



Student Equity Reenvisioned: Bridging the Equity
Gap for African-American and Latino Students in the
Behavioral and Social Sciences

Submitted to:

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By

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Project Abstract

The Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences (BSS) is seeking funding to create a holistic program of study that will produce equitable educational outcomes for African-American and Latino students in courses that have a high enrollment of African-American and Latino students but produce a low success rate. BSS is proposing a learning community based program of study that will integrate traditional student developmental theory and practices with organizational learning theory and practices. The addition of organizational learning theory will move BSS away from a student characteristics approach as the root of unequal educational outcomes to an approach that will examine “the structural and cultural obstacles” that prevent general education courses offered in BSS from achieving equitable educational outcomes for all demographic groups. To accomplish this, BSS will bring together a core of faculty who address student equity in the following:

- Subscribing to affective domain learning and educational neuroscience
- Implementing high impact practices
- Applying equity-mindedness to course redesign
- Facilitating an integrative and applied learning experience
- Bringing organizational learning theory to the classroom level

Statement of Need

Recent data provided to BSS by Institutional Research identified the top 25 courses offered at El Camino College that had the lowest success rates of African-American and Latino students. A closer examination of this data set has revealed that 9 of these 25 courses are housed in BSS. What is particularly alarming about this number is that it shows the average success rate of African-American students enrolled in these courses from Fall 2012 through Spring 2014 was 56.7% while the average success rate for Latino students was 65.5%. In contrast, the success rate of White students was 78.3%.

Table 1: African-American Student Course Enrollment and Success Rate

Course	Enrolled	Success Rate
ANTH 1	241	43.2%
HDEV 8	321	62.6%
HDEV 10	275	71.3%
HIST 101	404	51.5%
HIST 102	368	55.7%
POLI 1	731	48.6%
SOC 101	450	67.3%

Table 2: Latino Student Course Enrollment and Success Rate

Course	Enrolled	Success Rate
ANTH 1	1061	57.6%
ANTH 2	860	56.3%
HIST 101	1481	65.1%
HDEV 10	823	79.5%
POLI 1	2490	59.2%
PSYCH 5	2704	64.8%
SOC 101	1681	76.6%

Table 3: White Student Course Enrollment and Success Rate

Course	Enrolled	Success Rate
ANTH 1	294	75.2%
ANTH 2	238	76.9%
HIST 101	403	75.4%
HIST 102	453	76.4%
POLI 1	717	78.5%
PSYCH 5	685	79.6%
SOC 101	449	86.5%

When comparing the four common courses shared by these demographic groups, the comparative average success rate in these classes for African-American students was 52.6%, for Latino students 64.6% and for White students 78.9%. The disproportionate impact African-American students and Latino students are experiencing in these courses

has moved the Dr. Gloria Miranda, Dean of BSS, to begin exploring solutions that can bridge the equity gap these demographic groups currently face.

Table 4: BSS Common Course Enrollment and Success Rate

Course	African-American	Latino	White
ANTH 1	241 (43.2%)	1061 (57.6%)	294 (75.2%)
HIST 101	404 (51.5%)	1481 (65.1%)	403 (75.4%)
POLI 1	731 (48.6%)	2490 (59.2%)	717 (78.5%)
SOC 101	450 (67.3%)	1681 (76.6%)	449 (86.5%)

Traditional institutional practices when creating equity plans tend to focus more on the effective coordination and integration of key student services, on bolstering college-readiness curriculum (ESL, developmental and basic skills) and on promoting persistence/completion of college readiness curriculum. While both valuing diversity and seeking to address the equity gap, the tendency of these plans is to view student characteristics as the cause of differences in educational outcomes. However, if equity is to be a pervasive practice at El Camino College, then the need to exceed the traditional focus boundaries of equity plans must be tested. Thus, while student characteristics must be considered and addressed, BSS is proposing to approach the equity gap students are experiencing in course completion from an organizational learning theory framework that moves faculty to re-evaluate how their teaching methods, their view on how students learn, their assignment design and their content delivery may also be contributing to the equity gap.

Drawing on the evidence and recommendations from El Camino College campus based research, The CSU Give Student a Compass Initiative and recent studies addressing student equity, learning theory and high impact practices, BSS believes that implementing a learning community based program of study that integrates into disproportionately impacted courses support services, faculty trained in equity-mindedness, high impact practices and academic mentors will help close the achievement gap experienced by African-American and Latino students. More specifically, it is BSS's goal to provide these students with a culturally sensitive learning environment where content mastery and college readiness are facilitated and re-enforced throughout the semester and where faculty implement interventions that will specifically address the barriers that African-American and Latino students are experiencing in course completion through engagement, relevance, coherence and equity.

