

Equity Focus Groups:

What Students Are Saying and How You Can Engage Them

Strengthening Student
Success Conference
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Agenda

- Overview of Equity Focus Groups
 - Why we did it. How we did it. What we found.
- Group Activity
- From Research to Practice
- Facilitated Discussion about the Use of Focus Groups

Outcomes

Participants will:

- Be able to describe how qualitative data can augment quantitative measurements of equity gaps and inform equity project implementations
- Understand how to plan, conduct, analyze, share, and respond to findings from student equity focus groups
- Recognize how student voices can inspire action

Overview of Equity Focus Groups

Why we did it. How we did it. What we found.

Why We Did It

To increase colleges' understanding of the experiences and perceptions of students, faculty, and staff regarding matters related to equity.

To inform colleges' efforts to address equity gaps and create more equitable educational experiences that facilitate the success of all students.

Participating Colleges

Cabrillo College

Cuyamaca College

Los Angeles Valley College

Monterey Peninsula College

Mt. San Jacinto College

Reedley College

Riverside City College

Research Quick Facts

From 2015 to present, we have conducted:

- **47** student focus groups
- **11** faculty/staff focus groups

Which gathered voices from:

- **266** students
- **57** faculty/staff members

Who We Heard From: Students

Students	
African-American	Academic Probation
Asian	First Generation
Chaldean	Non-First Generation
Latino	Students with Disabilities
Native American	Low-Income
Pacific Islander	Former Foster Youth
Male	Veterans
LGBTQIA+	

Who We Heard From: Faculty/Staff

Faculty/Staff	
Full-time Faculty	Classified Staff
Adjunct Faculty	Admissions & Records
Counselors	Financial Aid
African-American Faculty and Staff	Outreach & Recruitment
Latino Faculty and Staff	

College Perspectives

Why We Did It

- What were some of the motivations we had for conducting equity focus groups?
- What did we hope to gain?

How We Did It

- Developed research questions with RP Group
- Identified focus group participants
 - Students, faculty, and staff
- Recruited participants

Activity 1

1. How would your students describe the culture at the college?
2. What challenges do your students face?
3. What motivates your students to succeed?
4. What is your college currently doing to help students succeed?

Overall Findings

Themes Across the Colleges

- Overall Themes Across Participating Colleges
 - Students and Faculty/Staff
- Themes Unique to Specific Student Groups
- Themes Unique to Cabrillo and LAVC

Overall Themes: Students

- Motivation to Attend College
 - Myself and my family
- Connection to the College
 - Connecting to *that one person*
 - Not feeling connected to or represented at the college
 - Commuter culture
 - Limited food options

Overall Themes: Students (continued)

- Perspectives on Student Services
 - Categorical and special programs providing needed support and resources, and dedicated counseling
 - Limited awareness of and accessibility to resources
 - Mix experiences in general counseling

Overall Themes: Students (continued)

- Mixed Experiences with Academics
 - Positive and negative experiences with faculty
 - Positive experiences with academic resources (tutoring)
- Financial Barriers
 - Textbook costs
 - Transportation costs
 - Balancing the need to work with school

Overall Themes: Faculty/Staff

- Lack of Faculty/Staff Involvement Affecting Student Life
- Need for Professional Development
- Culture of Feeling Undervalued and Underappreciated

Overall Themes: Faculty/Staff

- Disconnected from Equity Plan
- Unspoken Student Services Policy for Special Populations
 - Placing the responsibility for URM groups and students facing language barriers on the shoulders of a small number of college personnel

