California's Student Equity Policy: An unexploited opportunity among Hispanic-serving community colleges

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California’s Student Equity Plan Policy

AN UNEXPLORITED OPPORTUNITY AMONG HISPANIC-SERVING COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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ABSTRACT

This article examines California’s Student Equity Plan policy, which requires community colleges to identify inequities, develop activities, and create goals for achieving equitable outcomes in higher education. We provide an analysis of the Equity Plans submitted by a subset of HSI (Hispanic-serving institution) community colleges and focus on these questions:

- In what ways do the Equity Plans of HSI community colleges address the success of Latina/o students?
- Do the Equity Plans reflect the HSI status of the institution?
- Do HSI’s Equity Plans focus on the most serious barriers to Latino/a success (e.g., developmental education and transfer)?

Because HSI community colleges provide a majority of credentials and degrees and they represent a pathway to transfer, we see the potential for HSIs to reduce educational inequality through the Student Equity Plan process and funding ($530 million since 2014). Specifically, do HSIs take advantage of the Student Equity Plan process and funding as an opportunity to build their capacity to produce better and more equitable outcomes for Latinos/as? Or do they approach equity more broadly and generically? Our analysis sheds light on the ways in which HSIs address policy mandates strategically to build their capacity and strengthen their identity.
INTRODUCTION

Latino/a student enrollment in higher education has steadily increased over the last 30 years. In 1976, Latino/a students comprised 4% of total fall undergraduate enrollment; in 2014, that number rose to 16%, representing over 3 million students across postsecondary education. Despite greater participation in higher education, their attendance is stratified by institutional type and sector; in general, Latino/a students are overrepresented in open-access institutions and severely underrepresented in selective institutions (Bastedo & Jacquette, 2011). Furthermore, Latino/a students face major challenges with respect to persistence and graduation (Chapa, 2005; Tierney & Hagedorn, 2002; Villalpando, 2004). Notably, they are placed in remedial courses at a higher rate than their counterparts, which delays their degree completion and overall persistence rates (Contreras & Contreras, 2015).

Many of the open-access institutions that Latino/a students attend are Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) (Excelencia in Education, 2014). The “Hispanic-serving” designation is given to institutions that have a Latino/a enrollment that is at least 25% of their student population. Unlike historically Black colleges and universities that were designed and established for the benefit of African Americans (Contreras, Malcom, & Bensimon, 2008; Malcom-Piqueux & Bensimon, 2015), with few exceptions (e.g., Hostos Community College in New York and National Hispanic University in California), HSIs were not founded specifically to serve Latino/a students. Moreover, the HSI designation is contingent on the shifting variable of enrollment: if Latino/a students fall below 25% of the campus population, the institution is no longer an HSI. And even if an institution maintains its HSI designation, questions remain about the embeddedness of this identity. As Contreras, Malcom, and Bensimon (2008) found, being an HSI does not necessarily mean that the institution sees “Hispanic-serving” as part of its broader educational mission.

In this article, we examine whether and how community colleges in California with the HSI designation are leveraging the Student Equity Policy (SEP) to improve Latino/a student outcomes. The SEP asks community colleges to eliminate inequities for a wide range of historically underrepresented groups, including students of color, low-income students, foster youth, veterans, and students with disabilities, in the areas of access, basic skills (developmental education) completion, course completion, degree completion, and transfer. By developing and implementing “student equity plans,” community colleges are expected to identify where and for whom inequities exist based on an analysis of disaggregated student outcomes data, set goals to close these gaps, propose interventions to
meet these goals, and evaluate progress towards achieving equity. In short, the SEP aims to establish at each community college a process of continuous improvement for mitigating inequitable outcomes. To support these efforts, the state has invested 530 million dollars in the policy since 2014.

