At a Glance

Transformational College Redesign: Building Blocks for Institutionalizing Racial Equity

By Mina Dadgar, PhD

California community college leaders identify three key building blocks for advancing racial equity[i]—contrasting "transformational" approaches that are significantly reducing inequities in students' experiences and outcomes with more "traditional" norms, processes, and practices.

Building Block	College Redesign Approaches	
	Transformational	*Traditional*
1. Lay a Strong Foundation for Reform: Build a Movement Focused on Equity & Uplift Equity Champions	College engages in ongoing inquiry and leverages data—including student voices—to change hearts and minds at scale. Ongoing inquiry is balanced with quick wins that create momentum for change. Resistors are embraced and engaged in change work.	Most campus constituents are unaware of key metrics such as completion rates for different racial groups. Because the equity imperative for change is unclear, the opposition of a few loud voices can stall progress or creates surface-level change.
	College leaders challenge historical structures, policies, and practices to advance student-centered, equity-minded reform. Middle leaders are mentored and supported to carry out a racial equity agenda.	College leaders avoid "sacred cows" (e.g., hiring practices, student-centered course scheduling, anti-racist classroom practices, etc.). Middle leaders cannot trust that college leaders will "have their back" If they take professional risks.
	Initiatives such as developmental education reform or guided pathways are used to refine, uplift, and scale the existing work and voices of equity champions.	Efforts to improve racial equity and guided pathways, developmental education, and other reforms are treated as separate initiatives with no clear or connected "why."

Building Block	College Redesign Approaches	
	Transformational	*Traditional*
2. Gather the Right Crew: Create Inclusive Design Teams & Meaningfully Involve Students	Design teams are formed to tackle specific issues in the student experience and generate new approaches. Individuals from various functions and different levels of the organization make up the team depending on the "problem," including frontline staff and adjunct faculty. Meetings are facilitated to allow all constituents to voice their perspectives and meaningfully contribute to the development of solutions.	Design teams primarily consist of tenured faculty and administrators. Historically privileged voices dominate dialogue and decision-making.
	Students most negatively affected by institutional barriers and societal racism are active and equal partners in understanding equity gaps and co-creating solutions.	Student engagement is periodic and limited to surveys, focus groups, student panels, or token student leader representation in meetings about campus operations rather than student experience.
3. Scaffold Services Based on Need: Universally Redesign Oppressive Structures while Prioritizing Resources by Need	Institutional barriers are removed universally, while high-touch and resource-intensive supports are tailored and prioritized for students who most affected by societal and institutional racism and oppression.	The false dichotomy between "universal design" and targeted programs creates competition between guided pathways and equity. Because access to high-touch supports occurs on a first-come-first-served basis, students with greatest need rarely receive resource intensive resources.

---

[i] Based on interviews with 28 California Community Colleges "equity champions," April – June 2020. Find more information in Transformational College Redesign: Building Blocks for Institutionalizing Racial Equity.