

Taking Action on Student Equity

21 Strategies to Advance Underserved and Nontraditional Student Success

The number of historically underserved and nontraditional students continues to grow dramatically in the two-year sector. These populations now make up the majority of today's community college students, yet their completion rates continue to lag behind those of traditional students.

With a growing sense of urgency, college leaders are met with a critical imperative: improve student outcomes for at-risk populations to close chronic gaps in achievement. **This action plan will help you do just that with 21 strategies to promote equitable opportunities.**

How Do We Make a Cross-Campus Faculty Investment in Equity?

1 Create Cascading Accountability for Equity Initiatives

Involve all levels of the campus in equity-based strategic action planning by implementing a cascading approach. Each level of the academic affairs division creates individual action plans focused on equity and inclusion. This system allows for multiple levels of accountability and generates role-appropriate goals that faculty are personally engaged in achieving.

2 Recruit for Faculty Strengths When Enlisting Input in Equity Planning

Solicit input and engagement across the entire campus by encouraging any student or any faculty or staff member to submit equity initiative proposals. Once approved by a central vetting and approval body, appeal to faculty's diversity of interests, skills, and experiences to increase widespread faculty participation and engagement.

3 Embed Inclusive Practices in New Faculty Training

Broaden the scope of existing training sessions to include techniques on inclusivity. One way to accomplish this is to use orientation training for new faculty hires as an opportunity to inspire a commitment to equity and inclusion at the inception of a faculty member's tenure at the college. Another option is to mandate all recently hired full-time faculty to participate in a First Year Faculty Experience course that embeds training on equity and community-building within their entire first year at the college.

CASE IN POINT

In response to declines in student success, **Southwestern Community College** utilized their committees more effectively to increase faculty engagement. The college appealed to its faculty's diversity of interests, skills, and experiences to increase widespread faculty participation and engagement and boost student retention. A central student success committee invites any faculty or staff member to submit a proposal for a new project. This committee then serves as the vetting and approval body for new student success projects. If a proposal is approved, the Provost sends an email to the campus community seeking

volunteers by listing the diverse skills (e.g., data analytics), experiences (e.g., policy review), and interests (e.g., minority male advancement) needed to make that project successful. Because participants are solicited based on their specific content knowledge or skill set, they are highly engaged in the planning and implementation of initiatives. In fact, the majority of teams receive more volunteers than are needed. They are also highly successful; **SCC has raised student retention rates by 29% and has seen nearly a 9% increase in students earning 12 credits per year since launching the initiative.**

How Do We Promote Equitable Academic Outcomes?

4 Use Low-Stakes Assessments Early and Often to Intervene Before Learning Gaps Develop

Encourage students to evaluate their progress in a course through frequent, low-stakes formative assessments. Implement early assessments to provide targeted feedback to students, connect them to resources, and follow up with them prior to high-stakes summative assessments.

CASE IN POINT

University of Maryland, Baltimore County addressed student learning gaps early in the semester by integrating a system that can help students succeed academically with frequent, low-stakes assessments. Known as adaptive release, UMBC faculty utilized their learning management system to require students to pass incremental quizzes evaluating their mastery of foundational skill sets before "unlocking" access to future assignments. For example, students must pass a short quiz evaluating their understanding of

pivot tables before moving on to a more complex assignment such as spreadsheet analysis. This model allows colleges to integrate some of the aspects of self-paced learning that so many admire, while also ensuring that faculty are kept aware of the areas in which students are struggling in order to provide necessary support in a more timely manner. **UMBC found that students in sections using this feature earned higher scores on the final exam and outperformed their peers in the next level of the course.**

5 Promote Student Engagement Through Active Learning Practices

Implement small group collaboration within large classes to scale student-centered and interactive learning. This level of engagement serves to improve student mastery and support underprepared students, ultimately increasing the likelihood of completion.

