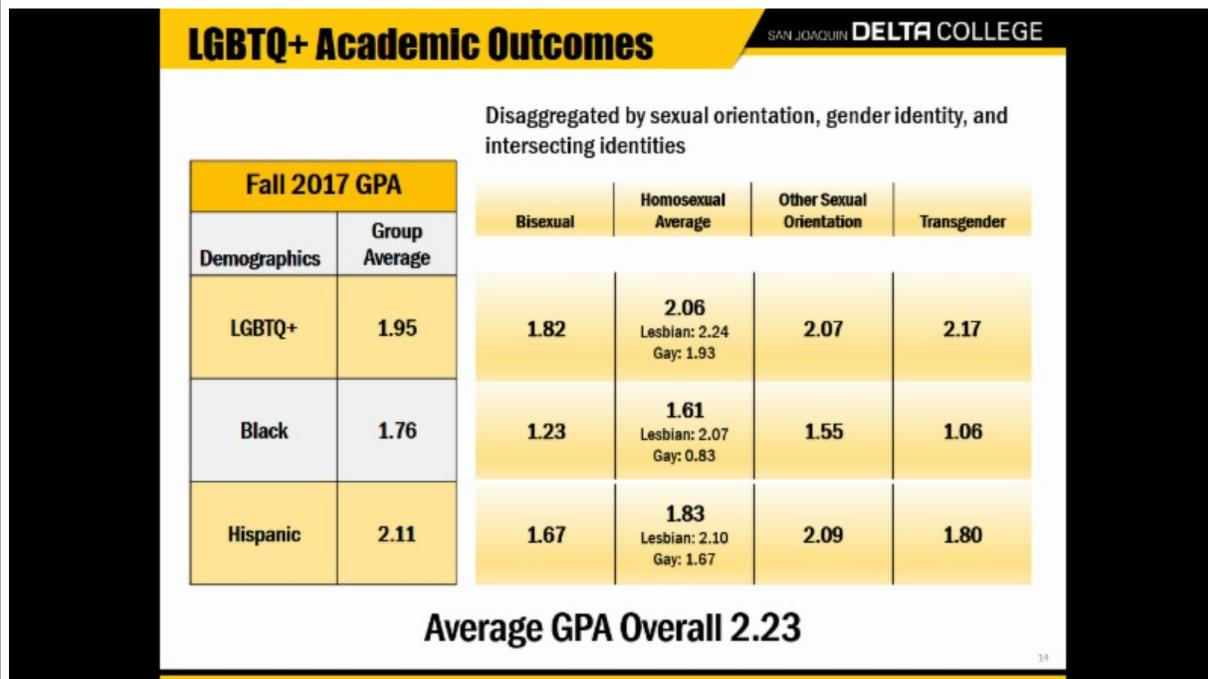
academic performance (Woodford & Kulick, 2015).

Other studies have shown that if lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students feel their school is less inclusive or less safe, they are more likely to miss class, earn lower test scores, and have lower GPAs (Garvey et al., 2015; Rankin, 2005; Silverschanz et al., 2008; Woodford & Kulick, 2015).

For Delta, it was important to understand the Central Valley context as shown in the UCLA Williams Institute report (Kastanis, 2016), and the fact that its students report stress as the number one reason they drop out and never complete their goals.

### Turning Data into a Source of Pride

Analyses of our campus climate survey and student achievement data revealed that LGBTQ+ students at Delta are less satisfied with the atmosphere for differences in sexual orientation, have lower term GPAs, lower cumulative GPAs, attempt less term units, complete less term units, and complete less cumulative units than their non-LGBTQ+ peers.



The above figure shows a sample of GPA data based on Delta's model. It also illustrates Fall 2017 average GPA for LGBTQ+, Black, and Hispanic students. As identities intersect, we see a decrease in average GPA. Even with the limited data available, Delta has been able to preliminary measure academic outcomes for LGBTQ+ students.

All hope is not lost, however, because from this data-informed model, Delta College has been able to structure student support services that help mitigate some of these outcomes. For example, Delta's Pride Center, a space and program supporting LGBTQ+ students, may structure advocacy and programs that directly respond to issues facing LGBTQ+ students.

"We urge other colleges to begin collecting internal data about their LGBTQ+ population and to deepen collaborative efforts between research and support services," says Ricky Gutierrez-Maldonado, who runs the Pride Center at Delta. "Colleges can not only learn about what hinders academic success, but also what drives success for LGBTQ+ students."

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## New OEI "Hub" and Equity Framework Mean Online Environment Will Offer More than Just Instruction

***This article is based on a presentation delivered at the 2018 RP Conference. Presenters/authors: Arnita Porter, Online Student Equity Coordinator, Student Services, California Community Colleges Online Education Initiative, Equity Co-coordinator, 3CSN; and Jessica Hurtado, Program Supervisor-Online Student Services, California Community Colleges Online Education Initiative***

The California Community College (CCC) Online Education Initiative (OEI) is a collaborative effort to ensure that significantly more students complete their educational goals by increasing access to and success in high-quality online courses by directly supporting students through online counseling support, proctoring technology, library services, online readiness, and more.

The OEI has 23 current consortium colleges and recently welcomed 33 new colleges to participate in the OEI's 2018 Online Equity Cohort, a group committed to online learning and student equity.