Give Students a Compass – The Starting Point

[Give Students a Compass](#) is a national initiative of the Association of American Colleges and Universities “that advances liberal learning and underserved student success by focusing on the educational practices that most engage students—such as learning communities, internships, peer mentoring, and faculty-student collaboration on research.” The Project Director for this initiative in the California State University system is Dr. Debra David. Through research and pilot programs, [Give Students a Compass](#) has provided CSU and Community College Faculty “teaching and learning designs which have been demonstrated to increase student engagement and persistence.” It is a project that promotes “exploring innovative ways to make GE more engaging, relevant and coherent to advance the achievement of those learners working toward a baccalaureate.”

“In their first 60 college units, California students in a CCC, CSU or UC who plan to earn a baccalaureate degree take almost two-thirds of their coursework in GE. It is an entry point for connecting to college, and it sets the foundation for subsequent academic work. Students who are placed in developmental English and/or math courses face an extra hurdle to even begin GE in those areas. In short, GE can make or break success, both in terms of persistence and learning.”

Dr. Debra David, [Giving California Students a Compass](#)

Table 5: Additional High Impact Practices BSS will Consider Infusing ¹

Teaching/Learning practices correlated with Student Persistence/Engagement
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Service Learning and Community-Based Learning▪ Undergraduate Research▪ Capstone Courses and Projects▪ Collaborative Assignments and Projects▪ Diversity and Global Learning Experiences▪ Common Intellectual Experiences▪ Writing-Intensive Courses

¹ Based on research from the National Student Survey of Engagement, George Kuh (2008, 2013) has identified a variety of teaching and learning practices that are correlated with student persistence and engagement and are beneficial for all students.

Learning Communities

BSS will use as its nucleus the high impact practice of learning communities. Learning communities “encourage integration of learning across courses . . . [and] . . . involve students with big questions that matter beyond the classroom.” They also create a social learning system that deepens the bond and commitment of cohort participants to learning, academic goal achievement and a multi-faceted approach to knowledge construction. Through learning communities it is also possible to emphasize leadership and teamwork efficacy. The success of learning communities has been well documented throughout the nation and here at El Camino College through the accomplishments of the First-Year Experience Program. Courses which historically have demonstrated to have a high African-American and Latino enrollment will be integrated into an [equity-minded learning community](#). These are courses which students have identified as being of interest to them, and if approached through integrative learning, will further enhance student commitment to content mastery and course completion. In addition, BSS will continue to explore other high impact practices that can be infused into its learning community

Threshold Concepts and Wicked Problems

Along with emphasizing the use of learning communities, Give Students a Compass and the California Community Colleges Success Network have singled out [threshold concepts](#) and wicked problems as designs that can bring relevance, integration and real-life application to general education courses. Faculty participating in this program of study will be trained in threshold concepts and wicked problems. Developed as a learning theory by Jan H.F. Meyer and Ray Land, threshold concepts “represent a transformed way of understanding, or interpreting, or viewing something without which the learner cannot progress.” Threshold Concepts are not content knowledge or core concepts, but instead are ways of thinking that are particular to disciplines and academic cultures. For example, historians have a particular way of thinking about the past. The implementation of threshold concepts allows instructors to determine the places in their courses where students are experiencing difficulties. In essence, threshold concepts decode the discipline of study for the student by identifying procedural and epistemological student bottlenecks that impact mastery of basic material. This in turn allows for faculty to define and address “the processes that students need to master to get past the bottlenecks.” The following lecture is an example of how threshold concepts are immersed into the first topic covered in a history of Mexico class. Because of the scale of Mexico’s history, and the limited foundations students are given in high school on knowledge construction in history, the instructor has used blended learning techniques to grant students the opportunity to revisit the lecture content as many times as needed.

