MODESTO JUNIOR COLLEGE’S EMBEDDING EQUITY FACULTY INSTITUTE

IMPACT MEMO – June 8, 2017

Modesto Junior College (MJC) and the Center for Urban Education (CUE) partnered in Fall 2016 and Spring 2017 to host two Embedding Equity Faculty Institutes for 40 MJC faculty. Over the course of the institutes, the faculty focused on building strategies to support racial/ethnic equity in their classrooms. These strategies included reviewing their course success data disaggregated by race and ethnicity, conducting action research to better understand the link between practice and student outcomes, and outlining actions they would take (based on action research findings) to close any racial/ethnic gaps in their classrooms.

To capture and share some of the learning from MJC’s Embedding Equity Faculty Institute, this memo provides a brief overview of the project’s key accomplishments, participants’ quotes, and offers recommendations for next steps to ensure the progress already underway to promote equity at MJC continues.

“Having the retention/success data has created a new perspective for me. I feel I am more curious and aware of HOW it feels to be a student in my class and WHAT that experience must be like for my students. It is making me take a closer look at some classroom dynamics that I feel will be valuable for everybody.”

-- MJC Embedding Equity Faculty Institute Participant
PROJECT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

EQUITY-MINDED DATA ANALYSIS
The MJC Embedding Equity Institute participants unpacked student outcome data disaggregated by race/ethnicity to understand the state of equity in their classrooms and departments (a new practice). Disaggregated data unveils equity gaps that are too often hidden in aggregate data and makes intentional action to close gaps possible. The institute participants’ data analysis supported MJC’s Equity Plan, which identified the following institution-wide equity gaps, equity goals, and potential impact.

EQUITY GAPS
“The course completion rates of African American students [across all MJC courses] are significantly lower (-22 percentage points) than the highest achieving subgroup (Asian). Hispanic students are also disproportionately impacted at a rate of -7 percentage points. Because of the high number of Hispanic students, this impacts more than 7,000 duplicated students.”

EQUITY GOALS
The MJC Student Equity Plan sets the following goal: “By fall 2017, increase course completion rates for African American students by 3 percentage points over the baseline course completion rate of 52% to a rate of 55%. By fall 2017, increase course completion rates for Hispanic students by 1.5 percentage points over the baseline rate of 66% to a rate of 67.5%.”

POTENTIAL IMPACT
“The MJC Student Equity Plan highlights that these goals translate to “[248] additional courses completed by African American students and [1512] additional courses completed by Hispanic students.”
The institute participants’ analysis of their own section-level data disaggregated by race and ethnicity uncovered patterns they hadn’t seen before. These patterns were different from one class to the next and spoke to the racial/ethnic groups that were (and weren’t) being served by their unique classroom practices. Following the data analysis participants shared:

**MJC Institute participants’ analysis of their own section-level data disaggregated by race and ethnicity uncovered patterns they hadn’t seen before...**

“...the greatest equity gap for me is with the Two or more student group (-20 [percentage points below the department average]) followed by Asian students (-11) requiring 2 additional student successes in each of these groups to match the department totals for the three-year period of study.”
-- MJC Embedding Equity Faculty Institute Participant

**EQUITY-MINDED GOAL SETTING**

Equity goals—measurable, race-specific student outcomes meant to ‘lead the way’ to equity—are an important strategy for motivating collective focus and action to close equity gaps. Institute participants set their own equity goals to envision what it would take to achieve equitable outcomes in their own classrooms.

“...the greatest equity gap for me is with the Two or more student group (-20 [percentage points below the department average]) followed by Asian students (-11) requiring 2 additional student successes in each of these groups to match the department totals for the three-year period of study.”
-- MJC Embedding Equity Faculty Institute Participant
EQUITY-MINDED OBSERVATIONS OF CLASSROOM PRACTICES

Seeking to understand the role institutional processes, policies, and people play in equitable student success, the institute participants paired up and observed each other’s classrooms. The observations were guided by CUE’s research-supported inquiry prompts which look for practices that serve historically underserved racial/ethnic groups. Based on the observations, institute participants:

Embraced peer-to-peer inquiry into classroom practices as a useful strategy for identifying equity-minded improvements.

“The classroom observations I conducted... has prompted the following reflection. I am constantly evaluating how I teach, how I speak, who I call to answer questions, the feedback I give on assignments, quizzes, and essays, and how I address students. I strive to be inclusive and encourage students, who may have additional barriers to success, to put their best foot forward.”

-- MJC Embedding Equity Faculty Institute Participant

“I saw that the dynamics of my class favored White non-Hispanic students over Hispanic students. The Socratic method I was using did not encourage participation from the Hispanic students. The Hispanic students sat along the edges of the class...I thought I was dealing with that by allowing the students to work in randomized groups which mixed the ethnicities together. However, the observations showed that the White non-Hispanic students dominated the groups.”

-- MJC Embedding Equity Faculty Institute Participant

Committed themselves to reflecting on their own role as an instructor and how it relates to the success of racial/ethnic groups in their classrooms.