Thanks to the pioneering work of the OEI consortium colleges, all California Community Colleges now have the opportunity to take advantage of OEI resources such as the course design standards, faculty professional development, online readiness tutorials, tutoring services, basic skills resources, and more to come.

*Although the CCC system has been offering online courses for many years, preliminary OEI research shows that most CCCs do not have online learning or online support services in their equity plans, or provisions to address equity and related issues despite a noticeable achievement gap among students from marginalized communities participating in online learning.*

As a result, OEI began the process of viewing the online learning environment through an equity lens in order to surface institutional and systemic barriers, address disparate impact, and increase students' sense of belonging. Ongoing efforts to equitize the online learning environment include the development of:

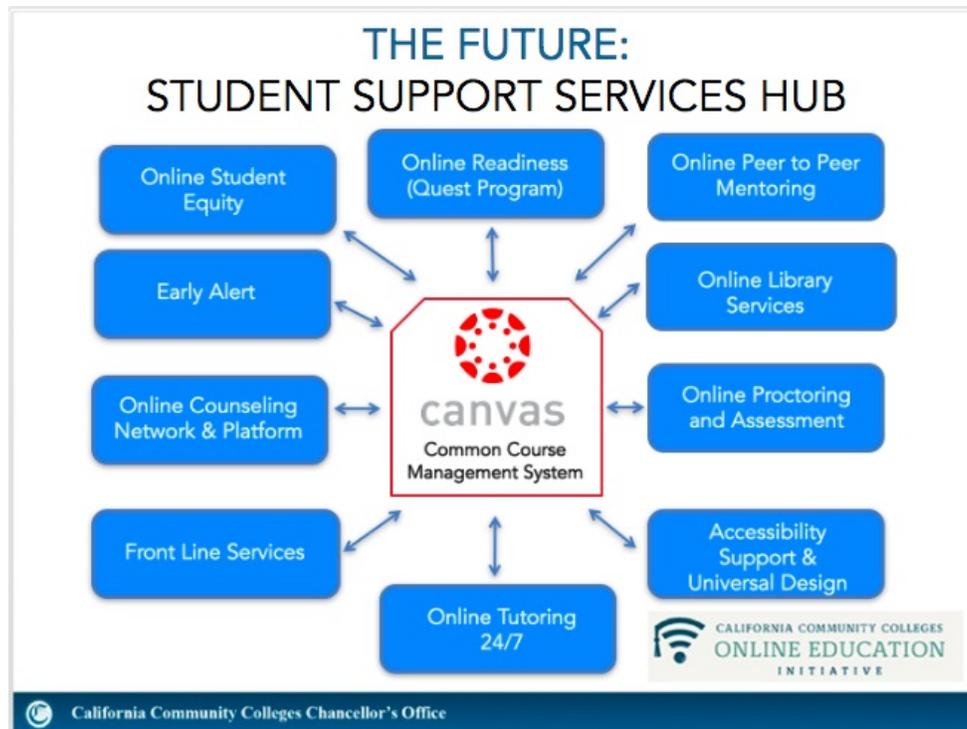
- An equity rubric
- Example distance education programs and courses in the [Course Exchange](#) (math and English)
- Online and on-campus professional development training (courses, modules, and workshops for faculty, counselors, staff, tutors and supplemental instruction leaders)
- An online equity community of practice
- An [equity page on the OEI website](#)

### Enter the CCC Online Hub and Other Efforts to Improve Equity

In an effort to close these equity gaps and help colleges meet accreditation standards, the OEI is working to develop The Online Student Support Services Hub. With the help of the CCC consortium colleges, this Hub will enable students the ability to access online

services in real time. It will include a centralized dashboard where students can access counseling, financial aid support, admissions support, tutoring, mental health services, and much more.

The Hub is one of the ways in which OEI is employing efforts to create equity-minded online learning environments. At the same time, the OEI will also incorporate equity embedded frameworks into professional development opportunities to ensure that both faculty and student services representatives have the training and resources to create a safe and welcoming learning environment for all students.



### The Future of the Hub and Online Equity

“Currently we are working with two pilots schools and hope to launch the pilot Hub this Fall,” says Jessica Hurtado. “We hope to reach out to other schools and have them launch next year, Fall 2019.”

Future goals also include research partnerships to determine the impact of equity gaps on our CCC students, and connecting an online student self-reporting withdrawal survey to a college course withdrawal process to capture why students drop online courses. The data will be scrutinized for common reasons among high-need student groups.

“This equity lens has created a lot of excitement and has led us to examine what it means for our personal growth and professional development as educators,” says Arnita Porter. “It requires more than participating in a flex-day breakout session, attending a conference, or participating in a campus-wide cultural event.”

While these are great starts, she says, equity requires willingness and commitment to be more engaged in the work to transform our classrooms, counseling sessions, the delivery of student services, and our online colleges.

### Get Involved

The OEI will be offering professional development opportunities through on-campus workshops, online courses, webinars, and training modules, including a four-week course, [Equity & Culturally Responsive Teaching in the Online Learning Environment](#) beginning July 9, 2018, designed to support faculty in reducing equity gaps and improving student success outcomes by creating online classrooms that are welcoming, supportive, and student-centered. This course is also part of the @ONE Certificate in Online Teaching Program.

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