Literature Review on Faculty, Staff, and Student Diversity

The California Community College system is the largest postsecondary education system in the nation and serves more than 2.1 million students, encompassing an incredibly diverse student population that reflects the diversity of our state.[1] In 2016-17, the California Community College served 73% of students that came from a diverse background including African American, Latino, Native American, and Pacific Islander students.[2] Following Chancellor Oakley's Vision for Success[3] and an increased focus on closing equity gaps, the Board of Governors requested for the Chancellor's Office to create a Diversity Taskforce to consider, among other factors, structural changes and practices impacting system-wide diversity specific to faculty, staff and administrators. As the higher education system that is "well-suited to reach many of the Californians in most dire need of upward mobility,"[4] closing community college student educational attainment gaps by race and ethnicity is dependent on faculty and staff diversity. A diverse college environment allows faculty, staff, and administrators to respond to challenges related to student completion more efficiently because including multiple perspectives and voices makes groups better problem-solvers.[5]

Literature on campus diversity efforts look at ethnic and racial diversity through the lens of faculty, staff, and students, with consistent themes of recruitment, retention, and support. Three ways in which colleges tend to engage in these efforts, for all these groups, is through *individual, interactional, or institutional* strategies. *Individual* efforts include faculty and student mentoring, *interactional* efforts include cultivating buy-in and building an environment conducive to diversity, and *institutional* efforts include larger scale actions such as department or institutional approach to reorient itself towards improving diversity. Our review of the literature revealed the need for system level commitment to faculty, staff, and student diversity to ensure we are supporting our students towards completion of their academic goals and closing educational attainments gaps among historically underserved student populations.

SYNOPSIS OF THE LITERATURE

Hiring and Retaining Diverse Faculty

Studies on the relationship between student diversity and faculty hiring and retention repeatedly suggested faculty of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds have a positive impact on student educational outcomes. Students who benefit from a diverse faculty are "better educated and better prepared for leadership, citizenship, and professional competitiveness" (Taylor et al.,

[1] https://www.ppic.org/blog/serving-californias-diverse-college-students/
[2] http://californiacommunitycolleges.cccco.edu/PolicyInAction/KeyFacts.aspx
[3] https://foundationccc.org/Portals/0/Documents/Vision/VisionForSuccess_Exec_Summary_web_2019.pdf
[4] https://tcf.org/content/commentary/californias-workforce-needs-cal-grant-reform/
[5] https://www.ccas.net/files/public/Publications/Best%20Practices%20CCAS_March%202017_FINAL.pdf

2010). Retention efforts and a clear commitment to diversity are two ways institutions can meet the needs of their students and changing demographics (Hurtado, 2001).

Recruitment and retention efforts are institutional strategies to increase faculty diversity. As the student body increasingly diversifies, with community colleges serving greater numbers of diverse students, the need for faculty diversity increases (Robinson et al., 2013). Romero (2017) offers specific strategies and practices for recruiting and retaining diverse faculty. His recommendations include implementing a strategic search process; cluster hiring; faculty mentoring programs; keeping a multicultural resource directory; and maintaining leadership roles for diverse faculty. For example, a strategic search process includes having the campus human resources and equal opportunity department provide information to all faculty search committees to ensure "proactive outreach" to diverse applicants (p. 2). Cluster hiring is an example of a practice that colleges can use to hire a group of diverse faculty at the same time to "minimize feelings of isolation and overload" and foster a supportive community (p. 3). In addition, a multicultural directory listing with available resources and programs can serve as a valuable tool for faculty to be able to navigate campus and community life. Mentoring programs aimed at having senior faculty mentoring new faculty can help increase faculty retention by fostering a sense of community that respects and supports organizational equity values. Lastly, maintaining and making available leadership roles for faculty representing historically underserved populations is presented as an institutional strategy to help facilitate faculty retention. This allows faculty to be part of the decision-making process while contributing to the diversity of perspectives. The institutional strategies and practices suggested by Romero (2017) require campus buy-in and leadership support as well as close coordination with human resource departments. Having executive support ensures efforts to increase faculty diversity are not simply an idealized goal, but a campus wide commitment so that specific policy, actions, and funding are then specified (L. Brown, 2004).