6 Conduct a Jargon-Reduction Audit to Ensure Course Materials Use Accessible Language

Engage faculty and staff in a jargon-reduction audit of course materials to evaluate and revise the use of inaccessible language on syllabi and assessments.

7 Highlight Industry-Aligned Competencies in Existing Curricula

While career connection is not typically thought of as a solution to equity challenges, data on low-income student stop-out rates suggests this is an under-invested area of focus. Promote completion for nontraditional and underserved students by helping them understand the long-term value of a credential. Embed marketable industry-aligned skills in academic courses to ensure students connect their classroom experiences to future careers.

How Do We Ease the College Transition for Underserved Students?

8 Prepare Underserved Students Through Easy-Access Summer Programs

Employ a targeted recruitment campaign in conjunction with local districts to reach the students who can benefit most from preparatory programming. Cultivate long-term student success with summer bridge programs that build connections with prospective students while preparing them for upcoming college coursework.

CASE IN POINT

Georgia State University's Success Academy is an intensive early start cohort program that awards credit for preparatory coursework. Realizing that noncredit-bearing developmental education delays and often prohibits completion for many underprepared students, Georgia State prepares students by enrolling them in college-level coursework the summer before their first semester while providing additional support. As a cohort, these incoming students attend courses

already offered in the summer term. To eliminate extraneous costs, the University enrolls participants in the same courses as returning students, who serve as confidence-building role models. The early credit accumulation builds momentum that propels students toward completion. The Success Academy **increased fall-to-fall retention rates for student participants from 50% to 87%; these students' grades represent a cumulative GPA of 3.29.**

9 Establish On-Demand Student Support

Alleviate some of students' application and onboarding challenges through supplemental support for incoming students by providing remote, on-demand assistance throughout matriculation. Deploy professional advisors and student mentors to staff a summer helpline for prospective students that provides on-demand answers to last-minute questions about health forms, financial aid packages, transportation routes, etc. This program requires no commitment from students but is instead offered as a service that is tailored to meet student needs. Students can call or text the school to discuss their questions and concerns.

10 Provide Preenrollment Assistance with Equity-Driven Success Course

Ensure incoming students are prepared for success by hosting a summer workshop that not only provides pre-matriculation assistance but also nudges students to continuously use the resources available to them beyond the first semester. The course, which is primarily marketed to prospective students aged 25 and older, includes campus tours highlighting where to locate key resources, an introduction to student support opportunities, FAFSA workshops, and an overview of necessary academic skills. The director of enrollment typically facilitates the course, while instructors and student services staff provide weekly lessons on key topics related to the enrollment process and student success.

11

Ensure Easy Access to Advisors with Temporary Advising Stations

Increase student-to-advisor interactions with temporary advising stations. Relocate advisors to be highly visible and accessible by setting up advising stations once a week in high-traffic locations inside the campus buildings that house the most popular classes. Advisors rotate through different buildings to boost the frequency of interactions and to share important information with students who may not have time to make regular office visits.

12

Target Unresponsive and High-Risk Students with Tiered Outreach

Reach highest-risk students through a targeted and tiered outreach approach that diversifies communications through multiple channels. Students who do not respond to tier 1 interventions are contacted via alternative channels, which serve as tier 2 interventions. Students who are unresponsive to tiers 1 and 2, thus the hardest to reach, are contacted via the most time-intensive form of outreach, i.e., tier 3.

13

Build Student Confidence Through Preenrollment Resilience Primer

Ensure that students understand the concepts of intellectual and social growth prior to arriving on campus. Use the college website to engage students in a resilience primer, educating all students in growth mindset theory. This online pre-orientation module serves to increase the likelihood of a smooth college transition and a successful first term.

14

Reinforce Productive Student Behavior with Positive Alerts

While colleges commonly use early alert systems to flag detrimental student trends or behaviors, few use such systems to commend student progress. Supplement traditional early-alert software to enable faculty to track and notify advisors of productive student behavior, such as demonstrated improvement and outstanding work.



