

Equity Walk at Compton College

STUDENT-CENTERED REDESIGN CASE STUDY AND TOOL | DECEMBER 2020

THE BEGINNING

Compton College learned about the equity walk, an exercise to experience the virtual or physical campus from a student's perspective, from the Guided Pathways Regional Coordinator who connected them to the guided pathways leads at Fullerton College. The team at Fullerton College invited Compton College to join the equity walk they were collaborating on at Cypress College where they provided participants with student experience snapshots to use as they navigated the physical campus through the perspective of the

student snapshot. At the end of the equity walk, participants shared where they felt the college was supporting students and where the college was putting up barriers or not meeting students' needs. Compton College wanted to recreate this event and was deep in the planning when COVID-19 hit and campus closed. In the new remote learning environment, they knew that students were now navigating the campus through the college website, so they moved the exercise online and renamed it the digital equity walk.

“Opportunities like this are great for building relationships, building our capacity, and building emerging leaders.”

Citlali Gonzales, Guided Pathways Counselor, CalWORKS, Guided Pathways Tri-chair

IMPLEMENTATION

The goal of the digital equity walk was to bring campus constituents together to experience how the college was serving students remotely and figure out where they needed to provide more support or do things differently. Compton College knew that students were struggling with housing and food insecurity before COVID-19. When the requirements for remote learning—appropriate technology and adequate internet access—added another potential barrier, they felt compelled to move their equity walk online to ensure they were supporting students effectively.

Compton College partnered with Career Ladders Project (CLP) to facilitate a digital equity walk with 128 faculty, staff, and students in attendance remotely. The college started the

event by norming the knowledge of the participants around institutional equity so they were all focused on and seeing the same issues. The event allowed participants to provide constructive feedback on web content to departments across the college. The Guided Pathways Team developed a range of student experience snapshots, which are short profiles describing an individual student's background including their college and career aspirations. These descriptions were based on the real backgrounds and experiences of students at the college. Using an assigned student experience snapshot, participants in the digital equity walk worked in teams to complete the tasks the student would need to take to reach their goal. While they were finding their way around the

website to complete the tasks, the teams were asked to take notes and screenshots to show where they felt the college was doing a good job or presenting a barrier for the student.

The event included 30 minutes for the digital equity walk and 15 minutes for a small group debrief. Each group met in a zoom breakout room and had a specific shared slide deck with the student profile, slides with questions, and a place to take notes. Each group assigned a notetaker, navigator, time keeper, and data collector who was responsible for taking screenshots. The goal of the teams was to rely just on the information that students have, attempting to channel the student experience of navigating the website and the college online. Before the breakout rooms closed, participants took a short survey to provide individual feedback on the utility of the website based on the student experience represented

in the snapshots. All participants then reconvened for a full group discussion.

The Guided Pathways Team collected and synthesized all of the feedback they received from the digital equity walk and presented it to specific departments and the website manager. The feedback on challenges included use of confusing terminology and acronyms or broken links. Highlights included examples where departments or divisions used inviting and helpful language like “We are here to help online—chat with us,” used inclusive images, directed students to a specific person and displayed their picture rather than providing generic office contact information, and provided a seamless way to digitally “knock” on virtual office doors.

KEYS TO COMPTON’S SUCCESS

- **Preparing for the digital equity walk** by creating an internal agenda with links to every resource:
 - Master slide deck
 - Breakout room slide decks
 - Facilitator tips
- **Including students and participants** who are less familiar with the college to provide objective feedback
- **Training facilitators** with explicit strategies for keeping the discussion moving forward
- **Holding a dress rehearsal** a few days before the event to ensure facilitators feel prepared and to address tech issues
- **Assigning specific roles** to people supporting the event: co-coordinators, presenters, facilitators, zoom tech support, zoom chat monitor

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A GUIDE TO DEVELOPING AN EQUITY WALK AT YOUR COLLEGE

This is a tool outlining five key steps to plan an equity walk at your college. The detailed descriptions are for a digital equity walk with participants joining remotely. For an in-person equity walk, see the Event-planning Tips for suggestions on adapting the exercises. You can also find web resources including templates, samples, and a conference presentation video on CLP's website at <https://www.careerladdersproject.org/equity-walk/>.