Given what is required, we see the SEP as an opportunity to investigate whether Hispanic-serving community colleges in California—which comprise over 75% of the sector—take advantage of the Student Equity funds to support Latino/a students in ways that advance their educational outcomes. In our analysis, we focus specifically on Latino/a student outcomes in developmental education and transfer to four-year institutions as these two areas pose the greatest equity barriers for Latino/as (Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Gonzalez, 2015). In our view, developmental education is the access issue for Latino/a students in community colleges given their disproportionate placement and limited success in remedial courses, while transfer to a baccalaureate institution is the success issue given their low transfer rates despite their intentions to earn a four-year degree.

Our analysis of the Equity Plans is guided by the principles and methods of Critical Policy Analysis and Critical Race Theory. We investigate a subset of Hispanic-serving community colleges’ Equity Plans (n=15), as well as relevant policy documents to address the following questions:

1. Do the student equity plans of HSI community colleges reflect their HSI designation?
   a. How do they articulate their status/identity as an HSI?
   b. How do they acknowledge their HSI identity?
   c. Do they focus on the success of Latino/a students?

2. How do the plans address disproportionate impact in basic skills for Latino/a students?
   a. How do they frame inequities in basic skills outcomes?
   b. How do they address the needs of Latino/a students in the goals and activities?

3. How do the plans address disproportionate impact in transfer for Latino/a students?
   a. How do they frame inequities in transfer?
   b. How do they include Latino/a students in the goals and activities?

In addition, we consider whether HSIs take advantage of the planning process and funding to build their capacity to produce better and more equitable outcomes for Latino/a students, or whether they approach equity
more broadly and generically. We anticipate that our findings can shed light on the saliency of HSIs’ identity in the distribution of resources that aim to close equity gaps in community college.

LATINO/AS IN THE CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES

In 2013, 65% of the first-time freshmen Latino/a students in California enrolled in one of the 113 community colleges in the state. Within these colleges, Latino/a students face significant challenges in developmental education and transfer to four-year institutions (Campaign for College Opportunity, 2015; Gonzalez, 2012). They are overrepresented in the former and underrepresented in the latter (Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Gonzalez, 2015).

Latino/a Students and Developmental Education

Developmental education refers to precollege courses, typically in English and math, that are designed to help students build knowledge, skills, and competencies needed for college-level coursework (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000). Nationally, 68% of community college students enroll in at least one developmental education course (Campaign for College Opportunity, 2015). In California, 74% of all entering students and 85% of incoming Latino/as are assessed and placed in developmental English or math. The number of Latino/a students placed in developmental courses annually could fill the Los Angeles Coliseum (93,000 capacity), more than one and a half times (p. 10). While developmental courses can serve as building blocks toward success, there is a growing consensus that they delay access to degree- and transfer-level courses and contribute to the low rates of degree production and transfer in community colleges, particularly in those that are minority-serving (Attewell, Lavin, Domina, & Levey, 2006; Bailey, 2009; Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010; Ngo & Kwon, 2014). In the California Community Colleges, only 34 of 100 Latino/as who were placed in developmental English, and 14 of 100 who were placed in developmental math, subsequently passed a transfer-level course (Solórzano, Datnow, Park, & Watford, 2013).

Students are typically placed in developmental education courses based on their performance on standardized assessments such as the ACCUPLACER or COMPASS. These assessments attempt to measure college-readiness for English and math, offering an “objective” result that directs colleges to place students in an “appropriate” course for their academic level (Hughes
Scholars argue that these assessments can be ineffective and weak in their predictive power, creating arbitrary barriers for students’ educational goals (Martorell & McFarlin, 2007). For Latino/a students, these assessments magnify the P–12 educational inequalities in academic and college-readiness preparation (Bailey et al., 2010). Once sorted into remedial courses, the progression toward college-level courses can take years, especially for students who attend college on a part-time basis, balancing a course load with work and family responsibilities. This process can lead to Latino/a students feeling educational fatigue, losing academic interest, or even dropping out of college (Contreras & Contreras, 2015). Advocates of reforms in basic skills placement practices and policies recommend the use of multiple measures (Bettinger & Long, 2005; Ngo & Kwon, 2014) and an end to arbitrary cut-scores (Martorell & McFarlin, 2007).