History 154 – History of Mexico: [The Nature of Historical Knowledge](#)

A wicked problem “is a social or cultural problem that is difficult or impossible to solve for as many as four reasons: incomplete or contradictory knowledge, the number of people and opinions involved, the large economic burden, and the interconnected nature of these problems with other problems.” Some wicked problems include poverty, social inequality, student equity and so forth.² Students learn that to address wicked problems traditional methods of problem solving do not work. It forces students to engage wicked problem related assignments from innovative perspectives requiring the use of intersectional thinking rather than directional thinking. Wicked problem based assignments also allow students to transfer course content to real life challenges they face and move them to propose innovative solutions that re-enforce applying interdisciplinary based solutions. By seeing the application of course content to real world questions, student will be able to identify both the value of course completion and degree completion. Equally important, they will see the cohesiveness of general education courses through wicked problem-based assignments. The following is an example of a seminar topic in History 140 centering on a wicked problem based approach to course content:

History 140: Early Civilizations: [Institutional Hierarchies](#)

Affective Domain Learning and Educational Neuroscience

Faculty participating in the SER Learning Community will receive training in how to infuse affective domain learning and educational neuroscience into their courses. Historically in formal classroom instruction, the primary focus of faculty has been on the cognitive facet of learning. Content delivery and assessments have thus been designed with cognitive outcomes in mind. However, many bottlenecks students experience in college may not stem solely from a cognitive nature, but rather of an affective nature or a combination of both since cognitive objectives will always have some affective component to it. Thus faculty awareness and training in infusing affective domain learning will help them address student “interests, attitudes, appreciations, values, and emotional sets or biases” when preparing instructional objectives.

Training in educational neuroscience will expose faculty to current research from the field of neuroscience, how it relates to student learning and how it can serve as a bridge between teaching and learning. Faculty will be exposed to how the brain processes information, to different types of memory systems, to the nature of transfer and to the dimensions of thinking.

² http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/wicked_problems_problems_worth_solving

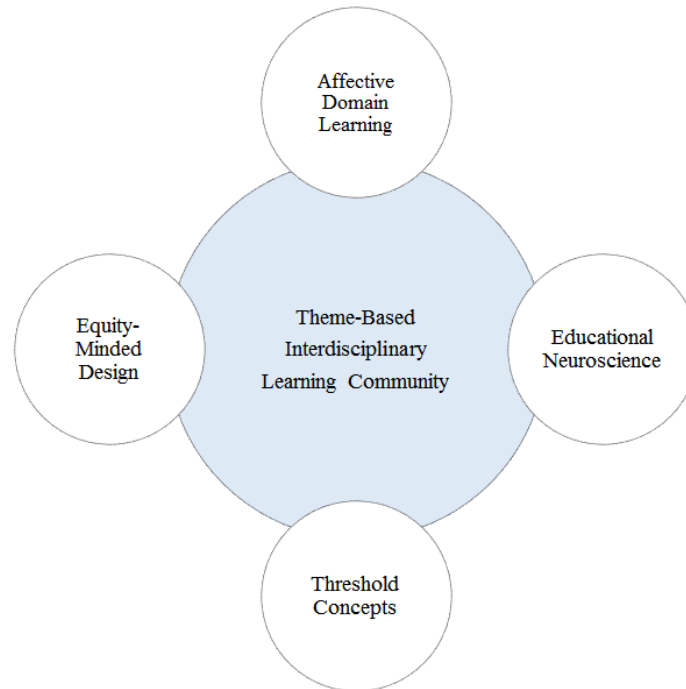


Figure 1: SER Learning Community Learning Designs

Reading Apprenticeship Framework

The [Reading Apprenticeship Framework](#) trains faculty to integrate literacy instruction with subject instruction which in turn facilitates student engagement and persistence. It is also a model that provides strong social-emotional foundations and reframes “the way students think about, talk about, and read texts in their classrooms.” The following is an example of a text analysis in a world history class using the principles of the Reading Apprenticeship Framework:

History 154: History of Mexico: [Tlaxcalan Actas](#)

Assignment Design and Signature Work

Participating faculty will design assignments that will utilize [Association of American Colleges & Universities VALUE \(Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education\)](#) Rubrics with the aim of improving student learning and creating authentic assessments. These assignments, whenever possible, should allow students to “draw on their own cultures and experiences” which in turn will “validate and help students feel like they belong in college.” Participating faculty will also implement a [signature work](#)

project that allows a student to use “his or her cumulative learning to pursue a significant project related to a problem she or he defines.” The signature work will be a semester long project that is under the student’s control. This project will make it possible for students to “expresses insights and learning” gained from the inquiry and to “demonstrates the skills and knowledge she or he has acquired” as a result of participating in the learning community.