Overview of the purpose and process

What is an equity walk?

- Equity walks ask participants to put themselves in the shoes of a student to navigate the college from a particular student perspective.
- Equity walk participants receive a student experience snapshot and begin to experience the virtual or physical campus from that student's perspective. This uncovers the messages that the college's physical and digital spaces and campus processes convey to students and how these might impact their ability to succeed.

Why do an equity walk?

- Equity, unlike equality, takes a conscious and intentional effort by the institution to understand the college student's experience with a focus on students who are disproportionately impacted by processes, policies, and practices that create barriers.
- Experiential learning can help everyone at the college learn about and gain insight into the challenges that students face, building empathy and supporting a caring student-centered culture.
- Equity walks can help to bring groups from across the college and across functional roles together to develop a collective vision for how to support students.
- Equity walks identify specific barriers and can lead to quick changes and long-term planning.

What is the general process of the equity walk?

- All participants convene in a group via zoom meeting to receive directions and review objectives before separating into breakout groups.
- Each breakout group receives one student experience snapshot to use on their digital equity walk. A breakout group facilitator guides the team through the exercise. Breakout team members share note-taking and timekeeping responsibilities.
- All participants reconvene after the breakouts to discuss what was learned.

Step 1 Build your student experience descriptions

- **Use your Student Equity and Achievement (SEA) Plan** to identify equity populations to represent in your student experience snapshots.
- **Work with the college's equity programs** to better understand the common barriers that students face at the college. Speak with classified staff working in offices where students are likely to ask questions, counselors working with equity populations, and program coordinators who may have firsthand knowledge of what students commonly struggle with when navigating the college.
- **Develop examples that include characteristics of students** identified in your equity data. These characteristics may include race, financial aid status, first generation, veteran, foster youth, and/or other disproportionately-impacted populations identified in your institutional equity data.
- **Include a specific next step or objective** that the student is trying to accomplish. This will help participants to have a place to start in navigating the college website and online campus.

Compton College Sample: Student Experience Snapshot

Tony is an army veteran who enlisted straight out of high school and never attended college. Tony attended Paramount High School and graduated with a 4.0 GPA, but didn't know about eligibility for financial aid or scholarships to pay for college at the time. Tony served four years' active duty and two tours of duty in Afghanistan. Tony was discharged from the army.

Tony constantly moves between his parents' and sister's homes, sleeping wherever there is space. Tony suffers from PTSD, and was inspired by his time in combat to pursue a career in nursing. Tony wants to go to school full-time, but doesn't know the processes for enrolling and applying for financial aid. Tony heard he should get in contact with the school's VA representative to get help with his veteran education benefits.

Tony has completed a Compton College application and is exploring the website to see what services are available. Take the next 30 minutes navigating the website to find Tony's next steps.

Things to consider

- Think about what you are trying to accomplish through the lens of Tony's student experience snapshot.
- Keep in mind the unique strengths and barriers of Tony's student experience.
- Be aware of your own prior knowledge of the website and college. Do not assume what you know.
- Look for all areas of support Tony may be interested in based on the needs of his student experience.

Step 2 Establish a vision for the equity walk

■ **Plan with a cross-functional team.** Start by building a team of leaders from across the college including equity and guided pathways coordinators, classified staff in student services, students, and administrators from both student services and academic affairs.

■ **Establish a set objective.** What student challenges do you want participants to explore? In a digital equity walk, participants can explore various aspects of the student experience online. You can ask participants to explore everything from navigating student support resources, finding answers to a specific question, or any other challenge that you think may be an issue for students. Setting a clear objective will help to guide your participants as they gather data on the equity walk and reflect on the challenges. This deep understanding of the challenges can aid in developing solutions that are nuanced and address the challenge in a holistic way.