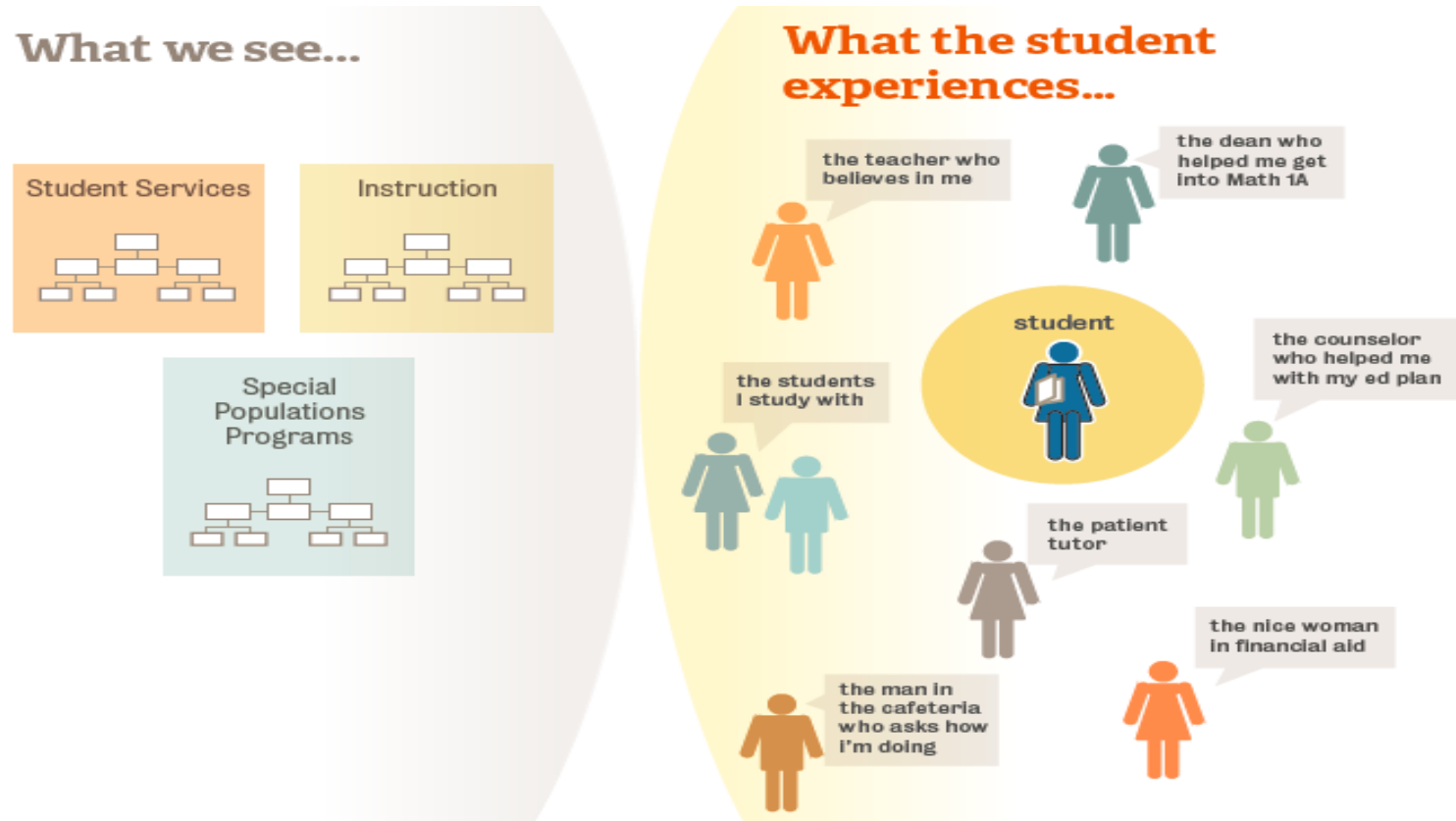
Common Perspectives between Students and Faculty/Staff

- Lack of Awareness of Resources/Services
 - Students not knowing where to go and what is available
 - Learning about resources from other students instead of the college
 - Faculty/staff not knowing where to direct students to go and what resources are available to students

Common Perspectives between Students and Faculty/Staff (continued)

- Communication Barriers and Breakdowns
 - Vertical and horizontal communication
 - College communicating with students
 - College personnel communicating with students

Differing Perspectives



Activity 2

- How do your answers to Activity 1 compare to the findings shared?
- Were there any surprising themes?

