FRONTIER SET

2020
REFLECTIONS ON TRANSFORMATION

PERSPECTIVES FROM THE FRONTIER SET

The Frontier Set was a select group of high-performing, high-potential colleges and universities, state systems, and supporting organizations, all committed to dramatically increasing student success and erasing attainment gaps by transforming how they operate.

In preparing these 2020 reflections, it's important to acknowledge the significant events of 2020, and the degree to which Frontier Set participants and their respective institutions were impacted by these events. The reflections collected here are informed both by their institution's operating context and where they were on their transformation journey. Participants contributed reflections on their experiences and evolutions in 2020, including grappling with the pandemic, adapting to remote learning, and reckoning with racial injustice.

We invite you to dig deeper into key topics of equity-centered strategies, cultures of care, and student-centered data, plus insights about student success tactics and editorials from the network. There is wisdom contained in each article, and collectively they offer valuable and actionable insights.

Note: These Frontier Set reflections were originally published by the Frontier Set in 2020, and then reformatted in 2023.

For more on the Frontier Set, please visit **frontierset.org**.

ARTICLES

A collection of insights from 2020

EDITORIALS

First-person perspectives from Frontier Set intermediaries

ARTICLES

EQUITY-CENTERED STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT STUDENTS OF COLOR

THIS YEAR'S CHALLENGES BROUGHT OPPORTUNITIES TO QUICKLY LEARN ABOUT, DEVELOP, AND IMPLEMENT MORE EQUITY-CENTERED STRATEGIES

Since its inception in 2016, the Frontier Set institutions, systems, and partners have been committed to reforming their policies and practices so that race and income are no longer predictors of student success. The COVID-19 pandemic and the reckoning with racial injustice in our country, both of which have had an outsized impact on communities of color, brought a stronger sense of urgency for higher education institutions to focus on equity-centered strategies to address the role systemic racism plays in the success (and failure) of students around the country. While there are many barriers to developing and implementing equity-centered plans, Frontier Set members acted quickly to move equity from rhetoric to action, identifying biases and interrogating institutional structures, culture, and practices to address their impact on students.

The events of 2020 brought systemic racism and entrenched injustices to the forefront of the national conversation. As these deep barriers to equity got the attention they deserve, Frontier Set institutions looked inward at their own barriers to developing shared, actionable, equity-centered strategies.

One oft-cited barrier to developing these strategies is a lack of time and resources available to faculty, staff, and students across campuses. For example, Northeast Wisconsin Technical College (NWTC) noted that "competing priorities for resources and urgency within the college landscape" continue to be a barrier to developing equity-centered strategies. Despite these challenges, NWTC and many other Frontier Set institutions observed and began developing a shared sense of commitment to prioritizing racial equity. San Jacinto College, for example, wrote that while time and resources are typical barriers, because the institution had committed to equity prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the murder of George Floyd in May, "the two global events actually made the work more pressing and personal to all members of our college community." And with a focus on equitable outcomes, institutional leadership can also help address the persistent resource barrier: leaders at Florida International University are "determined to identify existing resources that can be leveraged or reallocated to ensure we are fully supporting these efforts."

While the institution as a whole might be committed to equitable outcomes, another key barrier to equity-centered strategies is alignment and commitment from all campus employees, across all levels. Wake Technical Community College, for example, noted that a potential barrier is "the lack of a shared, widespread understanding of and value for equity," and Indian River State College wrote that some across the college may not understand systemic racism as an issue, may not see a need to act, or may not know what to do to confront it.

Again, leadership plays a key role in setting and supporting an expectation for individual and collective commitment to driving toward equitable outcomes for students of color. As Portland State University (PSU) noted, without executive-level sponsorship and follow-through on action, institutions will struggle to systemically prioritize equitable outcomes on their campus. And while the commitment to equity needs to be addressed at an institutional level, individual commitment is also incredibly important. Johnson C. Smith University in Charlotte reflected: "While the beauty of our institution is our differences, we must be willing to share and be challenged by our differences in order to assist the institution with meeting the ever-changing needs of our students."

Finally, institutions must hire racially diverse administrators, faculty, and staff to support students of color. As Northern Arizona University shared, "We should not be satisfied by checking the boxes that we attempted to recruit a diverse pool of applicants. We need to recruit, hire, retain, and fairly evaluate diverse faculty and staff, and to build a culture and institution where diverse administrators, faculty, staff, and students want to be."

Although there are barriers to implementing equity-centered strategies on campuses, Frontier Set institutions understand the urgency of moving from rhetoric to action—work that starts with recognizing bias and understanding students' experiences.

Often institutions start the journey of recognizing and addressing bias on their campus by looking at data that highlights equity gaps, which then sparks conversation around addressing those gaps. But then, to further recognize the lived experiences of Black, Latino, and Indigenous students, it's important to go to students and hear directly how bias shows up in their experiences. Harper College in Illinois starts with leadership participation to "help lead from the top," which creates the conditions for staff and faculty to feel empowered to discuss the impact of bias directly with students. Miami Dade College noted that in order to create a welcoming community, they "need to ensure that every individual in our college family clearly understands the historical underpinnings of social injustice and what (s)he can do to make a difference moving forward."

Being proactive is important to creating equitable outcomes for students. In addition to hearing and listening to students' experiences of bias, campuses across the Frontier Set are creating formal and informal spaces for students and faculty to share their experiences. For example, NWTC offers "A Place at the Table," a series for students and staff to talk about current events, and at Jackson State University, a historically Black university, faculty and staff are prompted to have the "HBCU Talk" with students to discuss the biases and shared experiences Black people face that still exist in our country today.

It's one thing to recognize bias on campus, but Frontier Set members are going further by expressing commitments to racial equity and aligning their language accordingly.

Staff play an important role in sharing feedback with leadership on how to turn strategies into realities on campus. After the murder of George Floyd, San Jacinto College's chancellor addressed the issue of racism directly, and went further by asking for employees' feedback on what the college could do to make its anti-racist stance clearer and more actionable.

In addition to offering space to address bias, campus employees—from practitioners to leaders—must share equity as a priority, and should be trained to use explicit, equity-minded language to lead with empathy. The University of North Carolina Greensboro summarized it this way: "Having executive leadership identify equity and inclusion as top values of the institution signals to the community that conversations about bias and racism, and solutions to systems and structures that promote it, should be top-of-mind." Across the Frontier Set, campuses are adopting this very practice. Portland State, for example, has "made a significant shift in utilization and language around our commitment to anti-racism, decolonization of curriculum, and dismantling white supremacy across levels of the organization, from executive leadership to faculty, staff, and students." The Advising & Career Services division at PSU created the Anti-Racism Taskforce and outlined where

they are versus where they hope to be in regard to dismantling institutional racism. Their commitment reads, "Historically, PSU has created a facade of commitment to Black students, staff, and faculty under the guise of 'diversity and equity.' The reality is that Black students, faculty, and staff are not supported and are hurting."

As the global pandemic and racial reckoning have created upheaval across the United States, many Frontier Set institutions quickly realized that now is the time to think differently, change the conversation, and challenge the historical structure, norms, practices, and cultures that have failed to equitably support students of color.

COVID-19 forced campuses to pivot quickly, to offer distance learning for students while still keeping equity a priority. Some campuses addressed this by implementing training to foster a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of students of color, others by ensuring inclusive hiring practices on campus. Notably, Sinclair Community College "paused instruction for 10 days in mid-March and added resources, training, and personnel to support our rapid transition of 2,000 courses to online and remote learning, and adapted policies and procedures to better and more empathetically support our students." Indian River State College implemented, and continues to offer, training for awareness on bias and racism on campus, in order to provide tools for faculty and staff to advocate for change. Miami Dade College emphasized the importance of delivering workshops and seminars to help employees and faculty build awareness about racial inequities and gain deeper understandings of Black students' lived experience.

The pandemic also brought forward the realities of digital inequities and access to technology. As conveyed by University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, the pandemic brought a focus to faculty on "how our students' lack of technology and Wi-Fi access, as well as commitments to family and work, impact what students are able to do in their classes." To ensure all students were successful during this transition, CUNY College of Staten Island and many other institutions purchased and distributed hardware for students without devices, so they could participate in remote learning.

While several institutions had student and staff affinity groups in place before 2020, several campuses developed new groups to address equity and provide safe spaces for minoritized communities to connect, gather, and learn. Florida International University implemented town halls for the university to come together and discuss racial justice and social equity, and Lorain County Community College is in the process of expanding its equity team to address strategic equity planning for the road ahead. But these campus groups aren't just addressing race. Johnson C. Smith University shared that they revamped their Safe Space programming, "which addresses and educates on LGBTQ issues. We now have a Brave Space program that does the same work and calls for individuals to be brave in their spaces to assist with making everyone feel [included] on campus."

Frontier Set members have always been committed to eliminating race and income as predictors for success for students of color, but 2020 brought an even stronger spotlight to racial injustice on campuses. From quickly pivoting to more digital learning with equitable access to technology at the forefront, to developing new student groups with a focus on racial and social justice, to conducting diversity, equity, and inclusion training for staff and leaders, the Frontier Set as a whole continues to innovate to serve students. The anti-racist work doesn't stop here—institutions and systems must keep innovating and pressing the issue to make change.

A STRONG FOUNDATION FOR A STUDENT-CENTERED EVOLUTION

STRONG CULTURES OF CARE AND COMMUNICATION HAVE HELPED FRONTIER SET COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES SUSTAIN STUDENT SUCCESS OVER THE LONG TERM AND EVOLVE RAPIDLY IN A CHALLENGING YEAR

The turmoil of the pandemic and the ongoing reckoning with racial injustice forced a focus on—or, in some cases, a realization of—the depth of racial inequity on campuses across the country. Many colleges and universities found themselves facing unprecedented challenges, at times exacerbated by a habitual lack of focus on students and ongoing inequities. The Frontier Set members certainly faced

these same societal challenges, but a well-established, earnest dedication to seeing and knowing students helped them continue to enroll, retain, and progress students through a turbulent period.