■ **Identify scenarios that you want participants to experience.**

Start with the student experience snapshots you developed in Step 1 around the college’s student equity populations. What scenarios might each student face? What would you like participants to explore with each student experience? Keep in mind that this will change for each student experience. For example, you may want a scenario where a first-generation college student is navigating financial aid and locating other programs that provide financial support. You might ask participants to note how easy it is to navigate this process online.

■ **Develop questions for participants to use as they are on the equity walk.**

Tips for developing participant questions

- Provide participants with clear instructions that guide them in understanding their task: to experience the college as the student in their snapshot might experience the college. Remind them that although they may have intimate knowledge of the inner workings of the institution, the student does not.
- Ask participants to identify where they think the student would start to complete their goal or task. Provide a place for participants to note what they felt the student’s starting place is and why.
- Remind participants to be empathetic to the student’s identity, background, prior knowledge, and prior expertise. Encourage participants to note where the institution reflects this identity and explicitly values the strengths the student brings and where there is a missed opportunity to do so.

Sample Goals and Objectives

Goal of Event

To identify barriers the college presents to students navigating the college

Objectives

- Identify where the college is supporting the needs of disproportionately-impacted students and where there are gaps in support
- Identify lack of clarity or gaps in communication to students
- Refocus and ground efforts for redesign in supporting equity populations
- Refocus and ground efforts for redesign on fulfilling the college’s mission

Tips for developing participant questions (cont.)

- Encourage participants to observe where there may be missed opportunities for touch points that would encourage and support the student.

Compton College Sample: Questions for the Digital Equity Walk

- If you were Tony, how would you know where to begin the process of achieving your goal of going back to school ?
- What sections of the website point Tony in the right direction? Are there aspects of the website that are more confusing than helpful?
- Are there particular web pages or aspects of the website that reflect student interests, experiences and achievements that Tony can relate to (e.g., pictures used, tone of the language used, student highlights)?
- If Tony was having challenges navigating the website, is it clear where to get additional help?
- What other observations do you have about the barriers Tony might face while navigating the website?
- Would Tony feel like his identity or experience is reflected in images around campus?
- Are the webpages you encountered from Tony’s perspective clear and concise? For example: information was easy to find; information was digestible, presented in lists without long paragraphs; web pages were aesthetically pleasing. List aspects that you want to highlight.
- In what ways does the website make you feel stuck or unsure of where to go if you need help?
- What other observations do you have about the website that may have been a positive or negative for Tony?

■ **Develop questions for the participants to reflect on after the equity walk.**

Tips for developing participant post-walk questions

- Develop questions that ask participants to reflect on their findings and to begin to categorize the challenges they identified. Questions may include asking participants to reflect on the most discouraging barriers they uncovered or the most affirming highlights they found showing how the college supports the students.
- Ask participants to vote on the top five to ten challenges they feel are most urgent to improving the student experience of the college. You can do this through a zoom poll if remote by numbering each challenge and voting on the number related to the challenge. In-person, you can ask participants to put a star or dot next to the challenge.
- Bring all participants back to the main zoom session. Provide each group time to share their findings with the other participants.

Step 3 Plan your equity walk

This step provides tips to help prepare key elements of a successful equity walk event: developing an internal agenda and resources, developing a method to collect breakout group data, training breakout group facilitators, collecting feedback from individual participants, and analyzing and sharing data with constituents. You can find the web resources referenced in this section at:

<https://www.careerladdersproject.org/equity-walk/>.

■ Develop your internal agenda and needed resources

- Draft a table for your agenda that includes time, activity, resources, facilitator, and notes. For a digital equity walk, hyperlink all resources needed for each section in the resource column.
- Establish event support roles to ensure participants, presenters, and facilitators have adequate support before and during the equity walk. Roles may include: event coordinators, presenters, zoom tech support and chat monitor (for digital equity walks), and a main room monitor to answer questions. (See web resource, Roles for Zoom Meeting)
- Prepare student experience snapshots with questions for participants to consider on the equity walk and to reflect on after the equity walk.
- For breakout groups, prepare clear directions for the group that assign roles and responsibilities to participants. Roles include: navigator, note taker, data collector (photos or screenshots), timekeeper, and debrief facilitator.