Depending on where a student is placed on the developmental course sequence, a student can be up to seven courses away from a college-level course, and two to four years away from reaching math and English classes that count toward their educational goals. In addition, the rates of “success” are critically low for Latino/a students. Statewide, only 29% of the Latino/a students who first enroll in a developmental math course completed a college level course after six years; for English the “success” rate was 40.2% (CCCCO, 2014). Both of these rates for Latino/a students were below the average completion rate.

Given this reality, developmental education has been described as a “cyclical trap” that sorts and maintains Latino/a students in remediation (Contreras & Contreras, 2015). Access to postsecondary education for Latino/a students must account for the cyclical trap of remediation and the barriers placed on community college students seeking to achieve a bachelor’s degree.

**Latino/a Students and the Transfer Process**

With 159 HSI institutions, California is home to the majority of HSIs across the nation. Most of these institutions are community colleges (n=98) (Contreras & Contreras, 2015), whose multiple identities and missions raise concerns over whether efforts are made to target and serve Latino/a students (Hurtado & Ruiz, 2012). Of particular concern is the transfer function, which has failed to maintain equitable transfer levels for Latino/a students. State policy has attempted to support transfer for Latino/as (e.g., Senate Bills 1456 and 1440, and Assembly Bill 540), but baccalaureate graduation rates remain low (Excelencia in Education, 2014; Contreras & Scott-Clayton, 2011; Ngo & Kwon, 2014).
& Contreras, 2015). Given their overrepresentation in the state and community college system (Martinez & Fernández, 2004), Hispanic-serving community colleges are poised to provide transfer pathways to the baccalaureate for Latino/s students in California. Yet, while Latino/as make up 40% of all students in California’s community colleges, only 24% successfully transfer to a four-year college or university (CCCCO, 2014). Furthermore, Latino/as’ “transfer velocity rate” is 29%, nine percentage points below the average and 24 percentage points below the highest-performing racial/ethnic group. In part, these low transfer rates are affected by community colleges’ multiple missions, which also include vocational and workforce development, and continuing education (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Martinez & Fernández, 2004). As such, transfer is merely one of several foci, and in some community colleges (i.e., those with a history of technical education), it may sit second to a focus for vocational and workforce training. This is particularly important as research has shown that students of color who enroll in vocational programs are negatively affected by transfer (Crisp & Nuñez, 2014).

In sum, developmental education and transfer are two areas where Latino/as in community college face substantial equity issues. By requiring community colleges to develop equity plans, the SEP creates a space for close examination of basic skills completion and transfer rates, meaningful conversations on why Latino/a students face disparate outcomes, and strategic development of interventions that promise to eliminate the inequities they experience. For community colleges with the Hispanic-serving designation, the SEP provides the opportunity strengthen the conditions that promote Latino/a student success and equitable educational outcomes (Flores & Park, 2014).

**STUDENT EQUITY PLANS**

The California Community Colleges Board of Governors initiated the SEP in 1993 as a way of addressing equity issues facing underrepresented students in the system, then defined as ethnic minorities, women, and students with disabilities. To ensure equal opportunities for access, success, and transfer for these students, community colleges were asked to develop “student equity plans” that were suited to the needs of “each college’s students.”

