Purpose of the Sacramento City College STEM Equity and Success Initiative (SESI)

WHAT IS THE SESI PLC?

Briefly, the STEM Equity and Success Initiative (SESI) grant was drafted in the Spring of 2016 by a group of faculty and staff that crossed SCC campus disciplines (Math, English, History, CIS, Graphic Design, Bio, and Chem were all represented). The grant application was to the Department of Education, with SCC qualifying for this grant request for proposals by being an HSI (Hispanic Serving Institution). We were funded for this five year grant, which began in January of 2017.

The grant aims to improve our campus’s dismal results in recruiting, retaining and transferring Hispanic or low income students into STEM disciplines. To boil it down to one thing, the grant focuses on a ‘high touch’ approach to student success: targeted recruiting, cohort-based classes in the students’ first year, dedicated counseling staff, near-peer mentors, faculty advisors, embedded instructional support (faculty, IAs, or tutors), and acceleration of all students into college level courses regardless of ‘placement level’.

The SESI faculty professional learning community (PLC) is an important piece of this approach. The PLC continues the cross-discipline makeup that began with the writing of the grant itself.

Expectations of SESI PLC members: we strive to address equity issues and the historical lack of success of underrepresented minority students and low income students in their college level courses by examining our own teaching practices individually and as a group, seeking alternative approaches to those which have been unsuccessful to date. This entails ‘active learning’ principals, collaboration inside and outside the classroom, linked assignments, and a strong recognition of our students’ ‘cultural capital’, the assets they bring to their life and academic pursuits that have enabled them to succeed in getting to this point in their journey.

Specifically, SESI PLC members agree to:

1. Attend 2 hour meetings twice monthly, and an ‘end of semester’ lessons learning conference each semester.
2. Commit to presenting one paper, book or video on equity, active teaching/learning or learning communities in the ‘step back’ portion of PLC meetings each year
3. Commit to participating in at least one outreach or field trip activity of the the SESI program per semester
4. Share data and classroom experiences with other members of the SESI PLC through meetings and in-class visits by PLC colleagues in order to improve the outcomes of our teaching practices
5. Serve as ‘change agents’ for the SCC campus by communicating with our colleagues, departments, and divisions about what works in the SESI program.
SESI Meeting Protocols

SESI PLC meetings cover 3 main topics:, over a time period of 1.5-2 hours, biweekly.

1. Regular business of the SESI program and the SESI PLC: information about upcoming events, deadlines, financial and academic issues
2. ‘Step-back’ presentation of a paper, video or book on equity in the classroom, active learning/teaching approaches, or development and integration of learning communities into the larger campus community (scaling)
3. Specific problem solving for our SESI students’ issues: academic and non-academic, in real time.

**Step-Back Consultation**

Dr. Robert Kegan, from the Harvard Macy Institute for Physician Educators, has pioneered a new model of group consultation called “step-back consultation.” This process will be used to discuss your proposal’s goals, objectives, methodology and evaluation, as well as any issues or obstacles you face. You should approach this with an eye to sharing, learning and benefitting from the group to refine and improve your projects.

This is how it works with approximately 20 minutes per project or topic.

1. The presenter(s) will describe the proposal’s goals, objectives, methods and assessment plan in 5 minutes (e.g. elevator speech). This is also an opportunity to describe whatever obstacles you face or questions you have about your project.

2. The rest of the group may ask only clarifying questions of the presenter and hear answers for no more than 3 minutes.

3. For the next 5-10 minutes, the presenter "steps back," becoming an observer. The group takes on “ownership” of the proposal as if it is theirs. The presenter’s job is to remain silent and observe actively. S/he may keep notes of ideas and internal reactions.

*For the same 5-10 minutes, the rest of the group takes on the project as if it were theirs. What are they going to do? How will they prioritize? What obstacles do they see? How will they overcome them? What would they add to advance the work? *Each individual writes a suggestion (or more) to share with the group. Each person is then given the opportunity to present their suggestion.

4. For the last 3 minutes, the presenter(s) is brought back into the conversation. S/he can say what it was like to sit back and experience others temporarily taking on their project. What did it lead him/her to think about? What did s/he learn?

What’s the idea of having the presenter talk so little?

In Bob Kegan’s words, “the more the presenter talks the more s/he will shape the discourse in the room to resemble the way s/he is already thinking. New ideas don’t get in. Since the goal of the consultation is for new ideas to get in, presenters need to be warned that, perhaps, the role of silent listener is actually a very difficult one.
“Those presenting their projects will inevitably feel that those responding ‘don’t really understand,’ ‘need more details,’ ‘would not be saying these ridiculous things if they only understood my context better,’ etc. Presenters should remember that feelings reflect how difficult it is for new ideas to work their way into their mindset.

*The goal is for you to get a few ideas out of the many that will emerge, that you think will be worth some further consideration.

**Integrative Assignments**

*Formation of Integrative Assignments*

*Remember, students just really need a couple of connections throughout the semester, not the entire course and that helps/trains them to see how to make their own connections.*

1. **Introduction**
   - Faculty will group in pairs, or no more than a group of 3 to discuss integration logistics (see “Collaboration in Learning Community Teams: A Cyclic Process”). Forms should be completed prior to meeting for the first time, and then discussed at the meeting for no more than 10 Minutes

2. **Post-it Notes Activity** (5 minutes)
   - Post-it notes are given to each faculty member, prompting them to list as many items they really want their students to leave their class with at the end of the term (not necessarily SLO’s, but what the instructor really wants them to leave with)

3. **Finding the Linkages** (15 minutes)
   - *First*—find where there is overlap between post-it notes. Talk about them briefly.
   - *Second*—discuss differences in post it notes and see if there is any way to make connections (this will take the most time to discuss)

4. **Develop an Integrative Assignment (or two)** (30 minutes)
   - Develop a “linked” assignment/project (use one linkage first, and then see if you can form a second assignment from a second linkage).

5. **Rubric Design** (20 minutes)
   - Discuss/begin forming the “Transparent Assignment Template” (see “Transparent Assignment Template”)

*Note that this conversation will most likely continue outside of your first meeting time.

6. **Share Out** (20 minutes)

Groups given a chance to share and receive feedback using the step-back consulting protocol