Event-planning Tip

Include a hyperlink to a google document (or other shared file) that contains the internal agenda with zoom links or meeting location and hyperlinks to all other documents used for the event. Using one “home” document to house everything you need will make collaborating easier.

Sample Internal Agenda

Time	Facilitator/Speaker	Notes	Resources to print or link in the chat (if using zoom)
9–9:15	Event coordinator	Welcome participants, review the agenda, and introduce presenter	SEA Plan or other resources
9:15–9:35	College leader	Present on something that will ground the work in equity and the mission of the college	
9:35–9:50	Facilitator	Introduce the activity, timeline, and resources (hyperlink resource folder)	Post resources folder (hyperlink in the chat or pass out to participants)
<i>Add rows to include the activity with time estimates</i>			

■ Develop a plan for collecting the data teams gather

- For digital equity walks, develop google slides (or other shared slides) for groups to record their reflections and upload their screenshots. (See web resource, Slides for Breakout Groups)
- For in-person equity walks, plan to collect notes from each note taker, transcribe them, and share them back with the group.

■ Train your facilitators

The facilitator’s role is to ensure participants know what they are doing, what their responsibilities are, what the process is, and how the information will be used. A key aspect of the facilitator’s role beyond setting the stage and assigning participant roles is ensuring that the group stays focused on experiencing the college through the lens of the student experience snapshot they have been assigned. A sample script for training facilitators can be found on CLP’s website. (See web resources, Facilitator Tips from Compton College)

Facilitator Role

- Ensure that everyone in the group understands their respective roles and the goal of the exercise.
- Ensure all voices are heard by encouraging quieter participants to speak or take the lead on answering particular questions.
- Support an experience based in inquiry and learning by steering participants away from casting blame on one department or another through highlighting the need to focus on systems change.
- Ensure data is collected along the way in the notes and screenshots.
- Help participants to stay in the role of the student, challenge preconceptions about what the student may or may not know, and facilitate a discussion if there is disagreement.
- Assign roles to everyone in the breakout group. Roles may include:
 1. **Note Takers:** take notes in the group’s slide deck. Feel free to add another slide to your notes as needed.
 2. **Timekeeper:** keep the group on track with time. There will also be announcements in the zoom room to help.

Event-planning Tips

For an in-person equity walk, allow about 90-120 minutes for participants to complete the walk. You should create materials that the facilitator and notetaker can easily reference and take notes on during the activity. Before the day of the equity walk, organize the questions to explore on the walk and questions to reflect on after the walk. Leave room for notetakers to record observations.

When participants return from the walk, use posters for each group to report out findings during the equity walk. Having participants do a “gallery” walk to review each poster can help to visualize all of the discoveries and spark further discussions about needed solutions. You can also ask participants to use sticker dots to identify the top ten findings. This can help to prioritize the work moving forward.

3. **Navigator:** share your screen with the group and serve as the role of the student in navigating the website. Take direction from the group on where to navigate using the perspective from the student experience snapshot.
4. **Data Collector:** take screenshots or photos of any areas that you want to highlight or that bring up specific questions and suggestions.

Step 4 Survey participants after the event

■ **After the event, it is important to survey participants** to capture any reflections or realizations they may have after the equity walk. Key reflection questions to include in the survey:

- What did you find most illuminating in this exercise?
- Who else do you think should participate in this experience?
- What are the main barrier/s you observed that students may face at the college?
- What other ideas do you have for better understanding the student experience? How can we incorporate that into a future professional development event?

Step 5 Analyze and share data with constituents

- **Create a shareable report** of the findings and reflections.
- **Make a plan for sharing** this report with key constituencies at the college.
- **Plan to examine** the more complex findings further.
- **Provide a workshop** for key constituents to develop solutions to barriers uncovered during the equity walk. Using a design-thinking approach to brainstorming and designing solutions can help maintain a user-centered design.

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