Tools for understanding students' needs, and a commitment to delivering on those needs, helped Frontier Set members effectively and equitably

transition to remote operations—and then build on that transition to become future-ready by cultivating new skills in faculty and staff. Across the Frontier Set, a culture of care and readiness to adapt are enabled by consistent, cohesive, data-driven leader communications, which provide faculty and staff with solid guidance as they evolve to serve their students best.

The trials of 2020 drove home the necessity of understanding students, especially students of color, in order to make and sustain change.

University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, a Hispanic-serving institution, noted: "If you're not looking and listening closely enough, you run the risk of eliding differences in students that matter." It's those differences that help institutions meaningfully reflect on their institutional practices to better serve students of color, and tailor solutions to meet them exactly where they are. Claflin University, a historically Black university in South Carolina, saw that "without a clear focus on the type of students the institution serves, it would have been very difficult for leadership to meet the rapid demands needed to minimize the disruption of the pandemic on students' learning experiences."

Similarly, Guilford Technical Community College in North Carolina pointed to the importance of a holistic view of students, writing that "Another staple of the college is the acknowledgment that our students struggle with non-academic and academic barriers, and a commitment to mitigate those barriers whenever we can." They, like many others, know that helping students solve for basic life necessities such as rent, childcare, and food makes attendance and progression possible.

The University of North Carolina Greensboro reflected on the value of understanding students' lived experiences, especially as a minority-serving institution: "Embracing [our students'] realities enables us to fully focus on improving the structures and supports [that are] necessary for our students to have the same likelihood of success as students who begin their academic careers with more advantages." This empathetic view of students

can increase willingness to make changes, and to provide targeted support for the students who need it most, as it gives faculty and staff a shared goal and a path forward to respond to student needs in meaningful ways. For example, at Claflin University faculty, staff, and administrators, along with students, volunteered early in the pandemic to share their experience and expertise in exploring options and building plans for fully remote learning, hybrid learning, and returning to campus. United by a common goal, the teams helped the institution evaluate its current operations and pointed to opportunities to grow and better meet students' expectations. Guilford Technical Community College saw this prove out in a recent interview, when a candidate asked the hiring committee what they like best about working at Guilford Tech and the first reply was: "A college-wide willingness to try something different if there was a good chance that it would make the student's experience better." Rooting change in students' needs gives additional urgency and weight to efforts, as does a consideration of faculty needs.

A strong understanding of both student and faculty needs led many Frontier Set institutions to improve the experience of learning and teaching online, and to offer important support services in the online environment.

Often this meant providing technology (devices and access to the internet), but it also included broad thinking about how to best enable student success online. At Jackson State University, each instructor was asked to create a "Sustainability Plan" to think through all aspects of transitioning traditional face-to-face courses to online programming for remote access, and the ramifications of having to do it quickly. Portland State University leaned on their existing Pedagogy and Faculty Support team to balance faculty's immediate needs as they transitioned to remote teaching with the long-term plan for academic success outlined in their Students First initiative.

Another solution was training and tools, for both students and faculty. Though remote learning

isn't new, for many students a fully remote college experience is. Santa Fe College, realizing that incoming students might be overwhelmed by new modalities, quickly developed and launched "[Learn How to Learn Online](#)," which explains course formats and Canvas (an online learning management system), and spotlights online support services such as free tutoring. The University System of Georgia launched a new site called Keep Learning USG, aimed at helping students of all ages adjust to the new reality of online and hybrid learning. The site addresses expectations of students during remote learning, as well as providing reassurance that support exists for a range of student needs, both academic and personal.

On the faculty side, New Jersey City University offered "Fundamentals of Online Teaching" along with "Fundamentals of Online Learning," and Florida International University used micro-credentialing to issue more than 1,100 "Remote Teach Ready" badges. Overall, the move online forced campuses to become more future-ready, converting cumbersome paper processes to digital ones and reorienting to encourage more remote and flexible work.

Frontier Set members are seeing their investments in long-term capacity-building pay off in the form of adaptability: the slow, steady work of building up capacity to better meet students' needs has made them stable, strong, and ready to shift to meet new challenges.

Fayetteville State University reflected this way: "Capacity-building is not only about funding and receiving services (e.g., training, consulting, travel, etc.), but realizing sustainable solutions and their impact over time. Capacity-building is not a one-time effort to improve short-term effectiveness, but a continuous improvement strategy that results in sustainable solutions. Short-term evolution is the discoveries, changes, and gains along the way; however, long-term capacity-building work results in the organization's ability to achieve its mission and sustain itself over time."

Northeast Wisconsin Technical College saw a clear example of this: In 2019 they created a teaching and learning center to help faculty redesign their curriculum for a fall 2020 transition to eight-week courses. When the pandemic arrived, many faculty had already developed additional flexibility in their classrooms in terms of delivery modes and adjustments to hands-on experiences, as well as creating classes that allow students to maintain the work-life-school balance they need.

Data helps with these shifts, too. Georgia State University surveyed students via chatbot about preferences on course delivery and schedules, and then responded rapidly by implementing changes that reflected students' desires—made possible by both infrastructure and the respect the data team had amassed over a long track record of support and performance.

Well-earned trust in and respect for leaders ties all this together. When mid-level and executive leaders effectively collaborate—and are backed up by data and trusted by faculty and staff—they have the ability to both hold the campus steady through extraordinary external change and drive necessary internal change.

At many institutions, the differentiation between mid-level and executive-level leaders became more pronounced in 2020—in a positive way—as they balanced the load of urgent short-term needs and maintaining a long-term vision. The University of North Carolina Greensboro put it this way: "Mid-level leaders are the solution-creators. They understand the ways daily operations and student needs intersect, which creates opportunities for creative solutions. Executive-level leaders do not have this same nuanced understanding of student needs or daily operations, but have the ability to set the expectation that student success is a priority, and therefore creative solutions should be identified and implemented."

The University Innovation Alliance, one of the Frontier Set intermediaries, noted that "strong, consistent engagement and communication from senior student success leaders … provide[s] mid-level leaders and staff with direction and empowerment to be creative and proactive in discovering what works to improve the success of unique student populations." It's critical that leaders cultivate environments of open "collaboration, innovation, and risk-taking" in order to make way for more meaningful, holistic sense-making of data and opportunities for change.

Hierarchies of leadership and support are useful when mid- and executive-level leaders see each other as partners owning different realms of leadership—and the same holds true for state systems and their members' presidents. For example, the University System of Georgia noted that a long-established collaborative partnership with their institutions allowed members to see them as a meaningful change resource rather than a regulatory body. The Tennessee Board of Regents found that providing solutions (such as health officials and technical capacity) that empowered presidents was key to supporting its institutions over the year.

Across the Frontier Set, a reliable cadence of clear, cohesive, student-centered communications with faculty and staff—often leveraging existing channels and key data points—was crucial to building resilience and leading change.

At many institutions, the pandemic necessitated an increase in communications, which typically meant an increase in meetings, often to a daily basis, which helped teams manage through a crisis that shifted every hour. Arizona State University's administrative leadership team adopted daily meetings to ensure the information guiding decisions was widely shared and understood by staff. At Georgia State University, weekly student-success-data meetings became daily in order to analyze data, spot obstacles to student progression, quickly adjust strategies, and adopt new interventions and technologies.

One additional benefit of this increase in meetings was an increase among faculty and staff in empathy for and connection to students. From the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley: "One thing which enabled us to pivot quickly was this swell of empathy and caring for one another. We really did put students first—at all levels—and we shifted quickly to a model in which leaders at multiple levels were meeting multiple times a week, sometimes daily, to ensure timely, clear communication. All the walls we had set up between divisions almost disappeared overnight, and we knew we needed each other to get through this."

Frontier Set members have always prioritized students, but in 2020 that commitment was underscored as not just the right thing to do, but essential to ensuring student and institutional success, especially with the transition to remote learning. Leaders shepherded teams through challenge and change with a steady hand and voice, instilling a spirit of innovation and flexibility while deepening capacity to serve students. Faculty and staff, driven by a commitment to their students and established cultures of care and innovation, took on immense challenges to see, hear, and support their students, building on the foundation of equitable student success that is at the heart of the Frontier Set.

BUILDING A CULTURE OF EVIDENCE

DRIVING CHANGE BY MAKING DATA TRANSPARENT, CONNECTED, AND ACTIONABLE

Data-informed decision-making has always been a foundational capacity and routine for achieving equitable outcomes within the Frontier Set. Since the initiative began, each member committed to tracking a set of student-level key performance indicators (KPIs) from a common metrics framework, such as retention and graduation rates, to help ensure all students are taken into account, not just first-time, full-time students. But collecting the data alone is not enough: institutions must build a culture of evidence that not only generates disaggregated data, but makes that data transparent, connects it to institutional goals

and priorities, and builds buy-in at all levels of the institution by sharing it widely and training campus stakeholders to use data to identify and act on barriers of access, persistence, and completion among students of color. It's this wide spread, resilient culture of evidence that is key to building and executing successful equity-based strategies across an institution.

Building a culture of evidence requires sharing the right data, at the right time, with the right context.

The University Innovation Alliance, one of the Frontier Set intermediaries, saw its institutions (Georgia State University, Arizona State University, and University of Central Florida) all articulate two general types of data they focus on: reportable data and actionable data. While these sets may overlap, in general the reportable data is "slower" and more long-term (e.g., graduation and retention rates), and is required by and provided to their boards and other stakeholders. The actionable data is "closer to practice," and it works on a shorter time frame and on a more granular level (e.g., registration, enrollment, online engagement). This kind of data can help measure the success of interventions, monitor student progress, and identify areas for innovation.

All this data—reportable and actionable, long-term and short-term—requires the context of tools and training in order to spark action. The best-designed data dashboard, when deployed without context, lacks the power to drive widespread change. When data is analyzed and shared with intentional tools and training, it can help create a common vocabulary and lens for change that become the foundation for a culture of evidence.

Student-level KPIs and other data can be transformative, but only if they are transparent, understood, and appropriately used by institutions and state systems.