“Because of this experience, I began to ask myself regularly, “what more can I do to support [Disproportionately Impacted] students?” and not from a paternalistic, missionary viewpoint but from a critical look at self-perspective. I recognize(d) my blind spots, had to challenge myself from making excuses for not having various groups represented more or at all. It required me to eat humble pie, check my ego, and go to making changes in my syllabus and classroom details.”

-- MJC Embedding Equity Faculty Institute Participant

“It is imperative that I develop and hold on to an awareness of classroom dynamics, especially as it refers to the participation of males from historically disproportionate groups.”

-- MJC Embedding Equity Faculty Institute Participant
Changed their classroom content to be more representative and inclusive of the racial/ethnic groups enrolled in their course(s).

“I am addressing my blind spot of Asian representation by using statistics and literature that include Asian experiences. My video examples are wider in range. While I have de-centered whiteness for some time, I showed video examples with predominately Chicanos/Latinos, First Nations and Black folks.”

-- MJC Embedding Equity Faculty Institute Participant

“I am now more aware of the supplemental tools I use in the classroom, and strive to make them more relatable to historically underrepresented populations of students.”

-- MJC Embedding Equity Faculty Institute Participant

“I changed my course by using examples that mirror the ethnic and gender ratio of the room.”

-- MJC Embedding Equity Faculty Institute Participant

Demystified classroom processes/expectations by explaining them and countering the assumption that students already know the institution’s inner-workings.

“First, my observation provided good insight and perspective for me. I observed in an area that was unfamiliar to me and, because of that, I was a little confused at the beginning of the class. Directions given were minimal, because the students already knew the class procedures and expectations, but I was not familiar with either so I was lost. This helped me to realize that I unintentionally do the same thing to some of my students. I make assumptions regarding their knowledge of college, my class, my procedures, etc., and therefore, may cause confusion. This is done before I have established any type of relationship with the students, so some may leave permanently because they are confused and afraid to ask questions.”

-- MJC Embedding Equity Faculty Institute Participant

“We assume that these young people know computers. This is true for some students, but not for all. I am spending more time actually SHOWING the students the computer applications.”

-- MJC Embedding Equity Faculty Institute Participant
Restructured their course design to more frequently connect with students.

“I also added additional questions throughout the class and am going to utilize a student response system for the first time. It is my hope that, through these changes, I will be able to reach all my students, alleviate their anxiety and/or confusion, and adjust more quickly when students are not comprehending the lesson.”
-- MJC Embedding Equity Faculty Institute Participant

“Canvas has a way that you can give audio and/or video feedback to students on every assignment or email response or with announcements. If a student appears to not understand an assignment or turn it in, I can give visual and audio feedback in addition to the rubric to the student individually and guide them through the process. I will also create a student feedback system so that students can respond quickly within their assignments of how the class is doing.”
-- MJC Embedding Equity Faculty Institute Participant

“I will continue to work on developing personal connections with regular conferencing with each student to discuss their essays, highlight areas to improve, ask them to share their personal goals, challenges, and questions, and foster a positive relationship.”
-- MJC Embedding Equity Faculty Institute Participant

Created a classroom environment that intentionally welcomes students.

“I greet my students at the door when they enter the classroom. I smile and verbally welcome them.”
-- MJC Embedding Equity Faculty Institute Participant

“I emailed them before the first day of class to greet them electronically.”
-- MJC Embedding Equity Faculty Institute Participant
EQUITY-MINDED OBSERVATIONS OF SYLLABI

Institute participants used CUE’s Syllabi Review Protocol to identify how syllabi can be deployed to intentionally support equitable student success. Following these analyses, institute participants revamped their syllabi to:

**Demystify institutional policies and processes.**

Examples included:

- Adding instructions to access online resources.
- Providing a full-page overview and explanation of important institution-wide dates.
- Including a list of campus resources.

**Create a partnership in which faculty and students work together to ensure success.**

Examples included:

- Words of Encouragement: We are passionate about nursing and hope that you find this profession as rewarding as we do. We are here to help you succeed and encourage you to utilize the resources that are available for you. We hope you find this transitions course valuable and educational as you continue towards your goal of becoming a Registered Nurse.

- You can expect me to:
  - Have a weekly Roadmap of learning goals and assignments with clear instructions.
  - Provide meaningful responses and comment to your work.
  - Provide meaningful updated information about various occupational outlooks.
  - Promptly respond to email/phone calls.
  - Welcome feedback and will listen to whatever suggestions you have related to our work together.
  - Be welcoming of everyone and create a safe learning environment.
  - Treat you like college students.

- Explicitly stating that the instructor’s role is to help students succeed.
- A List of actions the instructor will take to support student success.
Represent a range of racial/ethnic experiences and backgrounds in assignments, readings, and other materials.

Examples included:

- A page naming contributions to the field of math by people of color and women.
- An instructor who shared his own history in higher education.

Validate student’s ability to be successful.

Examples included:

- Providing a list of actions successful students take rather than a list of rules and repercussions for breaking them – which communicates an expectation of failure.
- In addition to communicating that the instructor is committed to supporting student success, this statement explicitly states “I believe all students...are capable of excelling academically.”