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1. The CCCC (California Community College Chancellor’s Office) uses the transfer velocity rate to measure “behavioral intent to transfer.” Students who demonstrate intent to transfer must have completed 12 credit units and attempted at least one transfer-level English or math course within six years of initial enrollment in the community colleges.
student population, best fit the particular college’s traditions and organizational structure, and have the maximum support from the college’s faculty and staff” (Guichard, 1992, p. 3). In the current iteration, student equity plans have to address inequity in five indicators (access, course completion, basic skills, degree attainment, and transfer) for 14 student groups2, of which Latino/as are one. First, colleges must calculate “disproportionate impact” (DI)—the term used in the policy to describe inequities in outcomes—on each area for each student group. For example, in the area of transfer, the plans are required to demonstrate whether each of the 14 groups are at or below equity. Colleges are obliged to include Latino/as (or any other student group) in the subsequent sections of the plan only if they are found to experience disproportionate impact. Second, the plan must include equity goals based on the DI calculations. The goal should describe the equity gap being addressed, goals to determine progress, and a desired outcome. For example, one goal is as follows: “Increase the number of students completing degree-applicable English courses who began their studies in basic skills English courses.” Finally, the plans must outline activities, including strategies and action items that help a college achieve its stated goals. An activity aligned with the goal described above, for example, is: “Scale the proactive counseling model to include at least four counselors and twelve faculty members.”

At each college, a committee with representatives from across campus areas (e.g., instruction, counseling, administration, governance, staff, students, community members) oversees plan development and implementation. Drafted plans are approved by local governance bodies (e.g., academic senate), leaders (e.g., president), and the board of trustees. Once approved, the plans are submitted to the California Community College Chancellor’s Office for review and accountability purposes.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK:
CRITICAL POLICY ANALYSIS AND CRITICAL RACE THEORY

Critical policy analysis (CPA) (Alemán, 2007; Ball, 1997; Iverson, 2007) has been used to understand the racialized effects of policies purported to be unbiased, value-free, beneficial for all, or a combination of these. Within education, CPA illuminates the ways policy design and imple-

2. These groups are American Indian/Alaskan Natives, Asians, African Americans, Latino/as, Pacific Islanders/Native Hawaiians, Whites, students of some other race, students of more than one race, males, females, students with disabilities, low-income students, current or former foster youth, and veterans.
mentation create negative conditions for students of color. For example, Iverson (2007) shows how university diversity policies meant to convey institutional commitment to creating inclusive campus environments for all students constructs students of color as outsiders, disadvantaged victims, and commodities. Her study used Critical Race Theory (CRT) and CPA to position race as the central issue of interest in understanding the dominant discourse, use of deficit-based beliefs of people of color in plans, and ultimately what is produced in these plans that are intended to improve the experiences of students of color.

Undergirding CPA are critical theories such as CRT, which advance our understanding of issues related to social justice and racial inequality in society. Founded in legal studies, CRT draws from fields like sociology, ethnic studies, women’s studies, and education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Together, CPA and CRT enable us to better recognize patterns, practice, and policies that perpetuate racial inequality, including those that operate in subtle and covert ways (Villalpando, 2004). They also allow us to examine, deconstruct, and understand racial realities within higher education (Quaye, 2008). These concepts have been adopted by education scholars (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007; Solórzano et al., 2013; Villalpando, 2004; Yosso, 2006) to discuss the racialized barriers people of color face in accessing, participating, and succeeding in higher education. For instance, Harper, Patton, and Wooden (2009) use CRT to show how policies that broadened educational opportunity for African Americans (e.g., the two Morrill Acts that established numerous historically Black colleges and universities) encouraged segregation and separatism, legitimized the tracking of African Americans into trade and vocational fields, and on the whole benefitted Whites as much or even more than African Americans. Alemán (2007) employed CRT to understand the racialized effects of school finance policy on Mexican American-dominant school districts. He found that the funding policy was drafted as “race-neutral,” which failed to account for the historical discrimination in the communities in which the schools were embedded. Focused on equal funding, the policy neglected “property poor, majority-Mexican American schools” and ultimately maintained the inequity the policy attempted to ameliorate (p. 548).

We weave together CPA and CRT as a complementary framework to better understand the ways in which Hispanic-serving community colleges take advantage of the SEP policy. For example, does the process required by the SEP enable practitioners to focus on inequities experienced by Latino/a students? Do institutions use the SEP process as an
opportunity to reflect more intentionally on how practices and policies work on behalf of Latino/a student success and take action to remediate them when necessary?