As Wake Technical Community College in Raleigh, North Carolina, noted: "If disaggregated data is not shared widely, and college stakeholders are not provided with time and venues to discuss how it relates to their jobs in meaningful ways, and if leaders do not discuss why it is an important issue for the college and connect it to the mission, then building equity into the college culture as a shared value will be difficult, and present a barrier to enacting change." The Aspen Institute, which supports the twelve Frontier Set community colleges, agreed, noting that these moments of shared sense-making around data are key to creating alignment and coherence as colleges look to assess and implement changes.

Creating infrastructure and routines to collect and disaggregate data can be a strong first step in creating a culture of evidence. San Jacinto College

noted that a lack of disaggregated data that shows how and to what extent students of color are affected on standard performance outcomes and, more broadly, a lack of data-driven decision-making at all levels, are primary barriers to developing shared, actionable, equity-centered strategies. Similarly, Jackson State University, a historically Black university located in Mississippi, cited the incorporation of KPIs into its daily data operational principles as a key contributor to a shift "from storing data on a shelf to using data to make critical decisions"—decisions that have improved equitable outcomes on their campus. Again, this shift toward actionable, "close to the work" data is key.

At the Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR), which includes 13 community colleges, they use disaggregated data across region, income, race, gender, and other demographics to measure student success, and they also make interactive data dashboards publicly available. Pointing to the key role culture plays in institutional transformation, TBR has "tried to make [data] more a part of the way we do business than a current initiative."

Transparency is key: to support transformation, data must be shared widely and regularly, paired with thoughtful analysis that helps decision-makers better understand the important nuances of the data.

This transparency applies to both the long-term "reportable" data and the more granular "actionable" data, to use the University Innovation Alliance's terms—and the transparency shows up both internally at an institution and externally with key stakeholders. Many Frontier Set institutions and systems disseminate data dashboards and make regular data presentations to their governing boards and faculty. At Fayetteville State University, student outcome data is communicated to executive- and mid-level leadership with a strong expectation that they share it with their direct reports.

At the University of Central Florida, a large research institution, leaders develop and distribute interactive fact books with insight dashboards and detailed student-level reports, all of which can be

disaggregated by race, Pell eligibility, and other factors for use by faculty and staff at all levels of the university: "By opening up the data, cross-functional teams can recognize areas of excellence to support scaling of ideas through the entire university." San Jacinto College, a community college in Houston, analyzes data daily, looking at differences across variables, including race/ethnicity, gender, first-generation status, and socioeconomic status. These analyses are used across the college—from faculty and department chairs to student services to top leaders—to inform decision-making. KPIs, including course success and college graduation rates, are shared with the Board of Trustees each month, and made publicly available on the college's website.

Building data literacy with a racial equity lens is critical to helping decision-makers and frontline practitioners produce actionable insights that lead to equitable improvements.

As the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) noted, early efforts toward a culture of evidence were hindered as "we were drowning in data, but it was rare to find someone who had the time, energy, or know-how to wade through hundreds of columns and thousands of rows for usable insights." As they built data-interpretation capabilities and trust between teams, leaders at UTRGV were able to put the institution's disaggregated data to use in developing a new advising curriculum and implementing a new initiative for students who are not yet college-ready and/or are undecided about their major. Columbia Basin College in Washington state offers data "Jedi training" to all staff and faculty, an effort that has led to the incorporation and use of aggregate data becoming more widespread on campus.

Building considerations of racial equity into data use is also important. Santa Fe College in Florida is working to increase data literacy across campus "so that disaggregated data showing inequalities is broadly discussed and used to make compelling cases for change." Leaders there hope that as a result, those working most closely with students—including faculty and learning support staff—will

be fully informed and engaged in determining how best to respond to student needs and opportunities.

Across the Frontier Set, many institutions noted that an existing culture of evidence provided the infrastructure for continuing to implement equity-based strategies and serve students in the face of unforeseen challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and the racial reckoning of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement.

When Davidson-Davie Community College in North Carolina transitioned to remote learning in March 2020, they collected and examined additional quantitative and qualitative data in an effort to understand how students responded to the modifications made to instructional programs and student support services. Data on student success outcomes from spring 2020 were compared with longitudinal data to inform what modifications were needed for fall semester. "Trends were analyzed, and strategies put in place to improve outcomes," they wrote.

Jackson State University also noted how their prior work set them up to respond well to new student needs resulting from the pandemic. "Our work with the Frontier Set positioned us to use data to conceptualize, inform, and actualize our response to the disruptions caused by COVID-19," they wrote. Leaders at Jackson State used key metrics and data to assess students' technological needs, faculty and staff readiness, delivery of student services, and their agility to transition from traditional to all online learning, all in a matter of days.

Also building on an existing culture of evidence as the events of 2020 unfolded, Fayetteville State University was moved to increase the use of operational dashboards that provide leadership with a comprehensive snapshot of performance in student recruitment, enrollment, and resource management. They noted that "the analytics included with the student success software and the development of applications (apps) have supported a better understanding of students' utilization of available campus resources."

At Sinclair Community College in Ohio, the BLM movement reinforced the resolve to continue to utilize data as a tool to drive racially equitable strategies that mitigate barriers, strengthen student growth, and accelerate completion. Drawing from a long-established, data-informed practice, they reflected: "We understand that data analytics, in addition to a heightened institutional awareness and collective actions, will have direct and positive impacts on student success."

Achieving more equitable outcomes for students requires cultivating a culture of evidence that goes beyond data-gathering infrastructure—a culture that calls for a commitment to transparency and embedding right-size, data-driven metrics into strategic goals for stakeholders at all levels. Frontier Set members have found that these approaches can help practitioners understand how policies and practices impact student groups differently, which can in turn lead to more meaningful change. Building a widely shared and long-lasting culture of evidence goes beyond initiatives—it requires connecting data experts and infrastructure with the frontline, student-facing work. By making these connections across the institution and bringing data to life with tools and training, data can become a routine resource for practitioners and decision-makers. The hard work of building this culture, and the infrastructure that makes it possible, positions institutions to advance racial equity and student outcome efforts—and, as proven in 2020, also enables institutions to quickly and confidently make decisions that faculty and staff can stand behind when unexpected challenges arise.

THE POWER OF PERSONAL OUTREACH

PERSONAL OUTREACH TO STUDENTS IS A SIMPLE BUT EFFECTIVE TOOL TO IMPROVE THEIR EXPERIENCE, INCREASE RETENTION, AND BUILD A SENSE OF BELONGING

One of the most meaningful changes an institution can make is to shift their focus to include the experience of individual students. Frontier Set institutions have always focused on students' experiences, but in 2020 this need was even more prevalent, when personal outreach to students proved to be a powerful tool to increase retention and build a sense of belonging.

Personal outreach can shed light on complex and pressing challenges, inform policy decisions, and help students feel their school is invested in their success.

Lorain County Community College (LCCC), for example, realized that understanding the experiences and barriers that different populations encounter was key to making transformational progress in closing equity gaps for students of color,

students who are parents, and students experiencing poverty. In 2019, school leaders launched a "strategic collection of the student voice" effort, using focus groups and surveys to inform next steps, which included creating programs to foster belonging as well as opportunities to learn about racism. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, LCCC wanted to understand "the needs of students both at the individual level and the institutional level" and again undertook broad outreach to students, which enabled better student connection to services and support while also informing the school's broader communications plans.

When the pandemic forced San Jacinto College to move instruction online for more than 31,000 students, leaders started an outreach program called "San Jac Cares." By reallocating time for many staff whose roles were impacted as on-campus operations decreased, leaders made it possible to reach out to all students and ask "How are you doing?" and "What do you need?" As a result of these conversations, students were connected to resources such as financial aid, IT, advising, mental health counseling, or food markets, to enable them to continue their academic journeys. Often, though, they "simply talked with them and discussed the current situation." In post-call surveys, students commented that they were appreciative of the call and felt cared for. Additionally, of the original list of students who had not registered for the fall semester, nearly 5,000 registered after receiving a call from San Jac Cares. Fayetteville State University similarly engaged existing employees, including administrative support staff, advisors, and middle management in academic affairs to text, email, and call students to remind them about upcoming assignments, refer them to resources, and offer a listening ear. As an added bonus, this also allowed support staff to continue to be of service while they worked from home.

The American Association of State Colleges & Universities (AASCU), which works with six regional comprehensive universities in the Frontier Set, noted that throughout the pandemic, institutions became better versed in soliciting student needs via text messaging, chat functions, and emails that were all crafted with care. "These types of needs assessments have rarely been done at the institutional level consistently, but [they] are practices that our institutions will maintain after the pandemic is over because they felt that it communicated the ethic of care and students responded well," they wrote.

Student outreach can also take shape as giving students more agency in their academic journeys.

For example, individual development plans have been core to advising at Delaware State University since 2015. At Delaware State, "students take ownership of personal, academic, and career goals to create individualized paths to success." Students meet twice a semester with advisors to ensure that they stay on track. The school also utilizes early alerts, a "recruit-back" approach where advisors reach out to students who have not registered for classes, and a 15 Strong to Completion campaign to boost student retention, matriculation, and success rates.

Sometimes student outreach means making individuals feel a part of something bigger than themselves. For example, at Morehouse College, a historically Black college for men, each student is required to attend six semesters of the Crown Forum, an experience designed to give students "a greater understanding of self, a deeper appreciation of the Morehouse experience, and a more profound commitment to servant leadership and global citizenship." In requiring students to participate in official ceremonies that honor Morehouse's rich traditions, attend speaker series, and explore common readings, Morehouse creates a learning community that sustains the college's mission.

While student outreach can take many different forms, the goal is often the same across the Frontier Set: boost achievement, retention, and feelings of belonging in order to improve equitable access to support services along students' educational journeys.