Re-enforcing Discipline Specific Skillsets through Blended Learning

Discipline specific skill sets will be re-enforced through blended learning and supplemented with assignments that will be reviewed by instructors and peer mentors. The self-directed modules will use prerecorded media information that will be under the control of the students themselves making it possible for them to view and review content as needed. The use of these self-directed modules will allow for follow-up sessions with mentors to be interactive and will facilitate active learning during these sessions. The following is an example of a self-directed module re-enforcing the fundamentals of research to be assigned after this topic has been covered in class.

Methods for College Success: [Research Methodology](#)

El Camino College PASS Mentor Program

Research indicates those students who are provided with additional growth and learning opportunities outside of the classroom through peer mentoring greatly increase their possibilities for college success. BSS will thus make peer mentoring a component of its program by teaming up with El Camino College’s Peer Assisted Study Session Program (PASS). The function of PASS Mentors “is to assist students with course content in the classroom and in the PASS sessions.” PASS Mentors meet on a weekly basis with instructors “to discuss specific issues, content or directed activities to be covered in PASS sessions [and] to discuss the specific challenges students are having with the course content.” PASS Mentors will also facilitate avenues for student success through the following:

- Help the students in the class during individual or group activity time when it is appropriate to do so.
- Plan and facilitate PASS sessions using interactive learning strategies rather than re-lecturing or completing students' assignments for them.

- Attend all class lectures for the semester. Take notes and pay attention to what students may be having difficulty with.
- Attend weekly staff meetings and ongoing training.
- Attend de-briefing sessions with the PASS Coordinator for feedback and evaluation.
- Demonstrate good learning strategies and share appropriate materials with students and faculty.

Academic and Student Services

This model also seeks to integrate existing El Camino College student services and programs into its interventions. Services such as academic advising and career planning will be more closely connected with the program and courses as will academic support services. The exposure of students to El Camino College's academic and support services will create a more seamless and engaging learning experience for them and make them a viable participant in the campus community.

Faculty Development and Training

Critical to the success of this proposal are the faculty themselves. Thus, BSS will ensure that participating faculty is adequately trained to help students maximize their learning experience and opportunities and to help BSS close the equity gap. The faculty cohort will begin with a general overview seminar on how to view their courses through an equity lens and how to begin integrating some of the designs recommended by *Give Students a Compass*: [SER Faculty Seminars](#). In addition, faculty will participate in related [California Community Colleges Success Network](#) workshops focusing on Threshold Concepts and Reading Apprenticeship Framework. When developing lesson plans, faculty will also consider the role the affective domain has in learning. In particular, attention will be given to student motivation, attitudes, perceptions and values and how they relate these to student retention and success. Faculty will also approach their classes through equity-mindedness. As part of their preparation, faculty will be required to complete specific foundational readings as part of their training. Some of these readings may include:

- Bensimon, Estela Mara. "Closing the Achievement Gap in Higher Education: An Organizational Learning Perspective." *New Directions for Higher Education*

Special Issue: Organizational Learning in Higher Education Volume 2005, Issue 131, pages 99–111, Autumn (Fall) 2005.

- Johansson, Frans. [The Medici Effect: What Elephants and Epidemics can Teach Us about Innovation](#). Harvard Business School Press, 2006.
- Linton, Curtis W. [Equity 101: The Equity Framework](#), Corwin, 2011.
- Reardon, Kathleen Kelly. [It's All Politics: Winning in World Where Hard Work and Talent are not Enough](#). Currency Double Day, 2006.
- Steele, Claude. [Whistling Vivaldi: And Other Clues to How Stereotypes Affect Us](#). W.W. Norton & Company, 2010.
- Witham, Keith, Lindsey E Malcom-Piqueux, Alicia C. Dowd, Estela Mara Bensimon. [America's Unmet Promise: The Imperative for Equity in Higher Education](#). Association of American Colleges & Universities, 2015.

Evaluation Metrics

The proposal's definition and design provides clear standards for evaluation of the program, the staff who conduct it and the students served by the program. Data generation to measure program success in helping students persist and succeed will be done both quantitatively and qualitatively and will include formative and summative information. The primary data source will be generated by the students engaged in the program. For the cognitive domain, course grades and retention rates will be measured. For the affective domain, reaction questionnaires, surveys and self-evaluations will be used. In addition, activity logs, interviews and focus groups will be explored for potential use.