One of the factors contributing to the “closeted identity” of HSIs (Contreras et al., 2008) is the fear of “identity politics” and the potential for divisiveness should campus constituents interpret an emphasis on the HSI identity as preferential treatment to one group. The SEP’s design as a policy specifically for the purposes of eliminating inequities in basic indicators of college access, participation, and success provides an unusual opportunity to focus on Latinos/as as a matter of compliance with policy. Thus, in examining the content of these plans, we sought to understand how community colleges utilize the SEP to close outcome gaps for Latino/a students.

**METHODS: DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS**

The data presented here is from a larger study examining the Student Equity Policy in California (see Ching, Felix, Fernandez-Castro, & Trinidad, 2017). The plans and related policy documents were obtained from the California Community College Chancellor’s Office (CCCCO). For this article, we randomly selected 15 HSIs from the larger sample of plans we initially analyzed (n=28). We identified HSI status based on percentage of Latino/a students enrolled and Title V Grantee status.

We first familiarized ourselves with the policy design of the SEP. Then we reviewed all related documents on the CCCCO website to better understand the implementation guidelines for developing the equity plans at each campus. We also examined the laws and regulations (e.g., California Education Code, CA Senate Bill 860) that created the policy, beginning with its inception in the early 1990s. Once all the documents were collected, we developed an analytical framework based on Iverson’s (2007) method of policy discourse analysis to review the plans. Questions in the framework had two levels. In the first level, we examined the policy plan to understand how each college framed issues of equity, how they discussed inequities experienced by students of color, and the ways they articulated potential strategies and interventions. The second level questions focused on whether the community colleges identify as an HSI in the plan (e.g., whether they used specific language when referencing Latino/a students and how proposed goals and activities addressed the unique needs of Latino/a students).

Our data analysis proceeded in three stages. First, we tested our analytical framework on a plan not included in our sample. This allowed us to
apply the framework and see how it helped to answer our research questions. An inter-rating meeting was used to revise the framework and standardize our analysis process from the test case. Second, we each reviewed five plans using the protocol. Finally, we met as a team to discuss the emerging insights and themes, and to synthesize our findings.

IDENTIFYING AS AN HSI IN STUDENT EQUITY PLANS

Within our sample of Hispanic-serving community colleges, we had a range of enrollment percentages from 25.7% to 64.3%. Our sample also included eight institutions that received federal Title V grants in 2013–2014. These grants provide funding for HSIs to “expand educational opportunities for, and improve the attainment of, Hispanic students” (US Department of Education, 2015). These funds can be used for faculty development, academic tutoring or counseling programs, and student support services, to list a few. Given our sample, our first question was to determine if and how colleges shared their HSI identity in their student equity plan.

Of the 15 plans in the sample, only 5 mentioned their HSI status, leaving 10 that made no mention of being an HSI throughout the document. It is important to note that the plan guidelines do not specifically require colleges to list or address their HSI status. However, given the common interest of improving educational outcomes for Latino/as, we expected more plans to make note of the colleges’ HSI status. Similar to previous researchers (Contreas et al., 2008; Gasman, Baez, & Viernes Turner, 2008; Malcom, Bensimon, & Davila, 2010), we were interested in understanding the salience of the Hispanic-serving identity among the colleges that reported their status. We found that the colleges shared their status in different sections of the equity plan. Three plans shared their status in the executive summary, one described it in indicators such as access and transfer, while another shared their identity in the budget and funding source section. For those that shared their HSI status in the executive summary, Hispanic-serving was a moniker of diversity-serving. Colleges shared their status with other descriptors that showcase the diversity of their student populations. For example, one college stated:

The college is a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), is identified as a Service Members Opportunity College, and serves a small number of foster youth. Also prominent in our community are large numbers of refugees from Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan, and we expect to see the numbers of refugees added to our service area by over 30,000 by the year 2016.
Another plan indicated that

[College] is home to a diverse student population. The college has the distinction of being a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) and will be applying for recognition as an Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institution (AANAPISI) with a student population of 36% Hispanic, 24% African American and 14% Asian.