SOURCING STUDENT VOICES: BACKING UP DATA WITH STORIES

BUILDING ON A BELIEF IN THE POWER OF QUANTITATIVE DATA, FRONTIER SET MEMBERS SOLICIT QUALITATIVE DATA TO ADD DEPTH AND UNDERSTANDING TO POSITIVELY INFORM CHANGE

While Frontier Set institutions and systems seek to build robust infrastructures for gathering and analyzing quantitative data, there is also a broad commitment to contextualizing this data with more qualitative information in order to build effective equity-centered strategies. Student voices can give authenticity and authority to numbers, provide important context and nuance to quantitative observations, and create buy-in from historically

marginalized groups. Or, as the University of Central Florida said, "By listening to underrepresented students, higher education administrators can craft plans to make our campuses more equitable."

Including the voices of students of color and nontraditional students was a key part of Lorain County Community College's efforts to build on its successful equity-based strategies. The school used surveys and focus groups to better

understand student perspectives. Results "pointed to the importance of belonging and opportunities for students to learn about racism," and led to implementing a number of strategies, including the launch of Commodore Conversations, an event designed to make space for students, faculty, and staff to speak on race and equity and learn about forms of allyship—and for Lorain leaders to listen and learn.

Over the past five years, Sinclair College has used focus groups and quantitative data to gain insights on student groups, such as Black students and students over the age of 25. Information gleaned from these focus groups is used to "make more deliberate decisions, mitigate barriers, and improve student success." This means the school has quantitative data to show improvement, paired with student anecdotes to tell a powerful story. "The African American Male Initiative is not only a college program for Black men; it is saving the lives of Black males," one student shared. "It saved me."

In examining the gaps in completion rates for courses, Florida International University dug into qualitative survey data and found that employment and other obligations make it hard for some students to attend class. Having this information "allows faculty and staff to develop strategies that may help address some of these obstacles."

Ask "not just the student ambassadors or members of the honors college," they wrote. "Ask struggling students and quiet students, those who aren't used to being asked for their opinion."

When data showed that Black students at Davidson-Davie Community College had the most difficulty completing courses in spring 2020, qualitative data from surveys helped shed light on the causes of this gap: notably, loss of employment, lack of devices to complete schoolwork, and increased prevalence of COVID-19 infection. As a result, the college decided to both hold some in-person classes in fall 2020 and make hotspots and laptops available to ensure students had the necessary tools to complete their work.

Leveraging qualitative data and stories not only helps increase success within student support and services, but also benefits and improves academic curriculum and teaching. The University System of Georgia (USG) took action on student input when a survey indicated student success in math is closely linked to the student's perception that the math they are studying has a purpose. For students studying a broad range of disciplines—including the social sciences, health sciences, business, and education—the most relevant area of mathematics may be statistics, a field in which knowledge and understanding has become increasingly important for success. In response, USG invited institutions to pilot a "Statistics Pathway" that allows participating institutions to offer an elementary statistics course as part of the approved core sequence.

Sam Houston State University identified the inclusion of student voices as a key step in making any far-reaching decisions to increase equity on campus.

Data is the bedrock of creating sustainable change across the Frontier Set.

The combination of quantitative data and student voices, with other qualitative data incorporated into the equation, has helped take equity-centered strategies to the next level. As Johnson C. Smith University noted, listening to those students who have been systematically excluded is "paramount to successfully shift the narrative and show results."

MOVING CLOSER TO EQUITY WITH EXPLICIT, RACE-CONSCIOUS LANGUAGE AND GOALS

USING EXPLICIT LANGUAGE ABOUT RACE AND RACISM CAN LEAD TO MORE SUCCESSFUL CULTURE CHANGE ON CAMPUSES

Frontier Set institutions have long been committed to increasing student success and ensuring that race and income are no longer predictors of that success, but with last year's reckoning with racial injustice it was more critical than ever for institutions to express a clear commitment to racial equity. An explicit equity strategy can help everyone on campus, including students, better understand and act on institutional values, priorities, and commitments.

Using race-conscious language is key to operationalizing racial equity, but there is a challenging learning curve to developing a new shared vocabulary about race, racism, inequity, and justice.

As institutions strive to thoughtfully and meaningfully articulate what equity means to them, it's important to both work and plan at the

individual level of both employees' and students' lived experiences, and also at the strategic level with bold commitments among leadership and actionable institution-wide commitments to racial justice. Only then will equity truly begin to be embedded and operationalized across all facets of an institution.

When approaching equity work, Frontier Set members have found it beneficial to define what racial equity means at the institutional level. As Wake Technical Community College put it: "Defining equity in terms of 'Equitable Outcomes' and 'Equitable Access' as tangible goals, rather than 'Equity' as a general value, was key. While many at the college had, and still do have, difficulty untangling and embracing the known concept of equality (everyone gets the same) versus equity (everyone gets what they need to succeed), most of our stakeholders who engaged in the strategic planning process … were able to recognize and agree that according to the data, there are persistent, inequitable outcomes occurring for Black/African American students at our college. The next step is establishing why, and what we as a college can do about it." The Aspen Institute College Excellence Program, which works with the 12 Frontier Set community colleges, noted that they are continuing to learn from the colleges they support about the importance of being explicit about equity. They continue to support their institutions to "push toward greater shared clarity about their definitions and measures of equity so as to be able to align strategies and evaluate impact more effectively."

Once institutions have embedded racial equity into their goals and priorities, it's important to bring campus administrators, faculty, and staff along. As the American Association of State Colleges and Universities said in their reflection looking across the six regional comprehensive campuses they support as part of the Frontier Set: "We recognize that the equity conversation is not just the responsibility of one office at the institution but see it as everyone's responsibility at the institution to challenge the status quo around racial injustices and inequities."

All campus employees must share equity as a priority, and should be trained to use explicit, equity-minded language.

From trainings to open dialogue, campuses have found continued success hosting conversations to empower faculty to reform their practices and curriculum to be more equitable. To address equity in the classroom, Sam Houston University will be redesigning the curriculum of their first-year seminar course to incorporate discussions of equity and inclusion, and beyond that, equity dashboards are being published to highlight challenges as well as successes in closing racial and gender equity gaps in all courses on campus. Similar efforts are underway at Northern Arizona University. In addition, Davidson-Davie Community College hosted professional development sessions with a clear focus on race, to allow for powerful, transparent, and transformative conversation. They noted that "participants from across all levels (including all Vice Presidents and the President) have been engaged in these conversations, with the intent to make progress on difficult subjects such as race, privilege, implicit bias, stereotypes, and ethnicity." Morehouse College noted: "The greatest asset any institution has is its faculty. Create opportunities for them to learn what equity looks like, and they will become the most potent advocates." These urgent conversations continue to lead to growth and change on campuses as they relate to student success.

But having conversations and hosting training isn't enough. Institutions in the Frontier Set recognize the importance of hiring racially diverse talent in order to support students of color, especially Black students. The University of North Carolina Greensboro, for example, launched an equity, diversity, and inclusion website and included a statement that committed the college to hiring and retaining more Black faculty, and Northern Arizona University noted their commitment to faculty who represent the student population, in order to "build a culture and institution where diverse administrators, faculty, staff, and students want to be."

While many Frontier Set members addressed racial injustice and equity both publicly and internally after the killing of George Floyd, some took it a step further to gather feedback. For example, the chancellor of San Jacinto College asked for input on what the college could do to make its anti-racist stance clearer and more actionable—a great example of taking a step from rhetoric toward real action. That input has resulted in much more explicit criteria for hiring based on equity and anti-racism competencies, mandatory training on implicit bias during new-hire onboarding, and reflections on contributions to equity required as part of faculty and staff performance reviews.

When developing equity-centered strategies on campus and setting goals, it's important to use clear, race-conscious language so everyone on campus has a shared understanding of the commitment and how it should be brought to life. As Frontier Set members have continued to define and commit to racial equity, provide staff and faculty training on racial literacy and equity-mindedness, facilitate campus conversations, and hire diverse leaders, they have been able to operationalize and make progress on closing racial equity gaps.

BEYOND THE SURFACE: MOVING TOWARD A HOLISTIC VIEW OF STUDENTS

SEEING AND MEETING STUDENTS' BASIC LIFE NEEDS IN CREATIVE WAYS

During a check-in conversation about resilience last fall, one Frontier Set member said he felt his university was in the midst of a fundamental shift from seeing itself as simply an educational institution to a comprehensive social services organization. This sentiment is shared, to varying degrees, across the Frontier Set. As these colleges, universities, and state systems have reoriented around a persistent focus on students of color and their success, more administrators, faculty, and staff have come to see their students more holistically, moving beyond degree selection, grades, and attendance to see students as parents, employees, friends, and family members—people who have struggles, commitments, and dreams that both compete with and fuel their academic journeys. In part this is simply because **today's students are so diverse**: nearly 40 percent are over 25, more than 25 percent have children, and the majority are employed while they go to school.

COVID-19 pushed this view even further, particularly as the pandemic exacerbated existing racial inequities.

The American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) reflected that "the pandemic itself was a catalyst in that it humanized the students and allowed people on campuses to see outside the deficit mindset faculty and staff sometimes perceive students through and into their real lives and the circumstances that are truly present for the students of today." In this way, the pandemic helped build empathy: student struggles increased, everyone (faculty and staff included) was struggling, and it was natural to continue to extend the role of the university, from educator to open-armed supporter of students through trying times. Many Frontier Set institutions saw calls from students to advising, financial aid, and support centers skyrocket, and some, such as Georgia State University, mitigated long wait times by implementing virtual appointment services that streamlined call center communications, as well as proactive outreach campaigns. Georgia State also created an online one-stop-shop application to help students request and receive immediate financial support for food, rent, childcare, and other basic needs.

Many Frontier Set institutions disbursed CARES Act funding to students as emergency aid, at times removing or simplifying the usual application process. They saw the need was urgent: students couldn't attend class if they were facing immediate housing or food insecurity. Outreach also played a key role—calling campaigns that encompassed all students, first-time students, or other sub-groups, aimed to make sure students knew what was available to them, and staff knew what students actually needed, so they could tailor offerings to match. San Jacinto College called more than 60,000 students across multiple terms, which resulted in students feeling cared for; as 2020 drew to a close and the calls continued, many students picked up their call just to let the college know they had what they needed to succeed.