CASE IN POINT

Advisors at **Itawamba Community College** employ a three-tiered, multichannel approach to student outreach based on student risk level in order to maximize the impact of advisor outreach and to meet the needs of the highest-risk students. After receiving a student alert from a faculty or staff member, advisors send an email, a letter, and a preprinted card directing students to visit student support services. These cards are directly handed to students at the end of class.

If a student fails to respond to any of these tier 1 interventions within a week, an advisor contacts the student via phone call and text messaging systems to interact with him or her directly. Finally, for those who do not respond to tier 2 interventions, tier 3 involves the advisor meeting the student in person immediately after a class. Itawamba found that they were able to engage a large proportion of students using the low-lift first- and second-tier methods and were then able to conserve time and energy for the hardest-to-reach students using the in-person visit.



CASE IN POINT

To address the gap in student confidence between incoming traditional and nontraditional students, the **University of Texas at Austin** integrated a resilience primer exercise called "The UT Mindset" into existing online information for new students. Researchers at the University tested the effectiveness of this strategy in a controlled experiment. Some students received a set of readings and activities that emphasized growth (i.e., intelligence is not fixed but something that can be improved over time) and belonging (i.e., it is normal to feel disconnected from others when adjusting to new environments, but connection will come with time), while the control group read general passages about Austin's climate and culture.

Then, students reflected on what they read by writing a personal message to another student struggling to acclimate to college, reinforcing and personalizing the key lessons in the readings. For the control group, there was no clear impact measured by credit completion after the first term. For low-risk students, neither intervention made much of an impact. But **for high-risk students, the growth and belonging exercise had a significant impact: the gap between their credit completion rate and that of the low-risk population was cut in half, from 12% to 6%.** Administrators now include this exercise in pre-orientation for all incoming students.

15

Shift Perceptions of Student Involvement

Expand existing leadership programming and career services to embrace nontraditional students' experiences and help them align their off-campus involvement with marketable skills. This support allows part-time students to maximize their college experience and promote themselves to the workforce.

17

Advance Term-to-Term Persistence by Extending Faculty Training

Target students who are unenrolled for the following term, and proactively communicate ways the college can address their needs in order to prevent attrition. EAB's student success management system, Navigate, can provide academic planning tools for students while simultaneously empowering advisors to direct them toward vital actions to stay on track.

19

Engage Late-Term Stop-Outs Through Targeted Reenrollment Campaign

Launch a targeted reenrollment campaign to reengage late-term stop-outs and incentivize their return to campus with a simplified and low-cost reentry process. Identify recent stop-outs with the academic and financial qualifications necessary to reenroll and complete a degree quickly.

21

Facilitate Completion with Multi-Term Registration

Encourage future education and career planning through a multi-term registration process that allows students to plan external commitments further in advance by restructuring the traditional term-by-term registration process. Incentivize long-term educational planning by allowing the students who have crafted long-term plans to enroll in a full year of courses (i.e., fall, spring, and summer) at one time.

16

Maximize Student Service Access with Personalized Resource Nudges

Encourage increased use of available services by proactively identifying student needs, aligning them to relevant campus services, and inviting students to take advantage of the appropriate resources through personalized nudges.

18

Automate Student Withdrawal Surveys to Identify Greatest Student Barriers

Establish a system to retrieve and process student feedback related to the root cause of course withdrawals. EAB's student success management system, Navigate, provides a direct-to-student mobile platform to make this process easier. Once you receive student input, identify opportunities to improve advising services.

20

Expand Student Access to Prior Learning-Assessment Opportunities

Outline institution-specific PLA policies and offer this information as a resource to all incoming students to help them self-select the PLA that aligns with their experiences and goals. For increased ease of access, provide hard copies of this outline at all admissions and student services buildings and include a digital copy on the college website.



For more information visit
eab.com/communitycolleges