Proposal Budget

Fall 2015	Semester	Total for Year
6 BSS faculty special assignment at \$62.00 per hour for 4 hours	\$1,488.00	\$1,488.00
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Faculty will meet 4 times (1 hour meetings) during the Fall 2015 semester to begin discussions on disproportionate impact in BSS, on the learning community design and on the proposal objective 		
Spring 2016	Semester	Total for Year
20% release time for Learning Community Faculty lead/trainer at \$62.00 per hour for 8 hours a week (16 week assignment)	\$9406.50	9,406.50
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Faculty lead will during Spring 2016 coordinate faculty workshops, prepare workshop materials, assist in course content integration, contribute to assignment redesign and develop and administer evaluation metrics 		
6 BSS faculty special assignments at \$62.00 per hour for 16 hours	\$5,952.00	\$5,952.00
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Faculty attend training workshops, complete related readings, begin integrating LC theme into course design, will explore possible assignment integration, will redesign assignments to meet the proposal's objectives, will be introduced to PASS Mentor Program, will identify potential PASS Mentors 		
Fall 2016 – Spring 2017	Per Semester	Total
3 Faculty special assignments at \$46.00 per hour for 20 hours.	\$2,760.00	\$5,520.00
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Faculty will regularly meet and work with PASS Mentors to coordinate mentor responsibilities course objectives 		
1 PASS Mentor lead at \$15.00 per hour for 20s hour per week for 16	\$4,800	\$9,600.00
Lead will monitor PASS Mentor's workloads and hours and coordinate their schedules and provide students enrolled in the learning community with discipline based academic support		

2 PASS Mentors at \$10.00 per hour for 10 hour per week for 16 weeks

\$3,200.00

\$6,400.00

- Mentors will provide students enrolled in the learning community with discipline based academic support

Total

\$38,366.50

El Camino College Student Equity Plan

Proposal – Goal Alignment Grid

Proposal Component	Goal
Learning Community Threshold Concepts Wicked Problems Reading Apprenticeship Framework Affective Domain Self-directed modules Peer Mentors	ECC is committed to decreasing the gap in course completion rates (both overall and in basic skills classes) for African American and Pacific Islander students by a total of 3% over the next three years.
Academic Planning SEP requirement Career Planning	ECC is committed to more deeply exploring transfer-directed and transfer-preparedness rates for African American and Latino students in Year 1, allowing for revision of the SEP in Year 2 to create a targeted goal and directed activities based on our findings.

References:

Advancing Student Success in the California Community Colleges Recommendations of the California Community Colleges Student Success Task Force

Basic Skills Completion: The Key to Student Success in California Community Colleges Effective Practices for Faculty, Staff and Administrators. California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2013.

Bensimon, E. M. (2005). "Closing the achievement gap in higher education: An organizational learning perspective." In A. Kezar (Ed.), *Organizational learning in higher education* (Vol. 131). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Bettinger, Eric and Rachel Baker *The Effects of Student Coaching in College: An Evaluation of a Randomized Experiment in Student Mentoring*. NBER Working Paper 16881, 2011.

Booth, Char and Brian Mathews . *Understanding the Learner Experience: Threshold Concepts and Curriculum Mapping*. Invited Paper presented at the California Academic & Research Libraries Conference April 7, 2012, San Diego, California.

Center for Community College Student Engagement. (2014). *Aspirations to achievement: Men of color and community colleges* (A special report from the Center for Community College Student Engagement). Austin, TX: The University of Texas at Austin, Program in Higher Education Leadership, 2014.

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Dadgar, Mina, Thad Nodine, Kathy Reeves Bracco, and Andrea Venezia. *Integrating Student Supports and Academics*. WestEd, 2013.

David, Debra, *Give California Students A Compass*, Final Report of Give Students a Compass in California, 2015.

Davies, Peter and Jean Mangan. *Recognising Threshold Concepts: an exploration of different*

Approaches. Paper presented at the European Association in Learning and Instruction Conference (EARLI) August 23 – 37th 2005, Nicosia, Cyprus.

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Meyer, Jan H.F., and Ray Land. *Threshold Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge: Linkages to Ways of Thinking and Practising within the Disciplines*. Occasional Report 4 ETL Project, Universities of Edinburgh, Coventry and Durham, 2003.

Meyer, Jan H.F., Ray Land and Caroline Baillie, eds. *Threshold Concepts and Transformational Learning*. Sense Publishers, 2010.

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