Thoughtful framing helped staff understand how the year's unique struggles compounded the usual student challenges.

Portland State University reflected on advice from a Frontier Set peer, who proposed a simple question regarding the challenges first-time students face: "Is it college, or is it COVID?" This framing helped them parse out the longstanding barriers and the new COVID-related roadblocks and build compassion for how navigating through a new environment is more challenging than ever. At a January 2021 meeting focused on learnings from the pandemic, some representatives from Frontier Set institutions noted seeing into students' homes via video calls and meetings spurred more of that understanding and, at times, more authentic connection as faculty and staff saw into students' lives, and vice versa. The Historically Black College and University (HBCU) intermediary reflected how it was data plus "intuitive conversations and intentional relationship-building with students" that allowed the HBCU member institutions to meet their students' needs, regardless of barriers and challenges brought in 2020.

Students have always needed to be supported to succeed, and the trials of 2020 asked institutions to deepen and broaden that support. Frontier Set members rose to the challenge and saw their efforts bear fruit as students persisted across the year and, together with faculty and staff, they found opportunities to connect, share, and learn.

CONNECTION AND FLEXIBILITY: UNEXPECTED BENEFITS OF MOVING CLASS ONLINE

EXPLORING THE UNANTICIPATED BENEFITS OF REMOTE LEARNING ACROSS THE FRONTIER SET

While the quick shift to remote learning forced by the COVID-19 pandemic certainly brought inequities and challenges to the forefront, Frontier Set sites also found advantages in this shift, including opportunities to strengthen students' sense of belonging, and an increase in accessibility for students. Most institutions spent the early days of the pandemic building and launching training and tools for faculty and staff to effectively teach online, as well as programs that provided students with greater connection to staff and additional flexibility in coursework—both of which are positive changes for student success.

At some institutions, moving course content online gave professors more time to meet with students and meaningfully connect.

At Santa Fe College, the shift online accelerated the trend of practitioners spending less time lecturing live, and more time problem-solving with

students; at CUNY College of Staten Island, the student success office facilitated that connection by providing resources to help faculty and students reconnect in a completely remote learning environment, and help students develop and maintain a sense of security and belonging. These benefits didn't stop in the virtual classroom: Wake Technical Community College established virtual advising as the norm, which expanded flexibility and access for students who even before the pandemic may not have been able to come to campus outside class time.

Remote learning also allowed Frontier Set members to innovate on new, flexible practices that may not have otherwise been implemented, to meet various student needs. For example, Fayetteville State University pivoted to allow students to withdraw from classes without affecting the number of allowable withdrawals while at the university. At CUNY College of Staten Island, a special COVID-19 grading policy allowed students who took classes during the Spring and Fall 2020 semesters to convert letter grades to credit/no credit grading. At New Jersey City University, the mathematics department opened its summer bridge program to any student who had been unsuccessful in a developmental mathematics course. Santa Fe College realized that "with less focus on attendance, we are getting closer to recognizing more basic needs for flexibility among all students, which will further the equity goal of meeting students where they are."

Students at Frontier Set institutions come from a range of backgrounds, and the shift online made inequities such as access to technology more apparent than ever before. Institutions had to pivot quickly to address issues around lack of access, often by providing devices and hotspots to students and turning parking lots into Wi-Fi zones. At Jackson State University, each instructor created a detailed plan to address issues including student access to the internet and technology, plus plans for thoughtful communications with students in order to address their unique scenarios.

In addition to advantages in online learning for students, the pandemic has allowed for more flexibility and access to other institutional services such as student services and advising.

University of Texas at Rio Grande Valley noted that students need more support now than ever before, and have extended resources to offer advising and career guidance in this online environment. As another example, Delaware State University developed remote procedures "to continue to engage with students to provide advising for registration, course withdrawals, and student support services, such as access to supplemental instruction and 24/7 tutorial services."

As Frontier Set institutions continue to grow their remote offerings, the quick pivots and innovations made on campuses continue to show benefits to students. The focus on student and staff connections, flexibility in coursework, and increasing equity will continue to be top-of-mind for institutions as they take learnings from this current moment and implement them into their practices for years to come.

FRONTIER SET EQUITY WISDOM

EQUITY ADVICE FROM A PEER-TO-PEER NETWORK OF INNOVATORS

The Frontier Set intentionally brings together a variety of types of higher education institutions, all striving to set a new standard in equitably serving their students. The network is structured around peer-to-peer sharing and collaboration: a place where high-performing, high-potential institutions and systems can share and learn publicly about keeping students at the center of everything they do, regardless if they're at a community college, a large research institution, a Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) or other Minority Serving Institution (MSI), or a regional comprehensive.

Over the years, the Frontier Set members have had many opportunities to both ask for and give advice on issues big and small. This year, as part of their annual reflections they were asked to build on that tradition by replying to this question:

If someone asked you "What step can I take tomorrow to start increasing equity on my campus/ in my system?" what would you tell them?

Here are some of their answers and reflections.

Focus on the Power of Student Voices to Fuel Equity Efforts

Read more about sourcing student voices **here**.

"The path to increased equity is about more than just analyzing and disaggregating your student success data. It is important to talk with and listen to your students and stakeholders, so that your efforts are intentional in design and scope and more directly addressing the lived experiences of your student population."
-*Florida International University*

"Maintain a focus on the students' experience and build success efforts around their stories."
-*Arizona State University*

"Listen to students. Students have much to share about their experiences, challenges, and successes throughout their college journeys. Higher education would be well served by continuing to leverage quantitative data to support students, but also to increase the opportunities to leverage qualitative data by listening to students and the stories of their lived experiences."
-*University of Central Florida*

See Faculty as a Student-Facing "Front Line" and Train Them to Be Equity Champions

Read more about building equity mindedness in faculty **here**.

"The greatest asset any institution has is its faculty. Create opportunities for them to learn what equity looks like, and they will become the most potent advocates."
-*Morehouse College*

"A commitment to serving students and co-workers with equity in mind will begin to increase equity. Faculty awareness and changes in the classroom will be the tipping point, since faculty are with your students more than any other employee group!"
-*Indian River State College.*

"If each student, staff, and faculty member examines their department, organization, committees, and other groups ... for barriers, and then implements change, a ripple will be generated throughout the entire university."
-*University of North Carolina Greensboro*

Think Broadly About Systemic Barriers and Long-Term Goals in Order to Stay Committed and Inspired

Read more about communicating equity goals clearly **here**.

"Be honest about the problem and the risks of not addressing its root causes. Be intentional and transparent about identifying and removing campus/system structural barriers and be transparent with higher education and state government officials about the challenge to your college/system if they do not do the same."
-*Tennessee Board of Regents*

"Measure the success of your efforts through the lives you are positively impacting, and not solely on the press or praise you may be getting or not getting."
-*Northern Arizona University*

"Develop small, measurable goals to achieve your large aspirational goals, and celebrate every accomplishment along the way. Keep in the forefront why we are doing this work: it's all about our students, our community, our nation, our world, and the enrichment of humankind!"
-*Miami Dade College*

"Speak holistically about student success rather than referring to individual initiatives. All initiatives must connect in order to achieve the big-picture goals of institution-wide student success."
-*Fayetteville State University*

Whether focusing closely on individual students and their lived experiences or thinking broadly about change and impact, Frontier Set sites have found ways to maintain momentum for their racial equity work as they look to the future for further efforts and sharing successful practices and thoughtful insights.

EDITORIALS

REFLECTIONS FROM OUR TRANSFORMATION ADVISORY GROUP: INSIGHTS FOR TRANSFORMATION

BY AASCU INTERMEDIARY LEADS
DR. JACQUELYN JONES AND MELISSA WELKER

In October 2019, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) launched the Transformation Advisory Group (TAG), a peer-learning group of campus exemplars composed of mid-level student success leaders from AASCU's six Frontier Set institutions. The focus on mid-level leaders was born from observing their understanding of the why and how of institutional transformation. TAG is anchored on the goal of generating actionable insights about the nature of student-focused, equity-conscious, whole-institution reform being pursued by AASCU institutions.

TAG co-created a learning agenda focused on sharing insights across very different contexts and lifting up insights for the wider field. The goal was to build a new kind of learning collaborative, aimed at shedding light on the complex work facing mid-level leaders of access-oriented universities. The group's first collaborative learning endeavor focused on harvesting crosscutting lessons about the nature of institutional transformation by examining a discrete change effort undertaken by each institution. The individual case studies covered a wide range of topics, including remediation/placement reform, faculty development around high-impact teaching practices, institutional policies around financial challenges facing students, and implementation of math pathways. As TAG members explored each other's case studies, five crosscutting themes emerged despite the diversity of topics.

When we look across the five themes, a single thread weaves through: the deeply adaptive nature of student-focused problem-solving.

Each theme illustrates the complex nature of the problems facing colleges and universities seeking to remake themselves in service of better outcomes for their students. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit the U.S. and threw colleges and universities into an unprecedented crisis, the group revisited the five themes to explore their relevance during the crisis—and they found the crosscutting themes not only remain relevant in a COVID world but are also perhaps even more important to understand now.

Five Themes: Insights for Transformation

1. Even seemingly simple problems live in multiple places across an institution. Solving them requires new forms of collaboration across a wide range of long-standing silos of professional practice, each with its own culture and imperatives. Silo-spanning skills are perhaps the most important skills for systemic problem-solving.

2. Accessing, translating, and using data is an evolving practice at institutions. Data-informed decision-making and the practices that imbues vary by institution. The quality and accessibility of the data, and the data-literacy skills needed to integrate it into practice, are challenges mid-level leaders are faced with navigating across positional levels, with them often acting as the advocate for data systems to be continually developed and used.

3. In contrast to the traditional view that equates "leadership" with the work of the most senior administrators, problems negatively affecting students can only be addressed with the insights of frontline faculty and staff, and through the development and exercise of leadership from the middle.

4. Each discrete problem that is identified and solved by an institution reveals a host of other policies and practices that are raising barriers to student success, particularly for historically marginalized populations of students. This "Hydra" challenge shows the pervasiveness of obstacles facing institutions determined to remake policies and practices at scale for more equitable student outcomes.

