



Stories from the Field

CLP | Career
Ladders
Project

Cerritos College

Utilizing Communities of Practice to Support Equity-Focused Changemakers

Equitable Counseling Approach

At Cerritos College, the Dean of Counseling, Eliza Hoyos Vences, and the Department Chair, Chelena Fisher, sought to close gaps in serving students and solve the challenge of students receiving inconsistent information and misaligned services. They observed that the disconnect was due to a lack of shared understanding among counselors of what it means to provide equitable services to students and how to differentiate services based on the needs of the student.

They approached this problem by creating a space for counselors to first reflect on their own experiences and positionality in relation to students. Then they worked collaboratively with counselors to develop a baseline awareness of differing experiences, to identify system changes that were impacting the current student experience, and to make visible the diversity of students' needs that demand an agile and transformative approach to counseling services.

To get the conversations going, the dean and department chair supported counselors throughout the fall semester to participate in equity trainings. To support the effort to reimagine counseling services to be equitable and address specific gaps in services, the Dean of Counseling and Counseling Department Chair organized communities of practice around four specific populations identified as being underserved by the department based

on qualitative and quantitative data. In the spring semester and summer, counselors in the communities of practice participated in trainings, developed a better understanding of why and how specific student populations are not being served well by current practices, and created a vision for how to deliver more equitable, intentional, and coordinated services to students. The Counseling Division is now working to implement the vision and plans that emerged from the communities of practice.

Transformational Practices

- **Examine your positionality** and reflect on how that may be influencing the way you show up for students.
- **Review data** on student, faculty, staff, and administrator demographics. Look at who is there and not there. Where there is a gap in representation, ask what you and the college can do to create a more welcoming environment for student groups not represented in college personnel.
- **Develop an openness** to learn, to have critical conversations, and to feel uncomfortable.
- **Engage in self-work** to be critically conscious and best able to serve students.
- **Leverage the college community** to co-lead the work.

Four Communities of Practice

Each community of practice met to better understand the student group and how they can develop more transformative and holistic practices to address gaps in service and better meet students' needs.

Dual Enrollment Students

- Developed an understanding of K-12 students, families, and partner organization needs.
- Developed an understanding of the dual enrollment pipeline.
- Examined who is granted access to the college and who isn't.
- Engaged with students and supported them to shift their mindset to a college going environment.
- Examined how and if dual enrollment is serving local K-12 schools and districts with high populations of socioeconomically disadvantaged and racially diverse students.

Counseling Transfer-focused vs. Career Education-focused Students

- Developed practices for discussing the differing benefits of transfer and career education options.
- Developed practices for having conversation with students seeking physically demanding jobs to plan for skill-building that supports job transitions when the physical demands become too much.
- Developed practices for having hard conversations with students who don't get accepted into impacted career education programs like nursing.

Students on or Nearing Academic Probation

- Talked with current students on probation to understand how they came to be in that situation.

- Discussed with individuals who were on probation and how they made strides to change their status.
- Engaged with students nearing academic and progress probation to connect them to resources.
- Developed an intervention plan for students on academic and progress probation.

Men of Color

- Discussed the transfer process with men of color who have graduated and transferred.
- Developed an understanding why men of color are not earning degrees and transferring at the same rates as other students.
- Identified ways to support men of color to understand the transfer process
- Engaged in race conscious discussions about how to better meet the needs of men of color and support them in developing a sense of belonging at the college.

Call to Action for the Field

Embrace collaborative leadership models between deans, department chairs, and faculty leaders to partner across the college to develop a collective understanding of the student challenges.

Get your hands dirty and do the work. Inaction to address known inequities is complicity with the status quo. Deans, directors, chairs, and faculty all need to be a part of the work to transform the student experience.