In both examples, being an HSI is one of the college’s many diversity identities.

Of the eight colleges that have received Title V funds, only three mentioned their HSI status. One of the colleges identified itself as an HSI only by mentioning the Title V grant in the “Sources of Funding” section: “Since student equity requires institutional commitment, funding for student equity is implicit in the use of all institutional funding resources.” The mention of the college’s HSI status in this plan served a functional purpose, for its inclusion was a way of demonstrating how the college will coordinate Title V grant and equity plan activities.

One college identified its HSI status in the section of the plan devoted to the calculation of DI (disproportionate impact). The college stated, “Overall, transfer can be an ambitious goal for most students. As a Hispanic Serving Institution, we must provide more resources to our Hispanic students to make this goal attainable.” Unlike other colleges that used their HSI status to merely signify the diversity of their student population or to show how it will align different initiatives, this college employed its identity as an HSI as a call to action. Once the college identified Latino/as as a group facing inequity in transfer, it described how being an HSI requires it to do more to make transfer equitable for Latino/as.

**PLANNING FOR LATINO/A STUDENT SUCCESS AND EQUITY**

In this section, we focus on the three aspects of the equity planning process described earlier: calculation of disproportionate impact, setting goals, and proposing activities. Table 1 summarizes the aspects where Latino/as were addressed directly. In exploring whether colleges found and addressed DI with Latino/a students, we generally found that campuses did not target Latino/a in their goals and activities. When Latino/as were targeted, they were frequently grouped with other racial and non-racial groups (i.e., foster youth, veterans), or were included in other indicators (i.e., access or course completion), but not in basic skills and/or transfer.
Of the plans we analyzed, all but one identified inequities for Latino/a students in basic skills. Within the SEP, the category of basic skills encompasses three areas: English, math, and English as a Second Language (ESL). ESL was the most identified area for Latino/a students, with twelve of the fifteen plans indicating DI. The second most identified area was English (10 plans) and then math (8 plans). Not only were Latino/a students identified as facing inequities in basic skills, many colleges found that they were the most severely impacted. One college stated, “The data indicate that Hispanic students, who have a 19% success rate in ESL, experience the greatest adverse impact compared to a 43% success rate of Asian students, the highest performing group.” Another noted, “Students enrolling in ESL and subsequently completing a college-level ESL or English course show there is disproportionate impact for Latino students.” These statements on DI mirror the statewide equity issue in regards to Latino/a students.
and success. Of those who start in an ESL program only 19.5% complete a
college-level course—the lowest of all racial/ethnic groups.

Although 14 of the 15 plans identified DI for Latino/as in basic skills, six
plans did not refer to Latino/a students explicitly in their goals. Of the nine
plans that included Latino/as in their goals, five offered more specific goals,
such as “Increase Hispanic student basic skills completion rate in the next
four years to the average of 34% for all students” and “Increase Basic Skills
English completion among Hispanic students from 45% to 47%. Another
subset of the plans included Latino/as, but as one of a series of students
groups that were found to be disproportionately impacted. For example,

To ensure equity among students, [college] aims to increase course
completion rates for each of the following basic skills subject areas:
- English: African-American/Black and Hispanic students; all sub-
groups 25 or older; ESL-Reading: Hispanic, White, and Unknown
ethnicity students; all student subgroups 25 or older; ESL-Writing:
Hispanic and Unknown ethnicity students; all student subgroups
25 or older; Math: African-American/Black and Hispanic students;
students 40 or older; and students with disabilities.