5. While institutional transformation is much more than the accumulation of small wins, it is through tackling discrete problems that faculty, staff, and administrators build the muscles and appetite needed for ongoing, systemic, whole-institution reform. In times of crisis, those muscles get worked in new ways, and understanding what this means—particularly for mid-level leaders—is ongoing work to be done.

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AASCU is the collective voice of nearly 400 public colleges, universities, and systems that hold students and community at the heart of our mission. The association works to expand student access, success, and opportunity, promote world-class teaching and experiential learning tied to career advancement, and support applied research and service that advances economic development and quality of life in communities across the country. AASCU institutions offer more than three million students each year with affordable, high-quality education as stewards of place, preparing our graduates to be informed and engaged citizens.

THE 30,000-FOOT VIEW: LEADING THE CHARGE

## BY ANDRÉA RODRIGUEZ, DIRECTOR, USU AND APLU OFFICE OF URBAN INITIATIVES

As an intermediary lead within the Frontier Set, I often balance the responsibilities of leading the charge from a 30,000-foot level and supporting sites on a more tactical level. This balancing act is no easy feat. However, my experience as a student affairs practitioner has been valuable to supporting the institutions' transformative efforts as they think deeply and critically on what it means to support all areas of student success.

The way I see it, the responsibilities of an intermediary in the Frontier Set go beyond listening and surfacing the institutions' voices, and making the necessary connections within our segment and across all the institutions and systems within the Frontier Set ecosystem.

Given that institutions often habitually lean on deficit-based approaches to help address students' needs, specifically minoritized students, my personal and professional lived experiences have been a guide I reference to best support the institutions with this work. The deficit-based approach is not an appropriate basis for student success strategies, as it signals that being minoritized, first-generation, or low-income are indicators of potential failure. With the challenges in 2020 that continue into the new year, much of my work is about directing and feeding the sites' practices to other segments and advising them on ways to best support student success through an asset-based lens.

The institutions in our segment at the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) are well-versed in student success efforts, and they understand their surrounding communities. Thus,

my role as lead for the segment and the sites is to ensure all participating institutions acknowledge their blind spots and plan to leverage their continuous improvement methods after the sunset of this project. The institutions' experiences and efforts to date will support their continued efforts to advance their initiatives, and the ways they address and aid students at all stages of their degree-completion process as higher education evolves.
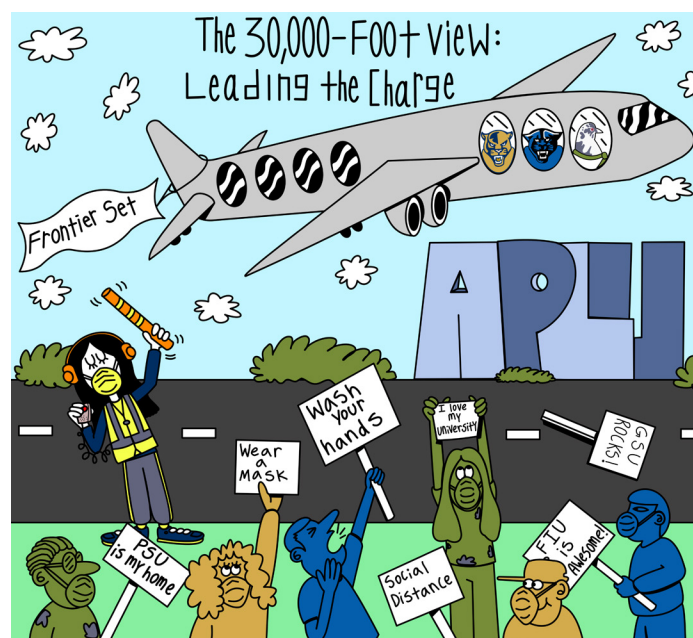
Artwork by Gabriel D'Elia, Instagram: @g.delia.paint

Lastly, the 30,000-foot view is not only about supporting the folks at the top of the institutional hierarchy, but also about closing the communication gap between high-level leaders and the frontline higher education agents. Closing this gap will help sites develop a more intentional cross-institutional focus on supporting and driving forward their macro- and micro-level goals and outcomes, and work as a unit to advance efforts to address attainment gaps.

Overseeing this effort means being intentional in ensuring high-level leaders understand the nuances

of the ongoing barriers that perpetuate equity gaps among historically minoritized and excluded populations. To succeed at this critical post, I require a "surround system" of eyes and ears to ensure I elevate the true lived experiences of the change agents who have been part of the Frontier Set. Although moving from solely site-level support to the segment-level support at the 30,000-foot view has been challenging, being able to communicate vertically and horizontally to internal and external stakeholders of the Frontier Set has helped me support the APLU institutions' transformation efforts. In doing this, we collectively inform the field on what it means to be a resilient and transformed institution of higher education.

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As a first-generation high school and college Latina graduate, Andréa serves as Director of the Coalition of Urban Serving Universities (USU)/Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU). In this role, she plays a crucial role in advancing student success, university transformation, and 21st-century workforce efforts across multiple efforts, and leads the Frontier Set initiative.

MOVING FROM SITE LEAD TO AN INTERMEDIARY ROLE

BY MITZY GONZÁLEZ, PROGRAM MANAGER, USU AND APLU OFFICE OF URBAN INITIATIVES

In my current role as an intermediary for the APLU segment within the Frontier Set, I leverage my past experiences, relationships, and assets to create new insights and opportunities. Prior to my current role as an intermediary, I worked alongside student-affairs professionals, senior administration, faculty, and students as the Frontier Set site lead at the University of Central Florida. Most recently, we saw the topic of student experience elevated in national conversations, specifically surrounding President Biden's selection of Miguel Cardona as the U.S. Department of Education Secretary. Cardona will now leverage his many years of experience working with students, teachers, and communities to influence national education policy. Ultimately, this selection sends the message that experience matters, especially when filling roles with the potential to have great influence and require coalition-building.

Artwork by Gabriel D'Elia, Instagram: @g.delia.paint

My success as a site lead was greatly dependent on the strength of my relationships with leaders across the institution. Through relationship-building, listening, and collaboration, I was able to gain a better understanding of both the challenges and opportunities for institutional transformation. I regularly shared what I was experiencing and hearing on the ground with my intermediaries and peers in the Frontier Set network. I felt deeply connected to the work and was actively participating in advancing transformation for my site. However, as I transitioned to the intermediary role, I quickly realized that my relatively easy access to leaders across the institution would look different in my new role.

Although I no longer work for one institution and am not deeply entrenched in one site's day-to-day student success efforts, I still feel connected and able to drive positive change.
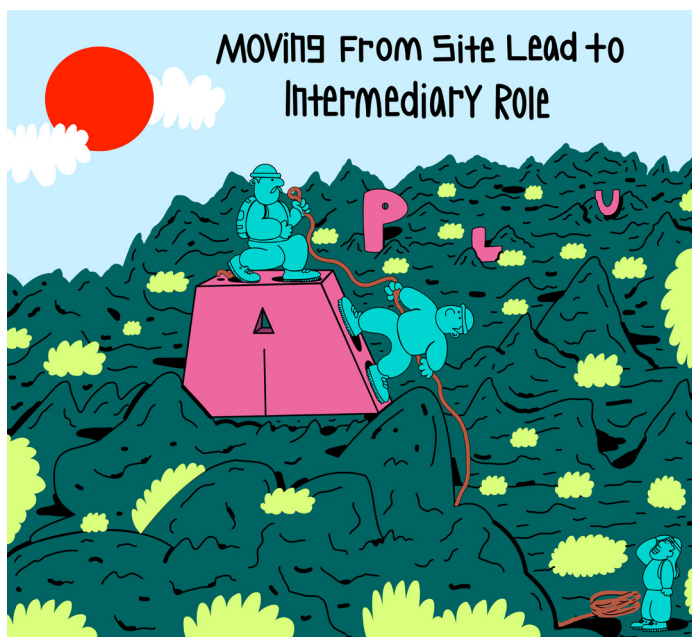
My experience as a former site lead proves valuable, as it allows me to gauge what questions I ask and, more importantly, how to advocate on behalf of the people who serve our students. I also understand the culture and structures in which our staff and university leaders exist. While those cultures and structures are hard to change, they do evolve, and as an intermediary I now share my understanding of institutional change from my personal and collective experience with other intermediaries across the network. My recent connection to serving at an institution is critical to helping the network understand the challenges our institutional leaders are facing. Our site leads also know that our segment is part of their team, understands their

reality, and wants to see their organization and student success efforts excel.

Cardona's appointment and my experience both highlight the value of having people in positions of influence who have both personal and professional experience that ties them to the mission of the work. The experience not only adds credibility, but opens the door for trust-building with stakeholders. An intermediary is only as strong as their relationships with their site lead and organization. There is great benefit when you elevate and amplify the experiences and ideas of those who have a deep understanding of what is happening on college and university campuses.

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Mitzy González serves as Program Manager of the Coalition of Urban Serving Universities at the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities. In this role she primarily works on the Frontier Set project, which looks at the role of transformation in closing attainment gaps, more specifically for underrepresented students, by elevating the institutional stories to more broadly inform the project and the field. Prior to joining APLU, she served as an assistant director in the Center for Higher Education Innovation, and as a University Innovation Alliance Fellow at the University of Central Florida.

"WE TRUSTED OUR PEOPLE": HOW COLLEGES ARE WEATHERING COVID

BY KEITH WITHAM, PHD, MANAGING DIRECTOR, THE ASPEN INSTITUTE COLLEGE EXCELLENCE PROGRAM

Some of the most vivid stories I've heard over the past few months from Frontier Set college leaders are the retellings of the first few weeks of March 2020, as campuses—and the nation—were just beginning to grapple with the seriousness of a terrifying new global pandemic. Across their stories, there was one word that captured the feeling of those weeks: "chaos."