Hiring faculty from diverse populations in itself will not change a campus culture or improve student outcomes; faculty must also be retained and supported. Robinson et al. (2013) highlights that retention efforts to *keep* diverse faculty are essential. These efforts can be considered interactional in that they are cultural and environmental, while specific retention efforts are also individual. There can be an additional burden on faculty of color related to tokenism or isolation. This makes exit interviews valuable (Romero, 2017). By explicitly asking faculty to share *why* they leave, campus or department specific efforts can be developed to remedy any problems for future and current employees.

Staff Diversity and Academic Success

Staff diversity plays an important role in student completion and success. Students value having staff and administrators who will advocate, and address concerns related to campus climate and diversity (Parnell, 2016). Therefore, the recruitment and retention of staff of racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds is equally important to faculty diversity. Staff on college campuses may be more diverse than the faculty population, but they still do not reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of the student body (Bauer-Wolf, 2018). The benefits of having a diverse staff on college campuses is the same as in the case of companies. Fine and Handelsman (2010) note the most innovative companies have deliberately engaged in the hiring of diverse

work teams, as “diverse working groups are more productive, creative, and innovative than homogeneous groups.”

In the case of academic, student, and multicultural affairs staff who are often assigned the primary responsibility of interacting with students, providing a welcoming campus climate is critical to the retention and recruitment of student support staff. A study by Hurtado and Harper (2007), surveyed underrepresented minority staff and found academic, student, and multicultural affairs staff members were keenly aware of how much “minority students were disadvantaged and dissatisfied” and did their personal best to help students, but generally did not believe that voicing these concerns to upper administration would have any benefit and could ultimately hurt their jobs (p. 19). This is consistent with other scholars that suggest student affairs professionals are unfairly expected to be the only staff on campus to engage in topics about racial and ethnic diversity. For example, student affairs professionals are demographically diverse with an over-representation of women and are often on the front lines of working with students through academic or personal issues, or critical campus or community events (Bauer-Wolf, 2018). Yet, non-classroom settings are often where students “process, communicate, and engage around the topic of racial diversity and, as a result, student affairs professionals are often expected to support students in those settings” (Parnell, 2016). Hurtado and Harper (2007) speak about *transformational change*, and how that kind of holistic institutional cultural upheaval needs to have key administrative leadership guiding it. The role of leadership in transformational change is emphasized in the literature because to change cultures, the authors note, leaders cannot simply “espouse commitments to diversity” - it requires a close examination of programs (Hurtado and Harper, 2007). In addition, senior leadership staff support is needed to help racial and ethnic staff in their work to transform racial campus climates by ensuring a culture where staff can communicate with senior level administrators without fear (Hurtado and Harper, 2007). This type of cultural change requires “equity-mindedness”[6] practices that consists of “actions that demonstrate individuals’ capacity to recognize and address racialized structures, policies, and practices that produce and sustain racial inequities” (Bensimon and Malcolm, 2012). To build an equity-minded practice, campus leadership must be open to routinely examine practices, policies, new initiatives, reports, and other structures to ensure equity holds a central position in diversity efforts (Bensimon and Malcolm, 2012). As the primary group that interacts with administrators, faculty, and students - academic, student and multicultural affairs staff should be part of college transformational change work. However, staff should be supported in this work to avoid personal or professional fatigue, which makes professional development or support from “others who are affirming racial diversity in settings external to their individual campuses” important for campus staff (Parnell, 2016).

Mentoring and Retaining a Diverse Student Body

A repeated strategy, often serving as the foundation for specific programs, among scholars is mentoring. Efforts to mentor and retain diverse students and diverse faculty and staff populations have some natural links: all groups benefit from individual and interactional strategies such as mentoring and institutional accountability that promote a supportive campus

[6] Center for Urban Education. https://cue.usc.edu/about/equity/equity-mindedness/