A consequence of including so many different target populations in a
single goal is the difficulty of developing specific activities to address
inequities for those populations. Plans that included many target groups
articulated activities that tended to be race-neutral, to lack cultural rel-

(1) “get ready” for math and English workshops; (2) provide more
tutoring and supplemental instruction; (3) look into “three takes”

Others advocated for general professional development, such as “Engage
basic skills instructors in professional learning opportunities.” Although
these activities may be helpful to Latino/a students, they may not address
the needs of Latino/a students directly and consequently may fall short of
closing equity gaps in basic skills.

Some colleges proposed activities specifically for Latino/a students.
One college intends to redesign its curriculum to be more relevant to the
students they serve: “develop and expand culturally specific content into
transfer and developmental level English courses (e.g., Puente English
Model).” Another college aims to develop better programming within
the English Department, to include “strategies and workshops to assist African-American and Latino students who complete their last basic skills level.” Some activities also centered on giving Latino/a students the chance to voice their concerns and offer potential solutions through focus groups on their “perceptions of risk and resilience as it pertains to success through the basic skills sequence.” In contrast to the race-neutral activities listed above, these activities place Latino/a students front and center. It is important to remember that only a few plans included activities that fell into this category. This may stem from the lack of congruence between the identification of DI (14 plans) to their inclusion in the goal statement (9 plans), to the development of Latino/a specific activities and interventions (5 plans).

Transfer

For the primary pathway to a bachelor’s degree and for a student group overrepresented in community colleges, the inclusion of transfer goals and activities centered on Latino/as is an important step toward advancing equitable practices in California community colleges. We found, however, few instances where colleges drafted coherent strategies that carefully considered Latino/a students.

Of the 15 equity plans, 10 identified DI gaps in transfer among Latino/a students. Two plans did not include calculations to identify DI and two other plans did not acknowledge DI, despite providing data that showed otherwise. For example, one college did not identify Latino/as as being disproportionately affected, even though only 50% of students transferred. Most of the plans combined Latino/as with other student groups when identifying inequities and none of the plans noted Latino/as as facing the greatest DI, despite the fact that Latino/as were among the lowest performing group across many indicators. Furthermore, none of the plans used language that expressed significant concern over the inequities among Latino/as.

When constructing goals for the transfer indicator, the colleges did not include Latino/as, listed them among other student groups, or created separate goals intended to serve only Latino/a students. Four plans neglected altogether to include Latino/a students in their goals section. These plans either prioritized other racial/ethnic groups or developed goals for non-racial/ethnic groups. Seven plans grouped Latino/as with other student groups. These colleges created general goals and listed all the groups that were disproportionately affected; for example, “Increase transfer rates for all students with an emphasis on the following groups: Hispanic, African Americans, American Indian, Filipino, Pacific Islander, Southeast Asian (e.g., Hmong, Laotian, Cambodian), and first generation, college-going students.” The list
looks like a “fill in the blank” format into which student groups are slotted and can just as easily be replaced or removed from the goal. Only four colleges created plans with Latino/a-specific transfer goals such as “Increase transfer rates of Hispanic students from 32.6% to 34.6%.” However, among two of these four plans, attention to Latino/as was done as a secondary rather than primary focus. In other words, the plans set generic goals and in the end included the phrase, “specifically for Hispanic students.”

As with the activities in basic skills, we found few attempts to create Latino/a or race-conscious activities. Over half (n=8) of plans did not include Latino/a-specific activities. These plans generalized activities towards all students and developed strategies that were race-neutral. Two plans, while race-conscious, used indirect and vague activities such as creating “men of color learning communities” and expanding Puente, an intensive English program intended to help students transfer. The remaining plans (n=5) included Latino/a-specific activities to address disproportionate impact, three of which incorporated a generic strategy that would be customized for Latino/a students. For example, one plan proposed transfer application “clinics” for Black, Latino, and Filipino students, among others. One college proposed Latino/a-specific activities but also explained that the disproportionate impact Latino/as face is the result of cultural limitations, that is, coming from immigrant families who are “intimidated by the prospect of attending college” and who lack social capital. Only one college served as a model of Latino/a specific goals and activities. This college planned to increase transfer rates and decrease time to transfer among Latina/o students through transfer pathways, outreach, or expanded student support services tailored for Latina/o students.