**TIPS FOR SUCCESS**

1. Print the SEMESTER CALENDAR. It gives you an overview of what to expect.
2. Check your MJJC Student email frequently. You will receive notifications from your student email whenever an announcement is posted.
3. Always login to Canvas to be aware of due dates and to find details for all assigned work.
4. Access Portales from the links I provide you in the Canvas Lessons module.
5. Read this syllabus and all other course material carefully and watch the “How to” videos more than once if necessary.
6. Search for solutions and ask for help in the “CyberCafe” Discussion Forum if you need clarification.
7. Learning a language requires that you practice on a daily basis. To avoid frustration, don’t try to complete all of the assigned work in one sitting. Space it out and do some every day.
8. If this is your first online learning experience, expect to invest extra time to orient yourself to the course design and tools. Good news: the Spanish Department has designed and organised all of the Online Spanish courses in the same fashion. If you want to continue studying Spanish at MJJC, you will already know how to navigate the layout.

**Expectation of Success**

It is my deepest desire for you to succeed in school and in life! Further, I believe all students, regardless of their background, are capable of excelling academically – and that means you! However, no one can want your success more than you do! Let’s work together to create an environment where everyone is valued, heard, and honored. Let’s step out of our comfort zones and learn from one another. Together, we can make the world a better place!
Examples of welcoming language included:

Greetings, I’m so excited to be working with you as you start your education at MJC! My goal is to get you better acquainted with the campus, create a space for you to meet other new students and work with you in developing a comprehensive educational plan so you have a detailed outline of what needs to be done in order for you to reach your academic goals. This is going to be a great semester, I look forward to getting to know you inside and outside of class. Please come visit me during office hours for support outside of class.

WELCOME TO CLASS!

MUST 101 is a fun class where we explore the fundamentals of music notation, rhythm, and musical elements. We will listen to a variety of music examples together. I am passionate about teaching music theory, celebrating multiculturalism, helping audiences understand music as a communication process, and keeping western art music alive in our community. I look forward to working with you this semester!

RECOMMENDATIONS TO FURTHER EMBED EQUITY-MINDED PRACTICE

The Center for Urban Education encourages MJC Leadership to enact the following recommendations to further develop the policies, practices, and people needed to ensure equitable outcomes among all racial/ethnic groups at MJC.

GET THE WORD OUT

An important piece of spreading equity-mindedness and making it pervasive rather than a marginalized special interest niche is providing space for people to talk about it. The members of MJC’s Embedding Equity Institutes have acquired important new knowledge and tools to assess their own practices. They have also learned how to use data to improve practice and become more self-aware of the imperative to be race-conscious in a positive way. It is important that their knowledge be made available throughout the campus. To sustain the excellent work of the
institute participants and achieve equity in all MJC classrooms there has to be a plan to develop equity-minded institutional agents among all administration, faculty, and staff.

The creation of a standing Embedding Equity Committee or Working Group with a clear charge to communicate how to conduct race-conscious action research is one step towards institutional level change. The impact of this committee will be much greater if they engage in regularly scheduled presentations to the college council, president, strategic plan committee, and other important leadership bodies. The Equity Committee should be treated as essential to student success and should have the status of other academic committees in order to avoid the perception that “equity” is an ‘add-on’ or not ‘central’ to MJC’s priorities. Equity is not simply a “nice thing to have” it is “a got to have.”

Learning how to make sense of data, how to analyze a syllabus, how to observe routine practices critically empowered and energized the participants. It is important to develop that sense of empowerment and energy in others. Empowered and energized practitioners are essential for achieving institutional excellence that is equity-advancing.

CREATE YEARLY EQUITY REPORTS
The disaggregated data the institute participants reviewed on classroom enrollment and course success needs to be collected and monitored on a yearly basis, otherwise MJC’s Equity Plan goals will be forgotten. MJC would also benefit from reviewing other disaggregated data to identify racial / ethnic equity gaps in areas like semester-to-semester retention, success in key gatekeeper courses, and transfer/degree/certificate attainment.

TRAIN ADDITIONAL FACULTY AND STAFF IN EQUITY-MINDED INQUIRY
A standing MJC Equity Committee could also be charged with training peers to engage in equity-minded data analysis, problem identification, action planning, institutional assessment, and goal setting.

FINAL OBSERVATIONS
The successful outcomes of MJC’s Embedding Equity Institute were made possible by a very small number of highly dedicated faculty members and staff. These individuals took on the work and added it to their already overloaded schedule. The core practices of CUE’s Equity Model are: 1) collecting and reporting data that informs practice, 2) the use of inquiry methods to understand how things really work and who they work for, and 3) addressing implicit racial bias in documents, language, and practitioners’ views of African American, Latino/a, and Native American students. The MJC Embedding Equity Institute participants engaged in activities associated with these three practices but there is much more work to be done. Based on our experience with other campuses, we know that sustaining the core practices of equity depends greatly on the willingness and capacity of high level leaders to invest time, attention, and the power of their office and title to communicate that a focus on racial equity will reverberate and benefit all students.