Lisa Armour, Vice President for Assessment, Research, and Technology at Santa Fe College, described some of the chaos of the first week after the college made the decision to shut down: "We were dismantling technology in some places to reinstall it in others; there were people in masks running across campus with monitors under each arm, getting equipment to faculty at their homes so they could keep teaching … decisions were being made individually on the fly, but we trusted one another to do what was right for our students."

Across all of the Frontier Set, college leaders' stories about how they made it through those first few months of the pandemic and continued to provide not only high-quality teaching and learning but also academic and non-academic supports for students, that one theme reverberated: We trusted our people to do what's right for students.

We shouldn't take that for granted. It's easy to assume that all who work at colleges and universities are driven by the missions of those organizations and would make heroic efforts to do the best for students under difficult and uncertain circumstances. But that's not true at every institution. Nor does the collective willingness to problem-solve and "make it work" for students result, at every institution, in the kinds of herculean pivots many Frontier Set colleges made in order to sustain learning and support for students. What sets them apart?

The kind of strong culture that enabled faculty and staff—often with limited advance planning and direction—to effectively recreate the student experience virtually was built over many years through intentional practices, structures, and policies. Over the course of the Frontier Set work, we've learned how those colleges have built trust and a culture of empowerment and alignment through strategies that are instructive for other institutions. For example:

Hiring and Onboarding

Several Frontier Set colleges have focused intentionally on redesigning hiring processes at every level of the institution, to select attributes that are aligned with student success and equity goals—by screening specifically for "growth mindset," for example, or for experience with and commitment to equity and anti-racism. At San Jacinto College, the hiring process requires interviewers to screen explicitly for equity-mindedness and fit with the college's values on diversity, equity, and inclusion. For example, hiring committees are required to ask questions from a protocol focused on advancing DEI at the college, such as: "How has your background and experience prepared you to be effective in an environment that holds inclusivity as core to our mission and values?" "What efforts have you made, or been involved with, to foster cultural competence?" Candidates for full-time faculty positions are also required to complete a statement that demonstrates their perspective on student success and its relationship to student learning and outcomes, which reviewers then assess to determine if the response is in alignment with

the college's values and mission. And the college provides robust onboarding, including a year-long New Faculty Academy that includes in-depth training on implicit bias and cultural competence. During COVID, San Jacinto saw the benefits of those hiring practices in the strong sense of shared purpose and willingness among faculty and staff to do what was necessary to support students.

Professional Development

Through the Frontier Set and the **Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence**, we've observed that one of the institutional strengths most strongly correlated with continuous improvement in student outcomes is a robust professional development structure that enables colleges to build capacity college-wide around strategies for more effectively and equitably serving students. For example, for over a decade Miami Dade College (MDC) has had an in-house professional development department, the Center for Institutional and Organizational Learning (CIOL). CIOL's focus had shifted in recent years to primarily engaging faculty in holistic student support, through both pedagogy and student interactions outside the classroom. Of the pedagogical strategies, online teaching and learning strategies were among the most prevalent. At the onset of COVID-19, MDC was readily able to activate that strong existing infrastructure to ensure traditional, classroom-based faculty could quickly "train up" to provide remote learning. MDC launched additional sections to train faculty in using the institution's learning management system, remote instructional design, and online engagement of students.

Data to Support Real-Time Adaptation

One of the most critical capacities colleges have relied upon during COVID is the ability to assess and respond in real time to students' needs—with respect to technology access, health, and personal and family circumstances that impacted their ability to stay engaged in learning. The ability to get critical data into the hands of faculty and staff to enable them to adjust their work quickly required an existing capacity for collecting, distributing, and acting upon data. For example, at Sinclair Community College, faculty, staff,

and administrators regularly use data to decide which programs to scale up and which to sunset. At an annual Data and Completion summit, several hundred employees receive professional development on the use of data, and they examined disaggregated student success trend data showing the greatest increases in graduation rates were for minority students. These events continued through the COVID pandemic, and that well-developed infrastructure for disseminating data—and the broadly shared skill for using data that's been built over time—allowed college practitioners to quickly home in on students hit hardest by the pandemic: students of color and low-income students. The college did targeted outreach to those students, and launched a calling campaign that brought 400 students back to Sinclair to continue their education.

These same strategies will help Frontier Set institutions emerge from COVID—hopefully, in some ways stronger and more student-centered than before—and navigate the uncertainty of the coming years in its wake.

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HBCUs IN PURSUIT OF EQUITY

BY THE HBCU INTERMEDIARY EQUITY TEAM

Between fall 2019 and spring 2020, the Frontier Set Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) intermediary team joined its six institutions—Claflin University, Delaware State University, Fayetteville State University, Jackson State University, Johnson C. Smith University, and Morehouse College—to discuss equity. The topic initially surprised interviewees since HBCUs only exist because Black students were prohibited access to education at predominantly white institutions. This conversation led to a comprehensive exploration of the HBCU perception of equity on their campuses and their actions to remove barriers to student success in college, including poor college preparedness, economic frailty, life circumstances, and racial injustice.

The Second Morrill Act of 1890 was the first legislation requiring "states with racially segregated public higher education systems to provide a land-grant institution for black students whenever a land-grant institution was established and restricted for white students." (U.S Department of Education, 1991). Although HBCUs established under the act received funding, they did not receive federal land donations. The states were required to educate minorities, but they would not share schools with them. The act increased Black and brown students' access to higher education and established the "separate but equal" doctrine, which was anything but equal.

To the early HBCUs, equity meant access to all, irrespective of preparation level. HBCUs still provide access to many students who might not otherwise pursue higher education. For example, Frontier Set HBCU Johnson C. Smith University's (JCSU) Biddle Institute reimagined education for Black students, who often score lower than other racial groups on traditional academic measures such as GPA and standardized test scores (e.g., SAT, ACT). Biddle Institute faculty are trained to address noncognitive and metacognitive skills in educating formerly inadmissible students. To help students think

globally, JCSU provides students with passports, offers study-abroad programs, and established the Center for American Culture and Race at Guangdong Baiyun University in China.

HBCUs provide a nurturing, diverse learning environment and customized support services that teach students how to succeed.

Institutions employ diverse and culturally competent individuals who support academic, environmental, and cultural success. When COVID-19 struck, Morehouse College rallied its community to help students manage the isolation of the quarantine. The college initiated "Brotherhood Bonding," a faculty-moderated bi-weekly Zoom drop-in session intended to recreate the on-campus experience with a forum for plain conversation. Morehouse also hosts Freshman Orientation, a platform to forge broader understandings of human nature. The Freshman Orientations allow students to learn about and engage in subjects including Black feminism, the intersectionality of race and gender, and technology topics such as computer security.

In response to COVID-19, Claflin University decreased the digital divide through a partnership with Zoom. Fayetteville State is investigating services to address an increase in student mental health issues. Morehouse implemented a calling tree to check on student welfare. The Black Lives Matter movement has Jackson State considering establishing a completely new organization to address social unrest and racial injustice and expand community partnerships. 2020 heralded a new era for Delaware State University (DSU) that propelled the university into state and national recognition as the top provider of professional pilots of color to the airplane industry, and one of two Delaware research universities with Carnegie designation as an R2 university with high research. DSU continues to soar as "the nation's most diverse and unapologetic HBCU."

Birthed out of necessity, sustained through legacy, and continually growing through innovation, HBCUs are dedicated to increasing student access to higher education and social mobility. By successfully educating underrepresented and underserved students, they continue to pass the HBCU torch in honoring the past, living in the present, and preparing for the future.

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The HBCU Equity Team is composed of a diverse team of equity and inclusion professionals engaged in the study of equity on HBCU campuses: Lisa Becker (HBCU Communications/Writer/Editor), Dr. Joe'l Lewis Billingsley (HBCU Team Facilitator, Instructional Designer, Storytelling Team contributor, and Men of Color Workshop Project Lead), Lillian Williams (Assistant Director, Grant Programs/ Frontier Set HBCU Intermediary), and Dr. Montrischa Essoka (technical assistance to the HBCU Intermediary Team/Senior Researcher with the American Institutes for Research).

THE HBCU STORYTELLING JOURNEY: TRANSFORMATION, SHARING, AND SUSTAINABILITY

BY THE FRONTIER SET HBCU STORYTELLING TEAM

"People don't believe what you tell them. They rarely believe what you show them. They often believe what their friends tell them. They always believe what they tell themselves."
-Seth Godin

Storytelling fuels institutional transformation by illuminating ideas and creating a lasting shift in perspective—and experience; taps into a sense of familiarity and shared values; and bonds person, place, and thing. However, often-repeated stories quickly become "old news," losing both purpose and impact. Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) must continually underscore and support their legacy of educating within nurturing, inclusive, and equitable learning environments and influence transformation by continuously communicating stories that generate concern, curiosity, excitement, and desire to belong. However, that hasn't always been an easy thing to do for many institutions.

Intermediary Kathy Thompson conceived the Frontier Set HBCU Storytelling Team initiative at the HBCU cohort's 2019 convening. During the "Brag Reports," a lively segment in which site leads share their institutions' accomplishments to enthusiastic applause and hearty congratulations, a site lead mused, "I wish we could tell our stories like this to our own people." Thompson saw an opportunity to help institutions celebrate student success milestones internally and externally, affirm the HBCU legacy, and showcase work from across their institutions through storytelling.

In summer 2020, the team interviewed 16 HBCU student success initiative leaders from Claflin University, Delaware State University, Fayetteville State University, Johnson C. Smith University, Jackson State University, and Morehouse College to hear their success stories. The team heard inspiring stories of doing more with less, creative resourcing,

and faculty/staff who go over and above the call of duty to contribute to student success and equity at the risk of their own career progression. Yet these stories were virtually unknown outside the respective departments. The team learned that the initiatives were primarily catalyzed by shifting metrics such as retention and graduation rates where retention and graduations are examples of KPIs, institutions and student finances, and crises. Interviewees spoke of early adopters, leaders, and faculty/staff whose passionate advocacy and single-handed efforts are often frustrated by barriers such as communication silos, a lack of resources, obsolete technology, and alumni who fear the loss of tradition in meeting the needs of a broader group of students.