Findings by Student Group

Themes by Student Group: African Americans

- Feeling negative attitudes and stereotypes directed at them
- Motivated by desire to dispel the stereotypes
- Lacking a community, sense of belonging, and representation (specifically faculty)
- Sensing a lack of cultural awareness and understanding of their unique challenges

Themes by Student Group: Latinos

- Cultural values as an influence on students' educational attainment
 - Expectations from family and community
- Motivated by desire to dispel the stereotypes
- Challenges related to being an immigrant or being undocumented

Themes by Student Group: Students with Disabilities

- Sensing a lack of awareness and understanding their unique challenges
- Dealing with stereotypes
- Lack of awareness and understanding of students' rights for accommodation
- Lack of role models among faculty and staff

Themes by Student Group: Veterans

- Finding a sense of belonging within their group, but not the campus community
- Sensing a lack of cultural awareness and understanding their unique challenges
- Feeling unable to relate to younger students
- Experiencing a difficult transition to civilian life
- Lacking an awareness of resources
- Lack of knowledge about veteran benefit requirements

Themes by Student Group: Former Foster Youth

- Feeling supported through support services or connecting with an understanding faculty member
- Mirrored challenges emerging for all target student populations; these challenges are often exacerbated for former foster youths
 - Lacking a support network at home
 - Needing to have basic needs met (e.g., unstable housing)

College Perspectives

What Did We Find?

- What were the specific themes found at our college?
 - Cabrillo
 - LAVC

Cabrillo College's Equity Efforts: Findings

General Findings

Financial
Concerns

Connection
with the
College

Academics

Student
Support

Motivation

LAVC Focus Group Findings

Overarching Themes

- ▶ **Communication Barriers and Breakdowns**
 - ▶ Breakdown in Vertical Communication
 - ▶ Barriers to Horizontal Communication
 - ▶ Impact of Communication Barriers on LAVC Students
- ▶ **The Cost of Education**
 - ▶ Textbooks and Impact of Faculty's Choices

Overarching Themes

- ▶ **Student Awareness of and Access to Resources**
 - ▶ Limited Student Awareness
 - ▶ Inability to Access Necessary Resources
- ▶ **LAVC Culture and Identity**
 - ▶ Positive Perspectives on LAVC Culture
 - ▶ Lack of Connection to LAVC
 - ▶ What Is LAVC's Identity?

Group Activity

Do you hear your students', staff's, or faculty's voices in these themes?

Activity 3a

- Pick a quote that highlights something your college is doing well to address the challenge identified