climate. By comparing student completion rates among students who either received or did not receive mentoring, Glover et al. (2003) found “individuals without mentoring relationships exhibit reduced expectations and lessened degrees of work satisfaction when compared to their mentored peers” (p. 108). The author further states, students from underrepresented backgrounds need to be given opportunities to work closely with faculty who can serve as mentors. Mentoring is a direct way a college can support student completion among underrepresented students by helping first-generation students who often lack the cultural capital to navigate campus life and choose a field of study (Glover et al., 2003). Similarly, research by Wilson et al., (2012) found that *less than half* of the students that initially decide to major in a STEM field successfully complete the major, and students from underrepresented groups had even lower completion rates in STEM. To address low completion rates among underrepresented groups of students, students we paired either with faculty, staff, or their peers. As a result of being provided mentoring opportunities, students were found to have higher grade point averages, higher retention rates, and completed more coursework successfully (Wilson et al., 2012). Another relevant example of mentoring is the collaboration between California State University, Fresno and State Center Community College District who partnered to implement strategies and interventions aimed at increasing persistence of underrepresented minority (URM) students in STEM (Avery et al., 2016). The strategies and interventions included strong support from institutional leadership, providing opportunities for community engagement, and creating extracurricular opportunities to engage students which resulted in program staff cultivating meaningful mentoring relationships between faculty and students, thereby increasing persistence of URM students through research stipends, tutoring, peer-support, and advising. These examples suggest mentoring is an effort focused on individual students. However, to be a successful strategy, mentoring requires institutional and interpersonal support. For example, mentoring requires institutional and interactional changes of a department responsible for creating these opportunities. Institutions supporting departments in building mentoring programs involves changes and practices at the individual and interpersonal level.

While mentoring is a specific strategy, retention is a broad area of focus in the literature on the need for maintaining student diversity through a clear commitment to diversity by the institution to better serve a diverse student population. Tinto (2006) looks at efforts to enhance student retention and places the responsibility back on the institution and the need for accountability. In addition, Tinto discusses the “institutional investment in faculty and staff development programs” to improve the retention rates of students. Gregerman et al. (1998) highlights that it is crucial for African American students, especially for those attending predominantly white institutions, to have interactions with faculty - it is essential to their academic success and retention.

Within this context, retaining a diverse student population is connected to faculty teaching and institutional accountability. Quaye and Harper (2007) discuss how *accountability* in terms of the assessment of student outcomes to ensure learning is occurring goes hand in hand with institutions choosing to make diversity a priority at the system level. Faculty need to teach in an informative and multiculturally effective way: “learning and engagement are inextricably bound, and students from all racial and ethnic backgrounds are more likely to be engaged when faculty expose them to multicultural perspectives” (Quaye and Harper, 2007). All faculty can be held accountable institutionally for including diversity in their teaching, but no single population of faculty should carry the entire weight of this work – it should become a shared and institutionally

supported effort. Hurtado and Harper (2007) point out that both white and racial and ethnic minority students report faculty showing discrimination towards students, but prejudice is experienced more actively by students of color. By stating that faculty should be “challenged to consider their roles as accomplices in the cyclical reproduction of racism and institutional negligence,” Hurtado and Harper (2007) are encouraging faculty to confront their role and to lead change. Some faculty do recognize the need to teach about social justice issues to prepare conscious leaders, but they are not necessarily prepared to address these issues of social justice due to lack of knowledge or training (K. Brown, 2004). If an institution or department recognizes this as a priority, then they can make professional development available for faculty to address matters such as implicit bias in the classroom and campus wide. Professional development can be used to ensure faculty receive the training to broach these important subjects. Furthermore, L. Brown (2004) addresses the need for the university to have a greater commitment to diversify faculty to reflect the current student population. Brown states that a university may have a “disconnect between institutional practices and faculty commitment” because the institution does not have a proper strategy to bridge this connection (p.21). An institutional commitment with support from key administrators is vital in bringing about transformational change.

Closing

The connection between the scholarly work on diversity presented here and the Diversity Taskforce’s work on diversity is that faculty, staff, and student support are critical to the successful completion and positive experience of students. Persistence and completion of URM students is highly dependent on positive and nurturing interactions with faculty and staff. Work must be done individually to build relationships and interpersonally to cultivate buy-in so that larger scale institutional transformation can be fully supported.

To retain a diverse population of students, mentoring and a clear institutional commitment to increasing faculty diversity are two ways to demonstrate both culturally and practically to students that they are heard and valued. Staff are a slightly more diverse group than faculty, but importantly, staff interface with key groups on campus (students, faculty, administrators) and these connections should be leveraged when working to bring about transformational change. Faculty diversity is key: faculty have the power to mentor underrepresented students, and to show students that they do belong on a college campus and can have a place in the pipeline towards becoming faculty themselves someday. Efforts to retain and support diverse faculty are essential in building strong campus communities where students from a range of racial and ethnic backgrounds will thrive.

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