Some Frontier Set HBCUs made the national spotlight with consistent, upbeat stories of resilience and sustained stakeholder engagement throughout the early months of COVID-19. Others worked more quietly, doing what needed to be done to serve their students. All six HBCU institutions honored their universal legacy of ministering to students in various acts of community, such as providing technology to those without devices or internet, housing students left homeless by the pandemic, paying for funerals of family members taken by COVID-19, and providing money for food and rent. These, too, were important stories and, while seemingly small in the face of the pandemic's magnitude, would have gone a long way toward fortifying pride of belonging among key audiences. These types of stories create collective memories and present transformation as an unknown but positive inevitability and nothing to fear. While details differ by institution, the story is the same: HBCUs overcome seemingly overwhelming odds to implement transformation and make lasting shifts. These stories should be told.

Without storytelling, institutions, staff, and students overlook accomplishments and pride points, losing interconnectivity.

Conversely, effective storytelling moves audiences beyond the numbers and connects readers to something they can relate to and want to join. Storytelling fuels transformation by illuminating ideas and creating a lasting shift in perspective—and experience—and creates advocates to pass on the stories. Storytelling is critical to both external and internal audiences, who will continue to raise the bar from where it is to where it should be—and higher.

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The HBCU Storytelling Team is composed of a diverse team of communicators who have developed a Storytelling Playbook to help institutions tell their stories and contribute to institutional transformation: Carlisha Hartzog (Project Lead/Contributing Writer), Lisa Becker (Contributing Writer/Editor), Dr. Joe'l Billingsley (Interviewer), Meredith Rushing (Graphic Designer), and Candace Spencer (Interviewer/ Lead Writer).

HOW SYSTEMS REINFORCED THE POWER OF SHARING IDEAS AND SOLUTIONS

BY BRANDON BISHOP, POLICY ANALYST, THE STATE HIGHER EDUCATION EXECUTIVE OFFICERS ASSOCIATION (SHEEO)

System offices have always played a crucial role in sharing information and ideas across their diverse institutions, covering academic planning, racial equity initiatives, and other student support services. The Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) and the University System of Georgia (USG) collectively support 56 institutions, so a groundbreaking idea at one campus can reverberate within a state. With the support of systems, one idea at an individual campus can be shared across a state, increasing the number of students who can benefit from the idea. Along with sharing ideas, systems highlight innovative practices and policies, using data to build onto ideas and programs and begin enacting systemwide change.

Systems share ideas, but they also share solutions, facilitate tough conversations, and support expanding ideas.

Sharing ideas is crucial for a system office to succeed, but it is also important to elevate proven solutions and be data-informed, and both TBR and USG have been able to utilize their networks to turn ideas into policies and programs that benefit thousands of students systemwide.

TBR, as a way of informing their work and developing a culture of inquiry, works closely with campuses to analyze data and use that data to begin systemwide, institution-driven convenings and idea-sharing that are topic-specific and tailored for various campus audiences. One specific topic is advising; TBR hosts annual advising academies to share data and best practices with the campuses. These convenings have multiple partners, including state leaders and institution leaders such as the National Academic Advising Association as well

as other institutions across the country. TBR understands that these convenings build on one another by encouraging institution leaders to take what is learned and make modifications to address their specific campuses, so they highlight all-star institutions as a way to begin scaling ideas. In the future TBR will focus on high-impact practices with a specific focus on racial equity, and spotlight institutions doing this work well. They will share this knowledge across the system so institutions can take crucial steps toward racial equity on their campuses.

USG has shown their commitment to student retention and graduation by enacting their Momentum Approach, which focuses on identifying systemic barriers causing disparities around low income and race, to help the system craft changes, remove barriers, and share ideas along the way. One key metric that shows positive results for this approach: even during the COVID-19 pandemic, USG awarded 70,879 degrees in the last fiscal year, a 4.5% increase over fiscal year 2019. With this approach USG hosts two systemwide, data-informed student success convenings led by senior leadership, which include all stakeholders involved in planning and implementing change. Additionally, USG hosts targeted convenings on topics such as advising and spotlighting "all-star" institutions. USG hosted six advising-specific events over three years, while continuing additional convenings as well. These other convenings have two focuses: case-making and providing how-to components. The earlier convenings were focused on building support among institutions and showing them the key areas of growth and how to approach them, so when it came time to implement USG could host convenings on mindset approaches and improving advising practices. Attendees were encouraged to

engage in cross-campus collaboration to deploy the all-star methods highlighted.

Idea-sharing has always been a crucial component of a system office's work, but with new problems arising frequently and pervasive problems such as systemic racism continuing, idea-sharing allows institutions to learn from one another and efficiently implement policies and practices that address these key problems and have immediate impact on students. Institutions know their students well, and often have the pulse of their campus communities. When institutions enact solutions that work, the system office has the power to convene campuses, showcase best practices and data, and work with other institutions to begin implementing the idea to best serve their own campus communities and states.

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Brandon Bishop is a Policy Analyst at SHEEO. His work portfolio includes the Frontier Set, the SHEEO Membership Survey and Report, and SHEEO's racial equity work.

THE POWER TO REIMAGINE: EQUITY AND INSTITUTIONAL TRANSFORMATION

BY TIFFANY N. POLITE, PHD, PROGRAM MANAGER, UNIVERSITY INNOVATION ALLIANCE

The diversification of the U.S. necessitates a reimagining of higher education. The current structure was designed for and is largely aligned with the political, cultural, and material interests of those in power—interests largely concerned with preserving their power. Years of reform has done little to solve for the persistent inequities found in our education system. This is because the system has been designed to maintain its structure. Reform leaves existing power relations in place, merely creating new pathways to achieve the same results. This explains why higher education outcomes have stagnated despite the plethora of resources that have been invested over time. We find ourselves more than ever before needing the knowledge, skills, and abilities of an educated populace— especially those from perpetually marginalized and underserved communities— but we're operating within a structure that was not created to serve such a function at scale.

The field must be willing to intentionally turn its attention to the power dynamics between students, communities, and institutions if it truly seeks to solve for the challenges of equity.

Equity is not just closing gaps in student outcome data; it is also providing the opportunity to engage in the system without more risk than reward, and integrity in acknowledging and rectifying past impediments to success. This expanded understanding provides insight into the perpetual nature of the plight of students and institutions, as both endure the pressures of stratification that undergird persistent inequity. Solutions to challenges of equity require a willingness to

objectively evaluate what we believe about public higher education and how to use its intrinsic agency to create more contemporary and beneficial ways of knowing and being, i.e., to transform.

Transformation is dramatic rather than incremental change, and addressing equity quickens institutional transformation. Refreshing the bounds of logic, integrity, and responsibility begins with intentional assessment and evaluation of the current state. This work must center on a process that uncovers and unpacks power relations, with specific attention to the complexities of problem definition, stakeholder positionality, research, expertise, and historical narrative. A thorough review and understanding of these dynamics positions us to create a future state that appreciates and addresses the needs of all learners while being attentive to the demands of institutional success. Below is a four-step process that can guide the institutional transformation process:

1. Identify the issue being contested.

2. Situate the current status and context.

3. Contextualize the situation with research, history, and supporting narratives.

4. Reimagine the future.

Identify the Issue Being Contested	Situate the Current Status and Context	Contextualize with Research, History, and Narratives
Power is about the relational dynamics of conflict and dispute; this work is political	**Power analysis requires an objective understanding of stakeholder positionality in decision-making, agenda-setting, and preference shaping**	**Power analysis requires ideological humility and critique to demonstrate how stakeholders come to (mis)perceive their own material interests**
Define the problem accurately to establish an appropriate course of action. Explicitly naming and defining the challenges allows for clearer understandings of power dynamics, **centering the exercise of power (e.g., inaction, coercion, influence, force, dominance), rather than the mechanism (e.g., racism, classism, sexism).** Mechanisms are tools of the exercise; seek to understand the action and process that produce the outcome.	Identify all groups involved in the contest and ensure that their ideological and professional perspectives and approaches are captured. Seek to understand how institutional structures, practices, attitudes, and environments support and/or hinder all parties by seeking their perspectives directly.	Interrogate the narratives and versions of history that are most familiar to allow for further uncovering of covert power dynamics for the development of a holistic [more accurate] account of the issue. Today is not ahistorical; many of the challenges we face are inherited. How was power exercised in the past and what were the implications for all parties?

FUTURE STATE DESIGN

Reimagine the Future

Power is largely invisible, distorts perceptions, and shapes preferences; analysis demystifies these dynamics to realize the utility in redefining possibilities and imagining the inconceivable

Analyze the power relations to reveal a closer-to-accurate account of problems and use it to guide the intentional design of systems and structures built to support equitable consideration of all. Decision-makers and staff must be equipped with the approaches, tools, and methods that will help usher in the newly realized future. These resources must be equitable, human (student)-centered, and forward-thinking.

UIA institutions have engaged in multiple activities in support of institutional transformation to design more equitable experiences and outcomes for all students. These include training in human-centered design and strategic foresight, reimagining career services, a Black Student Success Initiative, advising reorganizations, and exploring how to design technology implementations around unique student needs. These initiatives, along with many other exemplars across the Frontier Set, demonstrate that institutions have the agency to create conditions and environments that improve student outcomes despite the existing system's maintenance function.

Systems of power do not willingly relinquish power. As 2021 dawned, we faced the consequences of our complacency, and quickly realized higher education is not the only institution in need of transformation. We must enhance and strengthen the institutional integrity of higher education to ensure forward progress toward the democratic ideals of our nation. But we cannot solve problems using the same logic, tools, and structures that created or perpetuated the problems we seek to solve. The future is in petitioning higher education to change now so that we may guide our nation through its transformation. How we answer the call today

determines democracy's fate tomorrow. We must transform, but first we must believe we have the power and agency to do so.

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Tiffany Polite serves as Program Manager for the University Innovation Alliance's engagement with the Frontier Set. Her inquiry and contribution center on the dynamics of power, organizational design, and institutional change, with particular emphasis on the role of educational institutions and organizations in creating and maintaining of inequitable outcomes.

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