



Stories from the Field

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# Chabot College

## Uplifting Practices of Learning Communities

### Equitable Counseling Approach

Tommy Reed, Umoja Counselor at Chabot College, seeks to create an HBCU-like experience where all community college students feel valued and cared for. He doesn't stop there; he also seeks through collaborations across the college to bring Umoja practices to non-Umoja spaces. This works to ensure that students feel connected and valued throughout the college. Umoja, "a Kiswahili word meaning unity" according to the Umoja Community's mission statement, is a program that provides community, instruction, and resources to support the educational

experiences of African American students while serving any student who walks through the doors.

Three Umoja practices that Reed has experienced resonate most with both students and faculty at the college: Ethic of Love, The Porch (Porch Talk), and Language as Power. He works with faculty to explore how to incorporate Umoja practices into their classroom practices. In an Umoja classroom, Reed says, there is "energy, dialogue, and excitement" around learning and being in community with one another that is a direct result of the Umoja practices. He encourages instructional faculty and counseling faculty to explore Umoja practices in their interactions with students.

### Umoja Practices Defined by the Umoja Community

#### Ethic of Love–Affective Domain

"When practitioners move with an ethic of love they touch their students' spirits. Moving with an ethic of love means having willingness to share ourselves, our stories, our lives, our experiences to humanize and make real the classroom."

#### The Porch

"To say at all times 'What is Really Going on Here,' a learning environment should be open, respectful, playful; there should be argument, dissection and revision. It should be personal, political and philosophical."

#### Language as Power

"When we recognize and validate the language our students bring to the classroom—that which they create amongst themselves—our students open up to the power of language. We can help them to develop a sense of pride, ownership and responsibility in their own speaking and writing."

To learn more about Umoja and [Umoja practices](#), check out the [Umoja Community](#).

Reed uses the Umoja practices in his work with all students, whether or not they are in the Umoja program. He works to build community and connection with his students, showing them they are valued. “Black students need someone they can trust,” Reed shares. “The education system has failed them on many levels.” Reed makes himself available to students in-person, by text, and by phone.

He works outside the bounds of traditional counseling models that can sometimes demand a degree of distance between the counselor and student. Showing up



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authentically for Reed is about embracing the Umoja practice “Ethic of Love.” What that looks like in practice is Reed meets students where they are, connects with them on a human level, and teaches them how to navigate college. “By their second year, they are telling me what classes they need to take,” Reed states.

Equitable counseling is “an exchange with a student, not a transaction”. In delivering equitable counseling services, Reed sits with students exchanging stories and experiences. Through this mutual exchange, trust is built, relationships are built. This is where the transformative experience nests.

In delivering equitable counseling, colleges are working to build a different experience for students. Traditional education has failed Black students on a deep level. Reed states, “Black students need to connect and feel valued or they will leave.”

## The Transformational Practices

- **Build Relationships:** Be available for students.
- **Connect with Black Students:** Share your humanity with students and connect with their humanity.
- **Break the Mold:** Be creative in garnering resources to support Black students and brave enough to fail in that.

## Call to Action for the Field

- **“Tame the bureaucracy.”** Black students need just-in-time support, which means access to just-in-time resources.
- **“Leave institutional politics and competition over funding out of finding ways to better serve Black students.”** Focus on building relationships with students, preparing the institutions to be responsive to Black students’ needs, and focus on creating a culture and environment where Black voices and culture are valued, heard, and respected.
- **“Don’t experiment on Black students, stemming from Dr. Joy DeGruy’s work in *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*.”** Umoja practices are working. Start by incorporating those practices to support Black student success.