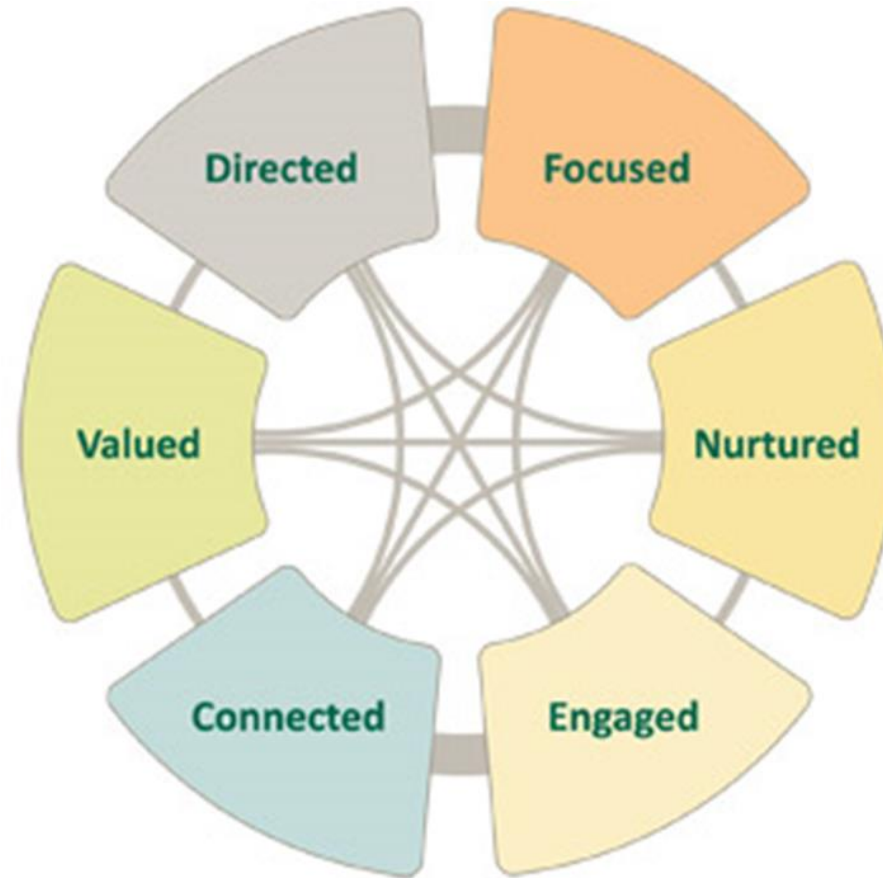
Activity 3b

- Pick a quote that highlights an area where your college can improve to better address the challenge identified

From Research to Practice

What We Did With the Findings

Six Success Factors



Recommendations

- Institutionalize a process for gathering students' voices to inform college practices through focus groups or similar activities
- Inform faculty about the impact of their textbook decisions

Nurtured, Valued

Recommendations (continued)

- Clearly and broadly communicate available resources at the college to ensure all students know where to go for support and are connected to available programs and services
- Increase the availability of key resources and align them with student needs

Directed, Focused, Connected, Engaged, Nurtured

Recommendations (continued)

- Foster a deep connection to the college for all students
- Facilitate social connections among students
- Creating a physical space at the college to encourage engagement and connection

Connected, Engaged, Nurtured, Valued

Recommendations (continued)

- Create opportunities for faculty/staff to engage in cultural sensitivity training designed to increase empathy and understanding of how to support students
- Establish a culture that empowers everyone to be a source for student success and support

Engaged, Connected, Valued, and Nurtured

College Perspectives

What Now?

- What has the college done or is planning to do with the results and recommendations?
- How did or are you planning to share the findings with the rest of the college?



LAVC
Equity Data Summit
May 12, 2017

Agenda

- ▶ Focus groups findings
- ▶ Survey findings
- ▶ Equity data update
- ▶ Implications for integrated planning
- ▶ Evaluation planning
- ▶ Next steps and close

Today's Outcomes

- ▶ Understand findings from focus group, equity and survey research
- ▶ Identify implications from these findings for activities identified in the college's integrated plan for equity, BSI, and SSSP
- ▶ Draw connections between plan activities and plan goals, specifically demonstrating how each activity helps meet specific plan goals
- ▶ Recognize the importance of evaluation planning for each activity identified in the integrated plan
- ▶ Identify next steps towards developing an integrated plan that takes research findings into consideration and includes meaningful evaluation

Cabrillo College's Equity Efforts: Reaction and Action

Reaction and Action

Office of Student
Equity

Faculty Senate

Counseling &
Educational
Support Services

Dean of
Student's Office

Accreditation
Team

Reaction and Action

- **Established an Office of Student Equity with a Full-time Director and Equity Program Coordinator**
 - Director: Provides leadership and direction, and recommends improvements to policies and practices that hinder student success to cabinet, faculty senate, instructional deans, and student services deans
 - Developing an equity-lens through professional development; institutionalizing this commitment
 - Reframing student needs from “complaints” to institutional shortcomings
 - Incorporating the student voice (i.e., RP Focus Group Study) in Accreditation, Program Planning, Integrated Planning, etc.
 - Equity-centered Data Based Inquiry: Where can we create the greatest impact, for the most amount of students, with the greatest need?

Reaction and Action

- **Established an Office of Student Equity with a Full-time Director and Equity Program Coordinator**
 - Coordinator: Direct Student Support
 - Addressing specific student needs
 - Increasing student engagement in equity efforts through leadership, programs, support
 - Supporting equity student clubs and groups (Black Student Union, Suenos Club, Accountable Intersectionality)

Reaction and Action

- **Faculty Senate:** Incorporated Equity as one of its ROCKS and priorities. Director of Student Equity Report=a standing item
- **Counseling:** Schedule follow-up appointments with the same counselor to improve consistency of information
- **Dean of Students Office:** Student services fair at beginning of each term to promote awareness of programs and services

Planning for Focus Groups

Activity 4

- What do you want to know?
- Why do you want to know?
- Who do you want to know it from?
- How will participants be identified and recruited?
- How do you plan to use the results?

For more information on Equity Focus Groups

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Thank you!