Although SEP is not intended to address inequity only among Latino/as, the limited effort placed to achieve equity for these students is noteworthy in view of their magnitude in the California community colleges and their status as the group with the largest number of students disproportionately affected. As highlighted, very few plans among the ones we reviewed developed comprehensive strategies’ centered on Latino/a students. For the most part, the plans articulated one-size-fits-all strategies that seek to address inequities for all student groups without careful consideration of the unique needs of the groups experiencing disproportionate impact.

**DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

As Latino/as attend college in greater numbers, institutions of higher education are faced with questions of how to best support them such that they have quality academic experiences, achieve equitable outcomes, and are
well-prepared to pursue personal and professional goals. Unfortunately, the
great strides that Latino/as have made in accessing higher education are com-
promised by attendance in less-selective institutions, and more important,
by continued inequities in success and completion. Our purpose in this arti-
cle was to explore how Hispanic-serving community colleges in California,
which enroll the greatest number of Latino/as in the state, intend to address
the equity issues facing Latino/a students. We grounded our examination in
an analysis of student equity plans, which all California community colleges
are required to develop and implement as a way of mitigating dispropor-
tionate impact for different student groups. We reasoned that these plans
are an opportunity for colleges to remedy inequities for Latino/a students,
and thus we sought to discover whether they used the plans in this manner.
Since developmental education and transfer represent, in our view, the most
critical access and success problems for Latino/a students, we focused our
attention on these two areas. Indeed, based on the 15 plans we analyzed,
only one did not reveal inequities for Latino/as in basic skills English, math,
or ESL, and only four did not find disproportionate impact in transfer.

Despite these results, the plans did not include Latino/a-specific goals
and activities. In both basic skills and transfer, we found few examples
of plans that offered goals that were developed with Latino/a students in
mind. Several included Latino/as in their goals, but they were mentioned
alongside the other student groups experiencing disproportionate impact.
Finally, there were plans with goals that made no mention of Latino/as.
Our analysis of the proposed activities produced similar findings, with
only a handful of plans presenting Latino/a-specific and more generally
race-conscious strategies to addressing inequities. Most, in contrast, shared
one-size-fits-all activities, which may maintain outcome gaps even while
raising success rates for all students. Although we can only speculate such
a result at this point in time, recent evaluations of interventions designed
to improve achievement for all students support this possibility. For exam-
ple, the redesign and implementation of “accelerated” basic skills math
courses in the California community colleges increased the completion
rates of transfer-level math courses for all students. Racial and ethnic ineq-
uiities remained, however, and for Latino/as, the gap increased from four
to nine percentage points when compared to White students, the highest
performing group (California Acceleration Project, 2015). Our point is
not to disparage acceleration, which we believe is creating much-needed
curricular reforms that reduce the time students spend in developmental
education and that provide knowledge and skills more clearly aligned with
college-level work. Rather, we want to emphasize that equity for Latino/a
students, indeed equity for all students of color, may very well require additional strategies that attend to their unique needs.

While we think it is crucial that all institutions of higher education address Latino/a student equity in such ways, we are also convinced that doing so may be even more important for HSIs, given that they enroll a significant number of Latino/a students. Yet, we found that except for one plan, this status was neither acknowledged nor invoked meaningfully, a finding that raises the question of whether being an HSI is essential facet of these institutions’ identity and mission. In our view, it is not sufficient for the HSI designation to serve as a means of securing Title V grant monies or to signal the diversity of a college’s student body. Echoing the arguments of other scholars (Contreras et al., 2008), we similarly assert that it is critical for HSIs to seriously consider what it means to be Hispanic-“serving” and to reckon with how they will be “centers of educational equity and excellence for Latinas and Latinos” (Malcom et al., 2010, p. 3).

REFERENCES


